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To Be Black, Female, and Literate: Literacy Identity among Undergraduate Black Women

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TO BE BLACK, FEMALE, AND LITERATE: LITERACY IDENTITY AMONG

UNDERGRADUATE BLACK WOMEN

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This empirical study explores the non-academic or out of school literacy and literacies practices of 10 undergraduate women of African descent, ages 18-24, to help better understand how they view themselves as literate beings in the 21st century. Through the lens of Afrafeminist ideology, studies related to power, language and identity, women's literacy, and Black women's literacy, this study examines how these women use literacy as a social practice in their everyday lives to make meaning of the world around them.

The primary methods of data collection included in-depth interviews, written statements on the value of literacy, written statements on early literacy practices, and artifacts.

Analysis of the data led to the following findings: participants see themselves as strong, intelligent women who are empowered by literacy/literacies; participants view literacy as a legacy to be obtained and passed on to future generations; participants view literacy as a vehicle to opportunity and success; participants engage in non-academic literacy practices on a regular basis; some participants do non-academic writing on a daily basis.

As women of African descent from various part of the Diaspora, the participants are aware of racial bias and the effects of double consciousness or

multiple consciousness, which includes the intersection of culture, class, gender and location, on their lives. They however, exercise agency and authority, and do not allow these conflicting notions to confine them.

These findings suggest that American society, the higher education community, and particularly English Studies professionals should be sensitive to the needs and culture of members of this historically marginalized group, who in this moment in time, when the U. S. has a Black President, still view themselves as "outsiders."

DEDICATION

To Amy Roliston and generations of strong women of the past;

To Amy Shanice Roliston and generations of strong young women of the

present and of the future.

You are my history and my legacy.   I am you, and you are me.

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This dissertation journey was a communal effort although I sometimes thought it was an alienating process. I always have had the support of my family, in particular, my men—my husband, Jack, and sons, Fred and Khary. They were always there lovingly and gently moving me forward despite life seemingly getting in the way of the work that needed to be done.

Likewise, my sisters, women who know me well and have touched me deeply were strong flowers in my bouquet of support, inquiring about my progress, telling me to "go for it," reminding me that I had the strength and ability to undertake and complete this project. Carolyn Sterling Deer referred me to the IUP program, monitored my progress and offered dissertation advice. April Adams, a classmate in my doctoral program and currently a colleague, was with me from the conception of the project. Our critical discussions during the beginning stages helped to formulate my ideas. She along with Roya Kowsary were members of my dissertation support group, and both were available at critical points in the process to read the manuscript.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, FRAMEWORK, AND OVERVIEW

Only the BLACK WOMAN can say "when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, and there the whole Negro race enters with me" (Anna Julia Cooper, 1892, p. 31).

With these words, Dr. Anna Julia Cooper, scholar, activist, educator, and the first African American woman to be named president of a college, publicly acknowledges her duality as a Black woman and as a marginalized American. Her expression of this idea, first presented to a group of "colored clergy" in 1886, seems to acknowledge and at the same time transcend the mere notion of exclusion to imply the significance of difference and inclusion. Bell hooks (1981) notes that Cooper suggests a progressive move on from the "margin to the center" for Black women and for all people of African ancestry. Her thoughts foreshadow the "warring of ideals," or "unreconciled strivings" as a Black person and an American, which W. E. B. DuBois speaks about at the dawn of the twentieth century with his classic characterization of the concept as "double consciousness" (1903).[1] And now, more than a century after this concept was first publicly noted, it still lingers in the psyches of many African Americans at the dawn of the twenty-first century (Smitherman, 1994, 1999, 2006; Baugh 1983, 1999, 2001; Freeman, 1998; Gadsden, 1993; Gilyard, 1991; hooks, 1984; Lanehart, 2002; Logan, 1999, 2003; Lynn, 2006; Richardson, 2003; Royster, 2000).

Despite this duality of race and cultural conflicts, gender and class bias, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary McLeod Bethune, Ida B. Wells, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Frances Harper, and other women of African descent became educators, writers, and activists who helped forge a legacy for literate Black women following the periods of American enslavement and Reconstruction in the United States.

The story of each of these women is a testament to the significance of literacy practice in the Black Community, and as I consider the African American literate tradition, the question arises, "What is literacy?" Most people would define literacy as simply reading and writing. This is a commonly held view even among members of the academy. However, in recent decades, literacy has come to be defined as competency in a particular area, which suggests that one can have literacy in different areas—technology, music, dance, art, etc. Further, in literacy studies there has been a "social turn," a move towards looking at literacy in the context in which it is occurring. This social-oriented perspective maintains that viewing literacy as skills situates it in the "individual person rather than society," and "obscures the multiple ways in which literacy interrelates with the workings of power" (Gee, 1996, p. 22). So the former, the skills approach most often associated with formal education, is curriculum sanctioned by government and accreditation agencies. Generally, particularly in the lower grades, it promotes cultural and social values as well as the development of reading, writing, mathematics, and other knowledge-based skills. However, as Collins (2000), Gee (1996), Heath (1983) and others observe, modern education

institutions contribute to hegemonic school systems and most often devalue out-of-school or vernacular literacies. Heath's (1983) study was among the first to demonstrate that children from privileged home environments entered school better prepared to successfully meet the demands of the curriculum because their home or family culture socialized them in ways that facilitated integration into the school setting and academic culture. This was not the case for children from working-class environments who had different early childhood literacy and socialization experiences. Their experiences were just as credible but were not representative of the values of the dominant community. So literacy as it is discussed in this study relates to the broader context in which it is viewed as a communicative practice, a way of understanding the world, and, the ability to act in a certain context. This definition expands and reconfigures the restrictive definition which is so prevalent. This more expansive view suggests not only that there are different types of literacy, but that non-academic, or vernacular literacies and literacies practices may be just as credible as academic (in-school) literacies and literacies practices. Consequently, the term literacies as it is used recognizes the inherent relationship with culture and power (Gee, 1996; Street, 1993).

As an African American woman academic, I believe these two concepts, double consciousness and the Black women's literate tradition, inform my social and cultural identity. It is this social/cultural identity that informs my attitudes, beliefs, and values in every aspect of my life, both personally and professionally. My personal and professional sense of being are intrinsically linked by identity,

and as I think about literacy and literacies—my own and that of my students--
instinctively, I am unable definitively to separate our private (or non-academic)
literacy practices from our academic/professional literacy practices, for they are
innately connected (J. C. Scott, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1997). As a student of
sociolinguistics, I accept the premise that language is socially constructed
(Coupland & Jaworski, 1997; Hudson, 1996); that identity is not individually
formed in a vacuum, but rather that the social self is "produced in interaction,
through [social] processes of contestation and collaboration" (Kucer, 2005, p.
207); and that literacy is socially situated. Therefore, as observed, it cannot be
viewed in isolation as the act of a single individual, but must be examined in the
culture of the society of the individual (Gee, 1996; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic,
2000; Kucer, 2005; Richardson, 2003; Royster, 2000). So, as I sought more fully
to understand the impact of out-of-school literacy practices in relation to
academic literacy practices, I examined literacy practices among college-age[2]
undergraduate Black women, as well as my own, resisting the notion of being an
"objective" researcher and cognizant that my lived experiences impact my
research.

Rationale

This study is in response to Beverly Moss' call "to open up the academic
conversation about literacy to the people who seem to have the most at stake—
our students, particularly those from 'powerless' communities" (1994, p. 2) and
Royster's suggestion that literacy researchers have a responsibility to examine
literacy in the contexts of individual life experiences (2000).

Its genesis is my professional interest in enhancing what Ball and Lardner (2005) refer to as efficacy in teaching literacy studies. It stems from my desire to understand better the literacy backgrounds of my students to meet their needs more effectively in the classroom. My initial approach to beginning this journey is to look at a segment of my classroom community—Black American women, with whom I identify culturally. (See "Interrogations" later in this chapter.) As an American-born woman of African descent, I instinctively feel we have connecting stories joined by fine threads that link generations through race, gender, history, and culture (Collins, 1990; K. D. Scott, 1995).

These stories need to be told, the stories of what it means to be Black, female, and literate in the 21st century. They are the stories of who we are as literate beings and how race and culture have impacted our identities.

In the first decade of this new century, it remains that comparatively little research has been conducted on women of African descent (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Rochelle Woods (2002) notes that academic inquiry into the experiences of African American females in higher education is a relatively recent phenomenon, while Evans-Winters (2005) confirms that there is a dearth of research on African American females in grades K-12 as well. For many years, the concerns of African American females were assumed to be the same as those of African American males (Baugh & Smitherman, 2007; Etter-Lewis, 1993). Consequently, there is a gap in the literature. Specifically, there is a need to explore how the undergraduate women of African descent view themselves as literate beings and how the intersections of language, culture, and power

contribute to the construction of their social identity/literacy identity. Recognizing the link between personal and academic literacy development (Ball & Lardner, 2005; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2001; Gilyard, 1991; Richardson, 2003; Rose, 1989; Smitherman, 1999), I explored the participants' non-academic literacies by posing four primary research questions.

- What are the early literacy development practices of college-age undergraduate Black women? This question relates to identity and Lanehart's research, which suggests that early literacy practices and language awareness strongly impact the formation of literacy identity (2002).

- How do undergraduate Black women view themselves as literate beings in the 21st century? The purpose here was to discover how young Black women generally view literacy and the significance of literacy in their lives.

- How do Black undergraduate women use literacy in their daily lives?

- Does double-consciousness apply to the non-academic and/or academic lives of Black undergraduate women? If so, how does this affect their literacy practice? This relates to the lingering feeling, already noted, that many people of African descent experience about the conflicting cultural notions of being Black and American.

Conceptual Frameworks

This is a qualitative study using Afrocentric feminism as the theoretical paradigm, or, more specifically, what Jacqueline Jones Royster in *Traces of a Stream* articulates as an Afrafeminist ideology (2000). Compatible with my personal values as a woman of African descent, it recognizes "direct connections to [the] lives and experiences of African American women, [and] situate[s] the intellectual work within the values and assumptions of this specific racialized and gendered group." It is an ideology that speaks to the need of African American scholars "to do our own intellectual business, and at the same time … [be] obligated to have that work respond to sociopolitical imperatives that encumber the community itself." It is a holistic approach that requires "merging the interests of mind, body, and soul as part and parcel of the wholeness of the knowledge-making enterprise, which includes accounting for our own social obligations as members" of our racialized and gendered community (2000, p. 275).

This is the guiding model that undergirds this project. It uses a subjectivist epistemology in which the respondents and I (the researcher) are co-creators or collaborators in the meaning-making process (Royster, 2000; also see Collins, 1990; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Olesen, 2000). It is a paradigm that dictates an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach to the topic as well as researcher reflexivity. This multi-lens focus draws on empirical material, historiography, and cultural, discourse and literacy studies.

To methodically develop a composite of the social/literacy identity of the undergraduate woman of African descent, I use Afrafeminism as an overarching

perspective or ideology and identity as a theme to examine language, culture, and power. I primarily draw on three models: Gee's discussion of identity (2000-01); literacy-related studies by Black scholars and others, which explore written and oral literacy, as well as a variety of African American non-fiction and fiction literary texts; and Brandt's theory of sponsorship (2001). These are discussed further in Chapter 3, "Review of the Literature."

Interrogations

Naming

"African American women," "Black women," and "women of African descent" are used interchangeably in this study. This project was originally conceived to explore the views of African American undergraduate women. However, during the pilot study, I was reminded that a woman who might be identified physically as African American might in fact describe herself in some other way. (See Chapter 4, "Pilot Study" for more information.) Therefore, to acknowledge the heterogeneity of the Black community and the ways in which my co-collaborators might identify themselves, I decided to use more inclusive terminology in the title of the study. Thus, it was changed from "Literacy Identity among Undergraduate African American Women" to "Literacy Identity among Undergraduate Black Women." So when used, the term "African American" is meant to signify people of African descent living in America, regardless of country of birth, who have historical memories of a common struggle and experience under Anglo/European domination and exploitation. Thus, the participants in the study include women who identify with various parts of the

Caribbean and Africa as well as the United States. All consider themselves women of African descent.

Academic Attainment

Another area of interrogation was the inclusion of women enrolled in pre-college level courses. Again, as the study was conceived, I thought only of women who had taken college-level English. I believe this was the case because currently I teach exclusively on this level although, I have also taught pre-college courses. While discussing the study with a colleague who teaches pre-college courses, I realized that was a cohort I had not considered and certainly young women enrolled in those courses have stories to tell as well. In addition, at least one of the participants initially interviewed had placed in pre-college courses when she first arrived at the college, and I wondered if her story was indicative of others who place into these courses. The inclusion of women currently enrolled in pre-college level courses added another layer to the narrative.

Literate Tradition

In some chapters, particularly Chapter 2, which provides a social/historical perspective for the study, I have used encode and decode alphabetic text to neutralize the terms reading and writing and the implied associations with formal education and the autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1993). However, as a style consideration, there is the occasional use of "literate," or "reading and writing" as descriptive terms. In these cases, both refer to the traditional use of the term and the autonomous model.

Self-Definition

I have chosen to use the term "strong" to describe Black women at appropriate points in this study. Generally, I am referring to attributes of persistence, determination, supportiveness, warmth, and independence. I made this choice in full recognition of the stereotype of the "strong Black woman," which has been imposed on women of African descent since the period of enslavement and promulgated by Anglo/European patriarchy during the 18th and 19th centuries to justify the oppression and victimization of enslaved Black women. It is the image of Black women as superhuman, able to endure any physical, emotional, or sexual transgression. Harris notes that enslaved Black women were field hands working alongside the men and performed tasks often considered men's work, such as picking 300 pounds of cotton in a day. Even in the house where the work was considered less labor intensive, enslaved women were "expected to perform physically at a level that was seldom—if ever— required of the planter class of white women.… [In] caring for white children [enslaved women] were expected to not give in to human conditions, such as fatigue or the need to sleep" (2001, p. 3). This stereotype of superhuman Black women has since been appropriated and embraced by African American culture during the 20th century on stage, in film, music, and literature.

However, as used in this study, "strong" is not associated with stereotypes and negative applications of strength. Royster observes that women of African descent came out of slavery with a "sense of self-worth as capable, tenacious, and self-reliant" (2000, p. 113) Loewenberg and Bogin (1976) note that Black women were able to sustain a "psychic wholeness." I refer to these attributes

when using the term "strong." Further, "strong" is an identity feature that women of African descent have selected to portray themselves positively (Troutman, 2002). The women in this study, as well as others (Houston, 1997; Troutman, 2002; Wissman, 2005), distinguish strength as a common feature in their lives. It is one element of their individual identities.

Significance of Study

According to The National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 1.5 million Black women were enrolled in colleges in 2008. This is an increase of approximately 50% since 2000. Black women are approximately 16% of the total undergraduate population with 66% of the bachelor's degrees conferred on Black students being conferred to Black women. Nevertheless, there is relatively little research exclusively on Black women undergraduates.

The research highlights both the heterogeneity and commonality of the literacy views and practices of undergraduate women of African descent. It explores the impact of culture on literacy/literacies in the participants' lives and the ways in which culture affects their individual identities and perceived community identities.

It offers English Studies professionals better understandings of the challenges facing 21st century college students; encourages increased sensitivity to the range of experiences and ways of making meaning that students bring with them to the classroom; suggests strategies for working with these students and a pedagogy to empower them; and as a "little narrative" (Daniell, 1999) contributes

to the body of literature on undergraduate African American women's literacy/literacies practices.

At my own college, I hope that this study might be the impetus for English faculty to revisit how we define literacy and its reflection on cultural differences that should be recognized to serve our students more effectively.

On a personal level, the reflection on my own literacy practices has helped me better understand who I am as a learner and teacher and presumably will help me become a better English Studies teacher/scholar as I recognize what works, what might work better, and how I can take the intellectual and emotional leap of faith to bridge the difference (Ball & Lardner, 2005). In addition, this study is a testament to strong Black women who may not have had formal education but who instilled in their children a love for learning and a desire to achieve.

Again, because the study is interdisciplinary, I also believe that this study will help fill the gap in the literature about Black women in the areas of African American studies as well as women's studies.

Lastly, I see this study as a vehicle to give voice to young Black women, who, particularly on predominantly white campuses, have traditionally been voiceless.

Chapters Overview

In this study, I explore the literacy identity of undergraduate women of African descent by examining their non-academic literacy practices through the lens of culture, language, and power. This introductory chapter provides the focus of this transdisciplinary study, situates the research questions, and

delineates my personal interest and presence in the project as both the researcher and a participant. Further, it presents the concept of double consciousness as common to the experience of many African Americans and queries if young Black women of the 21st century consider this a factor when self-identifying. Lastly, it suggests the importance of literacy identity to teaching efficacy in English Studies. Chapter 2 highlights my personal reflection as a young girl being nurtured in the tradition of Black womanhood and establishes the historical and cultural context of the study by examining the sociocultural traditions which contribute to the ideology of women of African descent. It is followed by Chapter 3, which forms a theoretical framework for this study. A review of the literature offers an in-depth discussion of literacy, power, language, and identity studies relative to the social construction of Black women's literacy identity, and at the same time it affirms gaps in the literature related to literacy practices of undergraduate Black women. The research methodology is the focus of Chapter 4. It lays out the qualitative research design of the study. This chapter reviews the research goals and includes the pilot study, sampling methods, data collection, recording, transcription, analysis, and other matters related to methods and procedures.

After outlining the methodology, the core of the study, the analysis, is presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 begins with a personal reflection and highlights biographic information important to understanding the identity of the ten participants and myself, the researcher. It suggests the heterogeneity of our lived experiences. Through their own words, the young women begin to self-

identify and align themselves with the African American women's intellectual tradition, music, the performance arts, and spirituality. Chapter 6 continues the analysis with an emphasis on themes which emerged and suggest how college-age women of African descent view themselves as literate beings. Through examination of language and identity, power, and their views on literacy, the participants position themselves as strong and independent individuals who have an affinity with Black culture. They have distinct discursive styles but commonly display certain linguistic features associated with women of African descent. They regard literacy as essential to their identities, feel it is a legacy which is to be passed on to others, and recognize multiple literacies. Although they move beyond the experience of double consciousness to experience multiple consciousness (the intersection of culture, gender, class and location), the participants do not allow these conflicting notions to confine them.

Chapter 7 draws on the analysis in responding to the research questions and the significance of the findings. This study is a call for increased sensitivity to the diverse ways of making meaning and lived experiences students bring to the classroom. It profiles today's undergraduate women of African descent and how they perceive themselves as educated individuals. The participants' daily non-academic literacies practices include reading, writing, technology, music, the performance arts, and spirituality, much of which displays cultural affinity. Though they generally feel empowered by literacy, the participants see themselves as outsiders within the broader culture. These factors, along with the focus on the identities and lived experiences of the participants, suggest

pedagogy must make room for students to have meaningful knowledge-making experiences in the English Studies classroom by providing an oppression-free learning space. The study ends with an appeal to academics to be counter-hegemonic not only in pedagogy but in research and scholarship as well.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURAL CONTEXT: SITUATING BLACK WOMEN'S LITERACY

This chapter is intended to connect the historical and cultural background of women of African descent with cultural traditions and literacy practices in the contemporary Black community. As indicated in the previous chapter, literacy is approached as a social practice, not as autonomous technical skills. Therefore, literacy is broadly defined to include elements of culture and power as well as the recognition of multiple literacies (Street, 1993). Generally, it is a recognition of "effective literacy" or "one's ability to effect change" (Hobbs, 1995, p. 1) or, in the case of African American female literacy, what Richardson (2003) terms womanist ways of knowing and the enactment of "vernacular resistance" and "cultural productions to help women protect and advance themselves" (p. 76).

To understand Black women's literacy practices and ways of knowing, one needs to understand the sociocultural traditions which contribute to the shaping of Black women's various world views. Black women in the United States are not a homogeneous group. They may have cultural ties to other parts of the African Diaspora as well as differences in class and socio-economic status which complicate their ways of making meaning of the world around them. However, for those individuals whose historic memory are linked to colonization and institutionalized enslavement, there are common historical threads which color their literacy practices and come out of the tradition of negotiating vernacular epistemologies of the Black community and the "standard" epistemologies of the dominant society or mainstream America. The sources of these vernacular

practices are cultural traditions and language practices (Smitherman, 1999). For people of African descent, many of these practices can be traced back to Africa and were firmly entrenched in Black culture prior to the period of enslavement (Palmer, 2001; Beckles, 1989). Irrespective of the site in North America (including the Caribbean) or South America, the enslavement experience held commonalities for all oppressed people whether they were enslaved in a British, French, Spanish, Dutch, or Portuguese colony (Conniff & Davis, 1994; Mathurin, 1975; Prince, 1831/1967). Acknowledging these commonalities, this study is being situated on a cultural continuum predating American enslavement to suggest the communal nature of literacy in the Black community (Gadsen, 1993; Moss, 2003) and a recognition that historically power relations have impacted language, identity, and ultimately everyday literacy practice (McWhorter, 1998). Collins and Blot observe:

> The terrain of literacy practices—the zone of engagement as well as the means of engagement—is profoundly historical. It combines at once the long-term hierarchies, inscriptions and regulations of colonial or nation-state power with the shorter-term adaptations and strategies of situated practical life, both "everyday" and "organized-resistant." (2003, p. 154)

In this chapter, first, I reflect on my early literacy practices, and then I present a segment on African American women's history and culture to position this study as young Black women tell their stories and how they have come to view themselves at this moment in time.

Who I Am: Reflections

I am eight years old and at my great aunt's fifth floor apartment on a Thursday afternoon. That is where I am every Thursday until the city decides to tear down the apartment building we live in, and my immediate family and I, who live in a second floor apartment, move to another area of New York City. My aunt is a domestic worker and Thursday and Sunday are her days off. So every Thursday and Sunday, her apartment where the family gathers for dinner, the family being my maternal family, aunts, uncles, cousins, and extended family within a twenty-five mile radius. (My favorite uncle comes only on Sunday because he travels by bus from Paterson, NJ.) I am usually the youngest of school age at these gatherings, my generation, namely a baby cousin, my brother and I, being the only ones born in New York City. Everyone else migrated from Florida.

This particular day, I'm there early as I arrive shortly after school. I've stopped home only to change from my school clothes into my play clothes. I have completed my homework, and we are sitting around talking. My aunt, Proc was what most family members called her, is watching her favorite soap operas, the ones that come on channel 2, CBS, "As the World Turns," and "The Edge of Night." She sends me to her bedroom to get her box of stationary. It is flowered with a red rose in the upper right-hand corner on off- white colored paper with a green border. As I start to hand her the box, she tells me to keep it. She wants me to write a letter for her because I have a nice handwriting (I was just beginning to write in cursive). It is my first effort at dictation other than the short

grocery lists I occasionally write for my mother and spelling tests taken in class. I am at first nervous, but soon become comfortable with my position as scribe.

Twenty-five years later, I am in Accra, Ghana.   As we visit the post office, outside, there is a line of men with their backs against the wall sitting at typewriters. They are the village scribes, who, for a price, write letters for those who are unable to write for themselves. I had not considered it before, but now wonder if my great aunt had been the scribe in her family. Since she was the youngest and most educated of seven children, I wonder how often she had been given the task of writing letters and notes for family members or friends in the rural south. I wonder if she had bestowed on me a tradition that was widely practiced during the American period of enslavement (Douglass, 1845; King Taylor, 1902/1968), one which I don't doubt would still have been practiced during her childhood in the early 1900s.

And so as I consider my early literacy practices, they touched me on all levels of my life--family activities; school activities; church activities; reading signs in restaurant windows, on movie theatre billboards, on the subway and while travelling in cars; and even during playtime as my friends and I wrote with chalk on the sidewalks and played school mimicking our favorite or not so favorite teachers. As a child, I had no way of knowing that a seed had been sown as my parents read to me from my favorite book of nursery rhymes, or that it was being watered and nurtured as I learned my ABCs and tried to write the alphabet. Early on, there did not seem to be a real distinction between home and school

literacies. Maybe it was because I liked to read and write or because preschool seemed to serve as a bridge between the two practices.

My identity is closely linked to my literacy practices. Who Am I?

I am a woman from a family of strong women. My early experiences were dictated by an image of womanhood that was displayed before me. Family time was always time with women, maybe because the oldest family members in the North were women. (This was not the case in the South where the oldest family member was my grandfather.) My role models were women who were independent, lived life on their own terms, and who loved family. The two I was closest to were Proc and my mother. Proc finished high school in Florida and was en route to college at age sixteen, but got off the train because she didn't want to be separated from her family. She was a witty, extremely opinionated woman, with a passion for life and a sharp tongue. She told stories which were full of color and drama. She followed current affairs and politics, and although, we had a television at home, it was at Proc's house that I was introduced to "Meet the Press" and "Walter Cronkite and the Evening News."

My mother did not have the same opportunities as Proc although my father often said she would have been a teacher if she had had the formal education. She loved children and took great delight in hearing their stories and encouraging them to follow their dreams. I think she was a child at heart because her own childhood had been stifled. We never missed fun, social occasions: the annual fireworks display and amusement rides at Coney Island, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade (although she was responsible for the family dinner),

or the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center and the Fifth Avenue holiday displays. But there were also fun, education-related occasions. By age seven, I had my first library card and visited the library regularly. (I actually got it in the first grade when I could print my name legibly); I had visited Washington, D.C. and seen the White House and Lincoln Memorial; I'd walked to the crown of the Statue of Liberty; and I had visited what is now NBC television studios. My mother was independent and sociable but had a quiet, humble, comforting spirit and felt strongly that my brother and I needed to secure a good education to have better opportunities and options than she had. She did what she could to prepare us for the outside world. During my first year in elementary school, I remember being regularly "corrected" for saying "git" instead of "get." "Standard English"[3] or the Language of Wider Communication (Smitherman, 2006) was generally spoken in our home, and my mother clearly disapproved of any remnant of Black southern dialect or African American Vernacular English I may have picked up during our visits to relatives in Florida. Quite frankly, I could not clearly hear the difference. So she consistently corrected me until I could.

My mother may have recognized the influence of the elite socially and economically. However, as a marginalized and oppressed person, I am not certain she fully understood the political nature of language (and literacy) as a means of control. She had spent much of her young life being socialized in dominant society, and I have little doubt that her language attitudes were shaped by her early experience in the North. She believed that varieties of English were substandard or "bad" English. Although I never heard her associate language

with intellect, between my home education and my formal school education, there was clearly the implication that if one did not speak "proper" English, she was unintelligent. As an academic, I recognize this as a myth which female exemplars, such as Sojourner Truth, who is discussed later in this chapter, dispel.   However, I did not learn about Truth until I was in college.

My mother was the oldest of eight children. At age nine, under the guise of being tutored by the teacher-wife of a wealthy white family, she left her Florida home to work for them as a "nanny" in upstate New York. When she left that family and settled in New York City, she worked during the day and went back to school at night until she formally completed a junior high school education.   She read the daily newspaper as well as magazines, her "dream books[4]," the Bible, and materials related to teaching her Sunday school classes. Throughout her life, she was active in all kinds of women's fraternal and social groups, and I often travelled with her to various meetings and events. I frequently sat in the business meetings and witnessed women conducting the meetings as well as taking and reading minutes. So, from an early age, I was acquainted with the written and spoken word, instinctively understood the value of female bonding and support, and had observed women in leadership roles. These women were not engaged in an academic setting, yet for me they modeled the discipline, reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills needed to master academic literacy. These meetings are my earliest memories of seeing literacy performed in a formal setting other than church.

Who We Are

The stories of women of African descent are rooted in Black women's history, a history that has common practices, beliefs and values which have contributed to our individual identities and world views.

As I consider our social practices, it is evident that our culture is one that recognizes multiple literacies based on our ancestral history, social, and power relationships, which ultimately affect literacy acquisition.

Historian Jacqueline Jones (1985/1999) notes that "Black women actually inhabit a unique subculture, one not shared entirely by either Black men or white women" (p. 5); consequently, African American female literacies must be viewed in the context of the unique experiences of American women of African descent. According to cultural anthropologist Johnnetta Cole (1970), African American culture has three elements—those shared with mainstream America; those shared with all oppressed people; and those peculiar to the Black experience in America. Therefore, as we consider African American females, a fourth dimension could be added based on elements peculiar to American women of African descent by virtue of historical memory.

The ideology of Black womanhood is not new. It predates the experience of enslavement since many of the values and traditions that evolved when Black women were bonded and viewed as nothing more than chattel can be traced back to African culture (White, 1985; Collins, 1990, Richardson, 2003, Tate, 2003, Mathurin, 1975). It is this ideology and its impact on African American literacies that inform this study. Culture is socially acquired knowledge,

something that is learned (Hudson, 1995) through intra-generational ideas about how to live and make judgments (Patterson, 2000). Culture is expressed through patterns of behavior, arts, beliefs, institutions, symbols, signs, and language. It operates on individual and group levels, and is "what one must know to act effectively in one's environment" (Hunn, 1989, p. 145.)

What a woman must know to act effectively in her environment requires specific knowledge and behavior, both of which impact identity. "Identity is the set of meanings that define who one is when [she] is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify… her as a unique person" (Burke & Stet, 2009, p. 3). Black women have a sociocultural path that has been laid out for them as history has documented their struggle to maintain a sense of humanity and self-worth in a country where for centuries they were the least valued among the devalued. To understand our history is to understand our cultural affinity and its impact on identity. For many women, it is the genesis or root formation of our identity and cannot be distinctly separated from other roles because the individual exists within the social structure of society (Burke & Stet, 2009). Therefore, common elements of African American culture considered for purposes of contextualizing this study are resistance, spirituality/church, oral tradition, music, creative expressions, family, and community. Although they are categorized separately, they overlap and all are intimately linked. Further, this historical/cultural discussion is by no means intended to be comprehensive. It does not specifically discuss many elements of the Black experience such as education, language,

aesthetics, and social and political movements. Rather it is a general discussion with emphasis on African American women's history and culture.

Resistance

Resistance was a common feature of the enslaved Africans' mentality: "Whether their native homes were in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, the Congo, or Ghana, they were first and foremost human beings, who instinctively resented being reduced to the condition of mere property" (Mathurin, 1975, p. 1). It was a natural instinct to want freedom, and resistance occurred all over the Americas where enslavement existed (Conniff & Davis, 1994). Therefore, it is no surprise that resistance is inherent in the culture of women of African descent and was evident not only in the enslaved community but in the spirits of free women-- some able to decode (read) and encode (write) text, some unable to decode and encode text--who stood boldly to have their voices heard acting as precursors of 20th century women. Members of a powerless community, Black women found their voices and told their stories whether by written word, oratory, or creative expression.

In *Unknown Tongues: Black Women's Political Activism in Antebellum Era, 1830-1860,* Gayle T. Tate suggests that the "culture of resistance" to which Collins (1990) refers is rooted in the female community where enslaved women were "invaluable transmitters of cultural traditions, including cultural resistance" (2003, p. 7). Tate posits these communities as the seedlings of Black women's political activism. Indeed one could argue that survival of a viable community under the inhuman, brutal, and harsh conditions of the American institution of

slavery is perhaps the greatest or overarching manifestation of cultural resistance.

This attitude is evidenced in the earliest documented case of female resistance, which occurred in the late 1690s as slavery was spreading as a legal institution in the colonies. Frances Driggus, a free woman who was bonded out as an indentured servant to a Blacksmith and planter, John Brewer, took an unprecedented step for a woman of any color. She successfully sued Brewer for assigning her to another planter, accusing him of placing her in a community where her status as a free woman would not be recognized (James, 2004). Hers is the first of a number of individual acts of resistance among Black women during the subsequent generations of enslavement cited by White (1985), Hine (1994), Jones (1999), and Tate (2003).   Such acts of resistance include Black women teaching their children independence and being alert to opportunities to seize their freedom (King, 1995; Tate, 2003); Black women learning to read and write (Jacobs, 1861/1987; Tate, 2003; Williams, H. A., 2005) and teaching others to read and write (King Taylor, 1902/1968; Williams, H. A., 2005); Black women engaging in verbal confrontations with a master or mistress; Black women feigning illness; Black women outwitting a mistress or master; Black women fighting back and refusing to be whipped; Black women stealing food from the master's kitchen to feed runaway slaves; Black women running away and/or assisting in insurrections (White, 1985); Black women participating in arson and murder; and Black women experiencing abortion and committing infanticide (Hine, 1994).

This culture of resistance was fortified in the enslaved female collective or network where older women "provided the stark contrast between their lives in Africa and their lives as slaves in a foreign land and alien environment" (Tate, 2003, p. 34). (Also see "Strong Sense of Community and Family" in this chapter.)

In the North, free women formed literary, educational, and benevolent societies to support each other and to "uplift the race" by the early 19th century (Logan, 2005; Belt-Beyan, 2004; Sterling, 1984). The first Black woman essayist and first American-born woman to speak in public and to speak to a mixed audience of males and females was Maria Stewart, a protégé of social activist David Walker.[5] Stewart vigorously advocated resistance of the status quo and felt it her spiritual duty to uplift her people:

> Methinks I heard a spiritual interrogation--'Who shall go forward, and take off the reproach that is cast upon the people of color? Shall it be a woman? And my heart made this reply --'If it is thy will, be it even so, Lord Jesus!' (Stewart, 1832)

She called on women to recognize their responsibilities as more than domestic:

> Shall it any longer be said of the daughters of Africa, they have no ambition, they have no force? By no means. Let every female heart become united, and let us raise a fund ourselves; and at the end of the one year and a half, we might be able to lay the cornerstone for building of a High School [sic], that the higher branches of knowledge might be enjoyed by us; … How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled

to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles? ...
Unite and build a store of your own, if you cannot procure a license. Fill
one side with dry goods, and [the] other with groceries….Do you ask the
disposition I would have you possess? Possess the spirit of
independence. The Americans do, and why should not you? Possess the
spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted. (1831/1835,
pp. 16-17.)

By the mid-nineteenth century, Sojourner Truth (formerly Isabella
Baumfree) had become one of the most prominent exemplars of African
American female resistance. A representative of the ordinary or "working-class"
woman of the period, Truth, a former slave, was emancipated by New York State
law in 1827. She left central New York State, where she was born and bonded,
and worked in New York City as a domestic for about fifteen years before being
called by "the spirit" to evangelize. Her journeys took her across the country as
she became a well-known spokesperson at abolitionist gatherings and women's
rights gatherings.

Never having learned to decode or encode text,[6] Truth had strong
oratorical skills. A speaker of the African American Vernacular English of the
period, she was a gifted speaker, strong in the oral tradition of the Black
community.   It is this skill, her intelligence, strength of character, strong religious
belief, indomitable spirit, charisma, wit and persistence which made her
extraordinary. In response to the 15th Amendment proposal guaranteeing Black
men the right to vote, Truth noted:

…if colored men get their rights, but not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad it was before [during slavery]…. I used to work in the field and bind grain, keeping up with the cradler; but men doing no more, got twice as much pay…there ought to be equal rights now more than ever, since colored people have got their freedom. (1867/1881-86, p. 1147)

There is no doubt that although she was unable to "decode" and "encode" text, Truth was a reader of men (Loewenberg & Bogin, 1976). She clearly understood the value of knowing and desired to interpret life for herself. Historian Nell Painter observes:

What Truth learned from written texts, especially the Bible, came not through the solitary study that academics practice, not through seeing words and reading them silently, but in the traditional manner, through listening to someone read writing aloud. In hearing the Bible, Truth studied it…. She was one of the masses of early nineteenth-century evangelical Protestants who believed that scholarly commentary, indeed, any commentary, obscured the deeper meaning of the Bible, which directly spoke to each believer. She preferred children to adults as readers… because children would read the same passage repeatedly, without interpretation, whereas adults tended to lapse into useless interpretation when asked to repeat a verse. (pp. 106-107)

Both Stewart and Truth epitomized the culture of resistance. At a time when women had few rights and were discouraged from speaking publicly, they

spoke boldly and honestly about the world as they saw it. They claimed agency

and authority, the ultimate authority, to speak, and drew inspiration from biblical

scripture to oppose slavery and the inequality of women. They used Black

female discourse to challenge power and exploitation while expanding and giving

vision to the experience of being a woman of African descent in America. Thus,

they refuted stereotypes and negative imagery of Black women as immoral. They

engaged in a rhetoric of social action and in effect were "crafting liberating

discourses" to negotiate race, gender, and class (Davis, 2002, p. 37). Truth and

Stewart shared common aspects of Black women's literacy; both possessed

womanist ways of knowing, ways to "advance and protect themselves and the

loved ones in society" (Richards, 2003, p. 77) and rhetorical competence

(Royster, 2000).

This culture of resistance contributes to a continual redefining of Black

womanhood. Forms of resistance may be different based on class and/or

political persuasion, but resistance is inherent to the nature of Black womanhood

as women speak for themselves and stand up for their rights and the rights of

others.   Be it in the actions of the unnamed washerwomen of Jackson,

Mississippi, in 1866, Galveston, Texas, in 1877, or Atlanta, Georgia, in 1881

demanding higher pay and/or striking (Sterling, 1984); the actions of publicly

recognized middle-class club women such as Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells,

or Mary McCloud Bethune in the early 1900s; the courageous actions of Rosa

Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Angela Davis and other women associated with the

social revolutions of the 1960s and 70s; or the persistence of women during the

past three decades who sought to break down the walls of white patriarchy in every field, such as Shirley Chisholm, Barbara Jordan, and Constance Baker Motley, Black women have always resisted less than fair treatment and striven for equal treatment under the law.

In literature, music, and the arts, resistance continues to be seen in the writing of contemporary poets and authors, such as Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, or Sistah Souljah; in the music of Indie Ari, Jill Scott, Mary J. Blige, and Sweet Honey in the Rock; and in the art of Faith Reingold, Valarie Maynard, Barbara Chase Riboud, Carrie Mae Weems, Kara Walker, and Wini "Akissi" McQueen.

Spirituality/Church

The influence of the Black church in African American culture cannot be underestimated. Moss (2001, 2003) points to its impact on academic literacy as suggested by the manner in which language and literacy operate in the contemporary church through the blending of the oral and written traditions. Literacy practice in the Black church is communal; there is shared cultural knowledge. In effect, in delivering a sermon, a community text is created with the minister as the rhetorician and the congregation as collaborators through antiphony or call and response. (Call and response occurs when the minister makes a statement and is "answered" by a congregant, group of congregants, or instrumentalist. It is a common feature of African American religious sermons as well as music and other cultural expressions.)

The Black church has a long history of being the site of educational activities. Theologian and historian Lawrence N. Jones (1974) points out that education was a priority for the Black church community with churches establishing day schools for children as well as night schools for adults as early as 1796. Between 1884 and 1900, the A. M. E. Church alone raised over $1,000,000 to support educational institutions, and by 1900, Black churches were supporting about 100 schools and 50 academies and colleges.

However, the Black church was not only the site of religious and educational activities, but also of social, political, economic, and cultural endeavors. Lincoln and Mamiya cite the Black church as the mother of Black culture saying it has influenced spiritual and secular activities (1990). (Also see "Music" In this chapter.) It was the first communal institution in the Black community and continues to be a viable force today. After enslavement, "not only did it give birth to new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low income housing, it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic and artistic development" (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 8).

The Black church was born out of "hush harbors," secret worship services and camp meetings, in the backwoods and bayous of southern plantations during enslavement. Hush harbors were covert, oppressive-free spaces where enslaved Africans could worship freely, unencumbered by the master's gaze. They were communal spaces established to subvert attempts by the dominant class to reduce Christianity to unequivocal submission. In hush

harbor meetings, the enslaved "could share what they remembered of African lore and cultural wisdom" to "preserve control of their own practices" (Duitsman Cornelius, 1999, p. 9). During these meetings, Africans combined tenets of African religion with Christianity and made Christianity their own (Levine, 1977; Paris, 1995). The enslaved "did not so much adapt to Christianity … as adapt Christianity to themselves (Joyner, 1994, p. 32). [7]

The first independent Black church is said to have been organized between 1773 and 1775 in Silver Bluff, South Carolina (Frederick, 2003). However, after the last major slave rebellion (1831),[8] Blacks were forbidden to congregate, and hush harbors became more prevalent as impromptu religious services took place in different locations in or near the slave quarters in the dead of night away from listening ears. The Hush harbor was a spiritual construct used as a tool of survival and resistance and was not only a spatial concept, but also a metaphorical concept for strategies of subterfuge or hiding in plain sight (Nunley, 2004).[9]

Consequently, religion was an intangible spiritual weapon against the oppression of race and gender as well as a vehicle which buttressed reading and writing in the community. Spirituality/religion played a significant role in the Black women's sense of being and way of operating in the world. During the enslavement period, there were many women who preached at underground meetings in the South. The first documented case of a female minister took place in the city of Baltimore, Maryland. Elizabeth, a newly emancipated woman who began preaching in 1796 at age 30 (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990) was a member of

the Methodist Society. She questioned her calling as she could "read but a little" and felt unprepared to "deliver a message" when she could "not understand the scriptures" (*Memoir of Old Elizabeth*, 1863, p. 9). Nevertheless, Elizabeth did not allow her minimal ability to decode text or persecution by male church elders who felt a woman should not preach to deter her. She, like Sojourner Truth, relied on her spiritual gifts and her oral skills as she travelled extensively doing her work. Eventually Elizabeth, who had little confidence in her own ability to decode and encode text, established a school for Black orphans in Michigan to develop and enhance their reading and writing abilities.

In "established" Black churches in the North, it was just as difficult for women to serve as clergy. Take the case of Jarena Lee (1783-185?), a literate free Black woman who, in 1809, petitioned Richard Allen, pastor of Bethel AME (African Methodist Episcopal) Church in Philadelphia, for a license to preach:

> And why should it be thought impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach. seeing [sic] the Savior died for the woman as well as the man. If the man may preach, because the Savior died for him, why not the woman? seeing [sic] he died for her also? Is he not a whole Savior, instead of a half one? as [sic] those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear. (Lee, 1849, p. 11)

Although the license was refused, Lee preached without it, and Allen did encourage Lee to hold prayer meetings and speak at events under his jurisdiction.

Lee, Elizabeth, Truth, Stewart, and others used their messages of piety to "reach deep into society's core, challenging slavery, racism, and sexism on their own moral terms" (Tate, 2003, p. 165).

During the 20th century, spirituality continued to be a mark of Black womanhood and the activist spirit as evidenced by the work of Mary McCloud Bethune, Ida B. Wells, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou, and Willie T. Barrow among many others. Women dominate the Black church membership. Lincoln and Mamiya estimate that approximately 70% of the membership in Black churches is female (304). In addition to women serving as pastors and ministers, they are very active as evangelists, missionaries, deaconesses, lay readers, Sunday school teachers, musicians, choir members/directors, ushers, and church mothers.

The Black church is an integral part of the African American tradition and is intimately connected to the oral tradition and music as these features are often enhanced and developed in the church through services and programs which include singing and music, drama, literature, storytelling, and humor, all of which impact upon identity and the acquisition and development of literacy and literacy practices.

Oral Tradition

The African American oral tradition is a vibrant communicative practice of Black culture and an essential feature of African American literacy practice. This tradition was fostered during enslavement by plantation owners' efforts to displace the enslaved socially, physically, and mentally.   Forcing Africans to

speak English and forbidding them to learn to read and write meant that a greater emphasis was placed on orality, a tradition that can be traced back to Africa where village griots (historians) were responsible for transmitting the history and culture of the people through stories and music. Building on this tradition, the enslaved in America developed a body of folklore and songs mixed with African memories to educate about survival and plantation life. Today, orality continues to be a vehicle for education and remains an important part of the Black American experience. It is expressed in sermons, songs, folklore, stories, poetry, and literature and is rich in the everyday culture of Black Americans:

> It has served as a fundamental vehicle for gittin ovuh.   That tradition
> preserves the Afro-American heritage and reflects the collective spirit of
> the race. Through song, story, folk sayings, and rich verbal interplay
> among everyday people, lessons and precepts about life and survival are
> handed down from generation to generation. Until contemporary times,
> Black America relied on word-of-mouth for its rituals of cultural
> preservation. (For instance, it was not until the late nineteenth century that
> the Negro spirituals were written down, though they date well back to the
> beginnings of slavery). (Smitherman, 1999, p. 199)

Among women, the earliest recorded evidence is documented in the works of Maria Stewart and Sojourner Truth, one able to decode and encode text, and the other unable to decode and encode text, both orators whose messages were so powerful that they were committed to the printed page at a time when women were discouraged from speaking in public. In the twentieth

century, perhaps Zora Neale Hurston, writer and anthropologist, is the best known folklorist and conveyor of the oral tradition. Many of her works, even those not considered folklore, such as *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes were Watching God* bring the oral tradition to the page as she moves back and forth between a third person omniscient, "Standard English" speaking narrator and characters who speak the vernacular English of the rural Black south. Her work influenced a later generation of women writers, including Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Toni Cade Bambara.

Music

Music is a natural extension of the oral tradition and encompasses that tradition.[10] It too is a method of communicating, telling a story, and relating history. It is a literacy practice many are introduced to at an early age by parents, siblings, or other relatives. It is a cultural cornerstone in the Black community, and the origins of African American music can be traced back to Africa. It is a communicative practice in which listening and response are just as important as performance.

Music was an integral part of African life. "The soul of [African] music evolved from an inseparable combination of the sister arts of music with drama and dance, and became expertly woven into the language and customs of the people" (Roach, 1976, p. 8). It accompanied all kinds of group work and often individual work to set the pace and to lessen the monotony (Epstein & Sands, 2006). Dancing and music were the custom at events and celebrations. Ethnomusicologists Portia K. Maultsby, Mellonee V. Burnim, and Susan Oehler

describe slave ship crews "dancing" the slaves, who performed their native dances using their own instruments, and report that by the 1630s, written accounts by slaveholders, travelers, and missionaries provide documentation of music making by African slaves, "the use of antiphony" or call and response and "the ubiquitous circle that served as a contextual frame to organize those present …" (2006, p. 8).

Traditionally, music has been a space where "Black women have found their voice" (Collins, 1990, p. 99; also see Walker, 1974), be it spiritual or secular. Although it is not certain how active women were in the events during the early 17th century, women were active in the dancing and singing in the invisible church in the "hush harbors" and have always been visible in the gospel genre (Burnim, 2006). There is further evidence that women participated in all the music forms that preceded and developed into jazz, including calls, hollers, shouts, work songs, spirituals, blues, gospel, and ragtime:

Women had danced, and chanted, and even drummed in nineteenth-century New Orleans at Congo Square, the gathering place of slaves where public music-making … was allowed to take place, and where some say that jazz improvisation was prefigured…. Women also played in early brass bands, usually as members of all-female units such as the 16-piece Colored Female Brass Band led by cornetist Viola Allen in East Saginaw, Michigan, in the late 1800s. [At that time into] the early twentieth century, it was not uncommon to find women, usually on piano, but sometimes on other instruments [such as trombone, trumpet and drums] in tent shows;

circus, family, and vaudeville bands; and minstrel shows.   Women

pianists [also] broke up the usual rhythms with the best of them as pianists

of the new craze known as ragtime.   Women worked as pianists and

directors of orchestras in Black theaters in the teens and 1920s. (Tucker,

2006, p. 530)

The musical sphere in which women's influence was most visible was

vocals. Mamie Smith was the first Black woman singer to record the blues in

1920. The success of this commercial endeavor (over 100,000 copies were sold

in the first month) led to the recording of other early blues/ jazz greats such as

Bessie Smith, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Sarah Martin, and Alberta Hunter[11] as well

as vocalists in other genres.

In the African American community, music crosses all genres, gospel,

spirituals, contemporary Christian, jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, hip-hop, and

rap among them. Nowhere is the influence of the Black church more evident

than music. It is the place where many singers of African descent got their start.

Among the many who are known for vocal fetes are Dinah Washington (blues

and jazz), Marian Anderson (opera), Mahalia Jackson (gospel), Aretha Franklin

(rhythm and blues), Grace Bumbry (opera), Gladys Knight (rhythm and blues,

and pop), Patti Labelle (rhythm and blues), Leontyne Price (opera), Whitney

Houston (pop), Sarah Vaughn (jazz), Nina Simone (jazz), Yolanda Adams

(gospel), Dionne Warwick (pop), Lauryn Hill (hip-hop), Mary J. Blige (hip-hop)

and Beyonce Knowles (hip-hop and rhythm and blues).

Creative Expressions

Creative expression is yet another communicative social practice; it is a practice where "women give voice and vision, structure and substance, to their personal and spiritual lives" (Hine, 1997, p. 16) in imaginative and artistic forms.

Many eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century narratives mention women sewing, spinning, weaving, and quilting, as does Alice Walker's 20th century short story, "Everyday Use" (1973), which uses the quilt as a symbol of African American female creative expression. "Everyday Use" grapples with creative expression under the thematic guise of family, education, tradition, and change. However, a metaphor for all of these things and a subtext to the narrative is Grandma Dee's quilt, which has been preserved and passed down from one generation to the next. It is an heirloom that has its own life, its own story connected to the quilters and the life experiences that are represented in the patches of cloth stitched together. The quilt gives voice to every person connected to it, the generation that created it as well as the generation that possesses it (Colvin, 2008). The quilt represents social practices in the rural south and is linked to Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (1974) which also uses the quilt as a metaphor for literacy practice through creativity.

"In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" posits creative expression as one of the few avenues open to women during enslavement and post enslavement who did not have access to "cultural outlets" to express that creativity. For that reason, women like "Anonymous," whose quilt hangs in the Smithsonian Institute and Alice Walker's mother, who was a gardener extraordinaire, expressed their

"creative spark" through everyday activities (p. 240). "If we could locate this 'anonymous' Black woman from Alabama, she would turn out to be…an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use" (p. 239). This unnamed Black woman quilter, possibly a slave, and Mrs. Walker, a homemaker and sharecropper, who was known for her gardening hand and floral wonders, told stories with their work. For the unnamed artist, it is the story of the Crucifixion, and for Mrs. Walker, it is the majesty of natural beauty, of flower power.

Mrs. Walker was able to choose a channel for her creative expression; however, for the many enslaved women before her, it was not a channel that they chose, but rather one which was chosen for them. Probably for this unidentified woman and many enslaved women who were forced to engage in quilting after their work day in the field, quilting became their channel of creative expression. Some were ordered to do it to provide warm blankets for the plantation owners' families; others quilted on their own to provide warm blankets for their own families. This expression exemplifies both a creative spirit and a spirit of survival in a domain reserved exclusively for women.[12] Historian Darlene Clark Hine notes that

> imbedded in quilts …are deep reflections on the everyday activities, values, and beliefs of ordinary folk.... The art of quiltmaking brought women together in protected spaces where they could cement friendships, share ideas, acquire information, and find and give each other essential support and encouragement. (1997, pp. 13-14)

For people of African descent, quilts are an agency of transmitting cultural memories and a shared meaning of expression. During enslavement they were used as means of survival and communication as symbols and patterns carried encoded messages for fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad (Tobin & Dobard, 1999). Quilt designs by Black Americans have been linked to textile designs by various West African tribes (Freeman, 1996, Tobin & Dobard, 1999, Vlach, 1978; Wahlman, et. al. 2000). Thus, African women & women of African descent took "European artifacts and modified them using African canons of design thus making statements of cultural survival rather than surrender" (Vlach, 1978, p. 44).

In contemporary Black America, quilts continue to have cultural, social and communicative connections for both women and men of African descent. In his landmark study, *A Communion of the Spirits: African-American Quilters, Preservers, and Their Stories,* folklorist, photographer, and quilter, Roland L. Freeman, "refers to the power of quilts to create a virtual web of connections—individual, generational, professional, physical, spiritual, cultural, and historical" (1996, p. xv). Freeman tells the stories of generations of quilters and preservers of quilts, some as young as eight, one older than 100 years, and the remainder all the ages in between. Most are members of quilting groups which meet regularly to work collectively or individually on quilts while others quilt alone. Quilting patterns, techniques, and purposes are just as diverse as the members of the Black community. Recognizable public figures such as Maya Angelou, Rosa Parks, Alice Walker, and Nikki Giovanni are quilters, while less public

figures such as Shirley Gibson Bell (Wayne County, MI), Georgia M. Patton (Wyandotte County, KS), and Ruby Dee Holloway (Albuquerque, New Mexico) may not be recognized outside of their local communities. Nevertheless, quilting plays an important part in the lives of quilters and preservers of quilts.

Freeman's survey suggests that quilts are created for a variety of reasons. Some quilts are created as blankets ("just something to keep you warm"); some to transmit and preserve family history; some with "special powers": to heal, protect, woo, resolve, or acquire; some as gifts (usually given across generations, to honor a rite of passage or dowry); and some as a means to make money, "for survival or empowerment" (1996, p. xx).

Historically, quilting and other creative expressions helped to foster communal relationships and serve as a form of social practice. The story is in the quilt (Colvin, 2008) as poet Sonia Sanchez, a quilt preserver who has quilts in every room in her home, observes.

> I am saying physically and initially, something happens when you put a
> quilt on your bed. And wow, when you sleep under it, it's like you are
> sheltered, like nothing can happen to you. Maybe what I'm saying is you
> feel protected, and I mean it's like what some people call "ooga booga"
> stuff. These quilts can be a form of intellectual nourishment. When I look
> at some of these quilts, I see the blood, I see the tears, and I see the
> sweat. I see women who could not say what I say on paper—but they
> certainly say it loud and clear in their quilts. You can hear the spirits of
> sisters moaning, moaning, moaning. They're not crying, they're just

moaning. And all I'm saying is, in these quilts, there is life that gives love.

(Freeman, p. 175)

Strong Sense of Community and Family

Among Black women an intense community spirit was distinctly etched in the historical memory when they forged a "female slave network" (White, 1985; Hine, 1994; Tate, 2003) to serve as a support group and as a means of survival and resistance to a system which branded them as sexual objects and less than self-respecting human beings. On smaller plantations, in the fields, slave women often did the same work as men —cutting down trees, clearing land, plowing, doing what was required by the master. However, on large plantations, at times other than harvest, women worked together in female crews. They worked, sang, ate, and bonded in exclusive female cultures. The women functioned as interdependent units. Out of the field, the more skilled taught the less skilled. Women wove cloth, sewed, spun thread, and quilted together in "spinnin and weavin" cabins. They dyed cloth, made candles and soap, churned butter, and did laundry together. They depended on each other for child care, for health care, and for entertainment as women gathered in the cabins of older slave women to hear stories. These cabin gatherings were the origin of sewing circles and "at home parlor" spaces where post enslavement 19th century Black women (and men) gathered to discuss common concerns and which Logan (2005) cites as a space of rhetorical education.

This female enclave contributed to a sense of family beyond the biological; thus family and community are intimately connected. Perhaps this is best evidenced by the common practice of enslaved women being referred to as

auntie, sister, or granny. These terms were signs of respect as the women internalized and transferred the bonds of friendship to those of family or what we commonly refer to today as extended family. It was very common for slave women to take in and care for children whose parents were sold or deceased, and in general a child belonged to the community, not just to the parents of birth.

The West African tradition of respect for one's elders manifested itself in the female slave community as older women were revered. Though older women were of less material value to slave holders, they were of increasing value to the community as these women were often given the responsibility of caring for the children, and some became midwives who healed ailing bodies and delivered babies. These female elders were the community historians who may have lacked traditional literacy skills, but, nevertheless, through life experience "served as a repository of history and folklore for the others…." They "practiced the healing arts in their combined role of midwife, root doctor, healer and conjurer. They guarded ancient secrets about herbs and other forms of plant life. In their interpretations of dreams and strange occurrences, they brought the real world closer to the supernatural realm, and offered spiritual guidance to the ill, the troubled, and the lovelorn" (Jones, 1999, p. 40). Although unable to decode and encode text, they were like walking and talking books of knowledge.

Conclusion

Critical context is essential to understanding and interpreting any social phenomena (Patton, 2002). Consequently, this chapter is an effort to demonstrate the links between African American women's history and culture

from the period of American enslavement to contemporary African American

society in order to sketch broadly the sociocultural context innate in my

background and presumably those of the research participants. The cultural

elements mentioned, resistance, spirituality/church, the oral tradition, music,

creative expressions, family, and community have all been factors in my life

experience and that of many women in the Black community (Collins, 1990;

Smitherman, 1977; Richardson, 2003). We have mothers, aunts, other relatives

who were active in the civil rights movement, or we ourselves may have been

student activists or are currently active in women's rights groups or community-

based groups; we grew up in or can identify with the Black church; we sat at the

knee of a grandmother, a great aunt, or a mother who could spin a tale or break

out in song if the spirit hit her; we learned to quilt, or knit, or crochet, or garden or

write as young girls; and we come from strong family and extended family ties

represented in regular dinners, birthday celebrations, and other family

gatherings.

This chapter is an effort to situate historically and socially the study as

African American literacy traditions, practices and values are presented and to

suggest sociocultural elements that impact Black women's social identity as well

as our literacy identity. All of the aforementioned sociocultural elements impact

the African American literacy tradition and are interrelated. Through their

practical application as stories of resistance, social activism and protest, spiritual

fervor, and communal relations, early female literacy practitioners and their

contemporary exemplars demonstrate literacy practices through verbal

expression, creative expression in the arts, music, and drama, everyday

activities, and written expression.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I tie together the analytical strands of this project as I present literacy-related studies which have a particular relevance to my investigation as it relates to English Studies. All of the ideas are interrelated, and so I present them in the context of literacy, specifically the social construction of Black female literacy. I begin with a brief historical look at literacy studies, move on to studies related to power, language and identity, then literacy studies related to women and to women of African descent. The categories under which they are presented are arbitrary for purposes of classification and clarity; however, all are tied to the ideas of language, culture, and power.

Mortensen and Daniell (2007) state that the discussion of literacy did not enter college rhetoric and composition literature until 1954 when Dudley Bailey complained about the "overwillingness of English departments to assume responsibility for college-level literacy" (40). Other than reading and writing, it was almost twenty years later, at the 1971 annual College Composition and Communication Conference, before the topic received any serious discussion. As the report on the workshop, "Is Literacy Enough," indicates, the participants struggled with a definition of literacy. This was a forerunner of the debate that would occur in the coming decades in literacy studies as the participants agreed upon working concepts of "functional literacy… as distinct from cultural literacy" (p. 284).

Functional literacy was said to be the skills "absolutely essential" to function in the world and "to make good choices" and to be "a voice in society to be reckoned with" (Mortensen & Daniell, 2007, p. 284). This definition of functional literacy suggests a level of ascendance on the hierarchy of literacy scale and may have been influenced by the theories of Havelock's *Preface to Plato* (1963), Goody and Watt's "The Consequences of Literacy" (1963), Olson's "From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing" (1977) and Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (1982). On individual and societal levels, these works summarily set forth binary divisions of the "simple" and "advanced," "primitive" and "civilized," "prelogical" and "logical" or "pre-literate" and "literate," associating reading and writing with higher cognitive abilities than orality and implying that those without such skills are far from literate. These theories, often discussed as the Literacy Thesis or Great Divide Theories, were eventually challenged "for being too simplistic and for exaggerating differences to create false dichotomies between types of societies, modes of thoughts, and uses of language" (Reder & Davila, 2005, p. 171) by the work of Graff (1979), Scribner and Cole (1981), Heath (1983), and Tannen (1982) among others who linked literacy to a continuum of social and cultural factors and displaced the notion of literacy as separate and distinct from orality.

Scribner and Cole's work with the Vai tribe of Liberia contributed to the concept of multiple literacies and introduced the concept of social practices,[13] an idea that evolved into the approach dubbed New Literacies Studies (NLS) (Gee, 1991; Street, 1993). Street says NLS focuses on

what it means to think of literacy as a social practice [rather than skills

acquisition, and] entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying

according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power….

[It] suggests that in practice literacy varies from one context to another

and from one culture to another, and so, therefore, do the effects of the

different literacies in different conditions. (2003, p. 77)

It is James Gee (1996, 2001) who connects Discourse with identity and literacy

with social practices.[14] Hull and Schultz believe it is this link between primary and

secondary Discourse, or home and non-home based institutions, that has

contributed to redefining our understanding of literacy. It redirects "our gaze on

the larger construct.… [It] draws our attention away from a solitary focus on

learning and language use in school settings and [it] positions us to

understanding learning, literacy, and identity construction in and out of schools"

(2001, p. 585).   Thus, NLS is primarily concerned with literacies and literacy

practices outside of the traditional classroom setting and is tied to social, cultural,

historical, economic, and political contexts.

Literacy, Power, Language and Identity

Power

To consider literacy fully is inherently to consider power relationships,

language use, and identity (Collins, 1995; Lakoff, 1990). For rather one's

definition of literacy is autonomous or ideological, making decisions, and the

language by which those decisions are expressed in speech or in writing, are

invariably connected to one's identity and how one views oneself or one's role in

a specific setting. Power, therefore, whether expressed or implied, overt or covert, is real in considering literacy as it relates to language use. Kedar (1987) observes that language plays a "critical role in the attainment and/or exercise of power" (p. v; also see Lakoff, 1990).[15]

Historically, literacy practices themselves have reflected a hegemonic order. Such a structure implies highs and lows, dominant and less dominant, or who or what gets marginalized; that is the nature of hegemony.   In recent years, some sociocultural language and literacy scholars have called for various approaches to defining and relating to power. In his critical review of the studies of "Literacy and Literacies," Collins (1995) notes that as nation states increased their stakes in literacy, more and more emphasis was placed on formal education received within a structured school environment to the detriment of diverse literacies, such as "domestic, religious and workplace literacies" that were prevalent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[16] The effect has been that literacy has become a normalizing power marker in society, contributing to the Great Literacy myth dichotomy and a "discrediting of… practical knowledge and out-of-school literacies" (p. 84).

This view engages Powell's thesis that literacy is part of the political domain, "a domain of privilege and power, of poverty and literacy subjugation, of hopelessness and acquiescence" (1999, p. 1). Consequently, since values and morality are intrinsic to politics, she advocates viewing literacy as a moral imperative to recognize and create pedagogy that speaks to the needs of *all* students not just those of a particular class, ethnicity, or cultural background.

This pedagogy of "empowerment and hope" would decenter power, "alienation and control" (p. 1). This notion of decentering power is exemplified in Cushman's ethnographic study of an inner city community. Drawing on Bourdieu, Giddens, and Scott, she describes power as dialogic and reciprocal, devoid of "false consciousness" and "ideological domination" where the presumed dominated or subordinate exercise linguistic agency with the everyday activities of their lives (1998, pp. 6-7). Cushman's study is one of many sociocultural studies during the 1990s that demonstrated the power relations prevalent in everyday literacy practices.[17] Later, in their theoretical and anthropological approach to the examination of the literacy debate, Collins & Blot (2003) characterize power as being more than authoritative, but being complex in nature with "'microscopic'…, small, intimate, everyday dimensions… [that] are constitutive as well as regulative" (p. 5).

Edwards in "The Power of Language, the Language of Power" (2006), suggests there are three components of power: coercion (power resides in force); influence (the imposition of power based on public conversation or debate), and authority (the institutionalization of power.)   In the 21st century, all three are evident as we consider education in the United States in both school settings and non-school settings. Enforcement is by authority, whether from a traditional or an accepted source, such as state or federal education codes; it may also be imposed by legal or rational influences, such as parents or guardians, or from a charismatic influence, such as an older sibling, friend, or minister. All are major forces impacting our literacy development and practices.

By definition, the concept of power, then, is a ubiquitous term in that it touches most facets of our lives.

The nature of power suggests that Brandt's theory of sponsorship of literacy as a lens for examining power relationships is most appropriate for this study. It is a reminder that "literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, [or] coercion" (2001, p. 19). Traditionally, for Black women sponsorship might take the form of a regulatory agency and/or vary among family members, friends, religious leaders, teachers, and other community members (King Taylor, 1902/1968; Logan, 1995; McHenry, 2002; Moss, 2001).

As Brandt's analysis, in "The Power of It" (Chapter 4 of *American Lives*), demonstrates, the flexibility of this approach to narrative presentations is compatible with the Afrafeminist ideology that undergirds this study. Examining sponsors as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 19), supports and complements the sociocultural context (outlined in Chapter 2) so significant to this study. Traditionally, Black women's literacy practices have been filled with sponsors of some sort. They vary from laws and policies enforcing illiteracy during the period of enslavement; to post enslavement and individual women modeling and teaching other women technical literacy skills, music, performance, and other creative expressions; to institutions, such as churches through various

activities providing forums and assistance to individuals with musical talents, oratorical skills, academic interests, and so forth.

Such types of sponsorships are consistent with Brandt's argument that literacy is not only cultural capital but an economic resource that influences society politically, intellectually, and spiritually.

> [It] is pursued for the opportunities and protections that it potentially grants its seekers. [It helps us] to understand…why individuals labor to attain literacy but also to appreciate why, as with any resource of value, organized economic and political interests work so persistently to conscript and ration the powers of literacy for their own competitive advantage. The status of literacy as a valued resource in this society accounts, then, for both the value of literacy for individual learners and the value that literate individuals have in wider arenas of economic competition into which their skills are recruited. As a resource, literacy has potential payoff in gaining power of pleasure, in accruing information, civil rights, education, spirituality, status, money. To treat literacy as a resource is to appreciate the lengths that families and individuals will go to secure (or resecure) literacy for themselves or their children. But it also takes into account how the resources of literacy skill are exploited in competitions for profit or advantage that go on within the larger communities in which people live and work and in which their literacy learning takes place. (p. 5)

Thus literacy requirements have changed as a "knowledge economy," which places more and more emphasis on expanded or higher levels of literacy and communication technology, impacts our lives (Brandt, 2003). Consequently, sponsorship helps to define the inequities of literacy as systems of sponsorship become stratified and access to certain types of sponsors is negatively influenced. Nevertheless, sponsors usually have a reciprocal relationship with those they underwrite and often stand to gain directly or indirectly from the support provided. A sponsor can be private or public, an individual or group, or a non-commercial or commercial enterprise. The individual can have multiple sponsors and may or may not accept the ideology of the sponsor. Nevertheless, these sponsor or power relationships contribute to the construction of identity and sense of self (Gee, 2000-2001; Collins & Blot, 2003).

Language

This power factor does not discount that "language and identity are inseparable" (Joseph, 2004, p. 13). All are intertwined, for linguistic identity cannot be separated from cultural/social experiences or interactions which help to define who we are and how we make sense of the world (Godley, 2003; Lanehart, 2002; Richardson, 2002; Gee, 1996; Street, 1993; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Smitherman, 1977; Baugh, 2001; Royster, 2000; Morgan, 1999; Logan, 1995; Morrison, 1992). It is making sense of the world that gave birth to the language of Black America (Smitherman, 1977, 2006; Baugh, 2000) or what some linguists now call African American Language.

Among linguists, there are at least two schools of thought in the discussion of African American Language (AAL) or what is variously termed Ebonics, Black English, or African American Vernacular English. One centers around AAL as a language system with an emphasis on grammatical structure, while the other focuses on AAL as ways of speaking (DeBose, 2007). For the purposes of this study, AAL is being viewed as the latter. It refers to "common speaking styles, systematic patterns of grammar, and common language practices [semantics] in the Black community" (Smitherman, 2006, p. 3) or what Spears refers to as AAL communicative practice (2006). Smitherman notes that it crosses all boundaries—age, gender, class, religion, education-- because its genesis is the same source, the Black experience in America, and she estimates that 90% of Americans of African descent speak AAL at some point in their lives.

Though much of the research in AAL centers on Black men, African American women have their own linguistic style "based on their own belief systems and social, cultural, historical, political, and religious reality" (Troutman, 2002, p. 116; also see Baugh & Smitherman, 2007; Etter-Lewis, 1993; Hudson, 2001; Lanehart, 2002; Morgan, 1999;). Troutman traces the development of African American women's language use as being influenced by enslaved women's aggressive participation and autonomy in selling and trading goods in 18th century marketplaces, specifically South Carolina. In advancing her theory of the social construction of African American women's language, Troutman cites her research, which is consistent with that conducted by Houston (1997) in identifying descriptors of language use. Table 1 displays the corresponding ideas

and features of African American women's language as identified by African American women students.

The table specifically speaks to the question of how African American women perceive their speaking styles. The historical reference to the aggressive participation in the marketplace and the sociocultural element of resistance discussed in Chapter 2 are consistent with the perceptions of Black women speaking out, not being afraid to speak what is on the minds, and being self-assured.

Table 1

African American Women Students' Perceptions of Their Speech

Houston (1997)	Troutman (2002)
speaking with authority	authoritarian
speaking out; talking about what's on your mind; not being afraid to speak your mind	direct; opinionated; vocal; voice their opinions; assertive
speaking with a strong sense of self-esteem; being very sure of oneself	self-assured; confident; powerful; cocky

Source: Adapted from "'We Be Strong Women': A Womanist Analysis of Black Women's Sociolinguistic Behavior" by Denise Troutman (2002, p. 109).

Thus, while Troutman is concerned with how women identify and define their linguistic selves, Etter-Lewis (1993) looks at oral narratives as autobiography and considers how African American women structure their narratives. Most often

they do not unfold in a contiguous manner and may contain any single or
combination of the following styles:

- unified – contains words or phrases that are all related to a central idea

- segmented – there are shifts in focus with a variety of seemingly unrelated
  utterances

- conversational – reconstructs past conversations verbatim using different
  voices, tones/or pitches; uses conversation as a means of illustrating an
  idea. (pp. 178-80)

However, it should be noted that a narrator's style may also shift according to
topic, imagined audience, values, local knowledge, and cultural knowledge.

Morgan (1999, 2002) considers African American women's language use
in their everyday lives as she analyzes Black female speech across generations.
Morgan says that women socialized in African American culture are familiar with
three interactional modes based on age and that their identity is tied to a "cool
social face" (1999, p. 41). As children, they may engage in language play or "he-
said, she-said" disputes (Goodwin, 1992) in which the offended party confronts
the offender but is not concerned about the reason for the offense. There is
more concern with reestablishing and maintaining social face. As
teenagers/young adults, they engage in instigating, but the "he said, she said"
dispute is taken more seriously as there is often an audience, and the
confrontation sometimes becomes physical.   As adults, women move on to
signifying, indirection, and signifying laughter as a conversational or narrative
style. Their interest is no longer in who said something negative about another,

but rather in the speaker's intention as well as the speaker's right to speak for herself. As girls they have learned that speech is important, and as women they recognize that speech captures a particular moment in time, and they use it more discreetly.

Identity

Identity is a multi-layered construct. It reflects the individual in her many roles in society, and both the individual and society are intricately linked to identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). Though definitions and theories of identity abound (Burke, 2003a), literacy and identity scholars agree that two basic types of identity are individual or personal and group or communal.

Individual identity is thought to be how a woman defines herself while group identity is equated with a body in which everyone has commonalities, such as physical features, education, culture, religion, or ethnicity. This group identity is based on some shared world view, a sense of "being and becoming" (Burke, 2003a, p. 1). Membership in this group helps individuals define themselves or distinguish their unique qualities or traits from others in the group. This group membership, in fact, contributes to a sense of "self." Individual identity, therefore, is linked to group identity as it is comprised of elements of various group identities (Kucer, 2005; Joseph, 2004; Burke, 2003b). These various group identities also contribute to each individual's multiple identities. The way (or ways) in which these identities are manifested is wholly dependent upon the relationship of the individual to another individual or group at a given point in time. Consequently, one's identity may change depending upon the context or

circumstance under which it is exhibited. It is dependent on the role being played at that time—mother, wife, daughter, sister, friend, etc. Another aspect of individual identity posits the individual sense of self as shaped in part by others' perceptions of the individual (Bartlett, 2005; Joseph, 2004; McCarthey & Moje, 2002.) Thus, there are generally agreed upon values or expectations that are a part of a larger community or group with which individuals identify. Sociologist Peter Burke (2003a) stresses that these shared beliefs tell individuals how to respond to themselves as well as tells others how to respond to them.

The concept of multiple identities dates back to the late 1890s (Burke, 2003b), and as stated is connected to membership in various groups and is negotiated based on the social context and linguistic interaction with others (Godley, 2003; Bucholtz, 1999). These groups in effect provide a framework or "interpretive community" (Fish, 1976) and the identities often intersect (Luttrell & Parker, 2001). Each of these groups has definitive moral and social values, beliefs or behaviors although they may not impact one's belief in a "straightforward, unilinear" way nor are they necessarily "deterministic" (Kucer, p. 206). Consequently, given a particular event or situation, a woman privileges certain beliefs over others as she negotiates or navigates her belief system when group ideologies lack harmony. Therefore, identity is not fixed, but fluid, dynamic and contestable based on context, one's beliefs, and sense of being (Bucholtz, 1999; Kucer, 2005; Mahiri & Godley, 1998; McCarthey & Moje, 2002). Take the example of Harriet Jacobs.

As Harriet Jacobs recounts in her autobiography (1861), her identity as a beautiful fifteen-year girl enslaved to a lecherous, "vile" master subjected her as a bonded person to his sexual entreaties. The slave woman identity propagated by the white supremacy culture labeled her a wench or Jezebel among other terms, all suggesting that the slave woman was someone with loose morals who engaged in promiscuous sexual behavior.

Although she was able to avoid outright ravishment by staying in the company of others and because her physician master was concerned about appearances and wanted her to come to him willingly, he, nevertheless, subjected her to "foul words" in his desire to "people" her young mind with "unclean images" (pp. 33-34). This slave woman identity was the reality of Jacob's life, but it consistently conflicts with her sense of self. "When he told me I was made for his use, made to obey his command in every thing; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and should surrender to his, never before had my puny arm felt half so strong" (p. 21).

When Harriet's desire to marry a free Black man who wished to purchase her freedom was summarily denied, and she was physically abused, threatened with prison or death for acknowledging her love for him, she resolved to resist her master's efforts to be with her. Eventually, her master devised a plan to build a secluded house for her in the country. Upon hearing of the beginning of its construction, Jacobs took a "plunge into the abyss" (p. 69). She made a conscious decision to take control of her sexuality and choose a lover for herself rather than be subjected to her master's sexual demands. (The lover was an

unmarried, educated, "eloquent" white man of means who treated her kindly and with tenderness.) Despite breaking the moral code of "good and pure" values which had been inculcated in her by her grandmother, she discarded the enslaved woman identity to take on the identity of a "free" woman. "It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something a kin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment" (p. 70). From that moment forward, Jacob's vision and sense of self was that of a free Black woman.

Nevertheless, on some level, Harriet Jacobs had taken on the enslaved woman's role and understood the "rules for socially interacting and sharing knowledge in literacy events" (Heath, 1982, p. 50); although she could read and write, which her master knew, for he had caught her practicing writing, she feigned ignorance over the notes he passed her, "I can't read them sir" (p. 39). This, of course, allowed him to read the note to her, thereby highlighting the respective role each played. But later, after Harriet escaped her master's plantation and became a "fugitive" free woman, she wrote letters to her master and had them mailed from New York in an effort to disguise her whereabouts. She internalized the literacy behavior and bold performance of a free person and the cunning and deceptive behavior of a fugitive who will do what she must to survive. Consequently, an individual's multiple identities reflect multiple literacies and discourse behaviors (Rogers, 2003). Therefore, "literacy is not literacy is not literacy" (Hull and Schultz, 2001, p. 583) but is related to the individual's "performance in society" (Gee, 2000-2001).

In "Identity as an Analytic Lens for Research in Education," Gee provides a practical structure for discussing identity that can be adapted for this study. In an approach related to his theory of discourse as an identity kit, Gee refers to identity as "being recognized as a certain 'kind of person' in a given context," and maintains that there are four perspectives or elements related to multiple identities that are linked as an individual acts in a given situation (2000-2001, p. 99). See Table 2.

Table 2

Four Ways to View Identity

Perspective		Power	Source of Power
1. Nature Identity: a state of being	developed from	forces	in nature
2. Institution Identity: a position	authorized by	authorities	within institutions
3. Discourse Identity: an individual trait	recognized in	the discourse/ dialogue	of/with "rational" individuals
4. Affinity identity: experiences	shared in	the practice	of "affinity groups"

Source: Gee, 2000-2001, p. 100

Each identity is connected to some sort of interpretative system, value, belief, or sense of being. The first of these is the nature perspective (N-Identities), which is biological or caused by a "force" over which we have no control nor can it be controlled by any individual or societal group, i.e., being born

short, and growing to a height no taller than 5' 1". This is an identity because people and institutions recognize it as such; without that recognition, it would have no special meaning.

The second strand is the institutional perspective (I-Identities). Institutional identity is sanctioned or empowered by some institutional authority that gains its power through a variety of laws, rules, traditions, or principles. "I-Identities can be put on a continuum in terms of how actively or passively the occupant of a position fills or fulfills … her role or duties" and accepts the I-Identity as a "calling or imposition" (p. 103), i.e., I am a doctoral student of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). This identity is granted by the educational traditions, the administration of IUP, and the graduate faculty of the English Department at IUP. This clearly is a calling rather than an imposition since I voluntarily made the choice to become a doctoral student. On the other hand, my younger cousin, who is a student at a junior college in upstate New York, was "officially" diagnosed with Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in elementary school, and this identity imposed upon her by a psychologist has followed her during her educational career.

The third strand is the discursive perspective (D-Identities). This identity is related to individual traits or individuality. It is possible only because interaction with other people makes it possible. This occurs through the way they treat, talk about and interact with the individual. The discursive identity is related to language and language use and is constructed and sustained through discourse and dialogue. There is no natural force or institutional authorization here, but

rather "rational individuals" who voluntarily engage the individual and recognize her as a certain kind of person, i.e., Michelle Obama, America's first lady, is a charismatic, confident and compassionate person. Any one of these traits relates to the discursive perspective. Numerous newspapers, magazines, and other media portray her as such based on interactions with friends, relatives, and colleagues who know her, as well as on the perceptions of those she encounters in public interactions. She is variously described as a "fearless fashionista, fun-loving hostess, protocol-stretching diplomat" (Skiba, 2009, p. 20); a "smart, capable, compassionate Black woman" (Burt-Murray, 2009, p. 18); an outspoken, yet dignified woman "who gave voice to masses of hardworking people who had never had a high profile, or any profile at all" (Kaplan, 2008, p. 157); and as having an "amazing heart …obviously she is beautiful outside, but she is really beautiful inside" (Cole, 2008, p. 75).

These identity traits are ascribed to her because of the way people talk and write about Mrs. Obama and because of her discursive use and persona in private and public spheres. However, Gee notes that the D-identity can also be achieved. In the case of Michelle Obama, in part because of her position in society as a powerful, public figure, both are at work. As an Ivy League graduate, accomplished lawyer and professional, Mrs. Obama, before taking a leave from her job as VP of Community and External affairs at a Chicago medical center, was known as a team player who inspired other people and could get things done. These qualities complement those already noted and contribute to the idea that the D-Identity is achieved because it is used to accomplish a goal.

Mrs. Obama believes that the White House shouldn't just be a place where famous people gather, but a place where famous people go out creating dialogue with the community. She did just that during Women's History Month 2009, when she sent a group of accomplished women to schools across Washington, D.C., including singers Alicia Keys and Sheryl Crow; Ann Dunwoody, the first female four-star general; and Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman to travel into space. Later that night at the White House, the women leaders had dinner with one hundred girls from schools around D.C. while Mrs. Obama encouraged the girls to make the most of the evening. "'Poke and prod and figure out how [these women] got to be where they are and what you can do in your lives to get yourselves ready for that next step. Tonight we just want to say, Go for it! Don't hesitate. Don't act with fear. Just go for it.' Because all the women in the room, she told the girls, see a little bit of ourselves in you" (Gibbs & Scherer, 2009, p. 32).

The fourth strand is the affinity perspective (A-Identities). This is group identity in which individuals have similar or shared practices and beliefs. This identity privileges practices and beliefs over shared culture and traits. The source of empowerment is participation or sharing, rather than institutions or discourse directly. Generally, individuals actively seek group affinity, and members of the group may or may not live in the same community or region.[18] The Ebony Society of Philatelic Events and Reflections (ESPER) is an international group of Black stamp collectors who collect and lobby for stamps depicting people of African descent. They visit schools, churches, community

organizations, and local events using stamps to teach and discuss Black history and to encourage philately. My church historian is an octogenarian who has travelled all over the country to meetings and unveilings of first edition Black history stamps. She is a retired trained health professional, who has an interest in history and has been using Black stamps as a teaching tool for the past twenty years. She has been part of this group since it was founded in the late 1980s.

These multiple identities are supported by interpretive systems, "people's historically and culturally different views of nature; …norms, traditions, and rules of institutions; … the discourse and dialogue of others; or … the working of affinity groups" (pp. 107-08). Although Gee suggests that D-Identity (discourse and dialogue) is the only identity that appeals directly to recognition, while the others are filtered through the lens of other entities, this is not the case for Americans of African descent. I-Identity is acquired at birth as race is listed in birth records. The state immediately gives the child an institutional identity. Whether she continues to maintain that identity is based on skin color as well as on privilege and cultural practices.[19] N-Identity is also connected to biology or the natural state of being. Race is a factor of birth and for most Black Americans, James Brown's "I'm Black and I'm Proud" is a cultural rejoinder. The D-Identity also fits the discursive perspective for Black Americans as African American Language is commonly spoken in many Black communities and the manner or nuances of the discourse and dialogue identify them as Black. Lastly, A-Identity, the affinity perspective, is real for those Black Americans who celebrate and engage in Black culture by wearing afro-centric or African-inspired clothing or

jewelry, attending "Black church" services[20], frequenting Black-owned

restaurants and clubs, celebrating particular holidays, such as Kwanzaa, reading

specific types of books, etc., thereby identifying with Black culture.

Black Women's and Women's Literacy

As was the case with most women's research, "General academic

inattention to the subject of women's literacy was the norm before the

appearance of the explicitly feminist sociological and anthropological scholarship

of the late 1980s and 1990s…" (Mortensen & Daniell, 2007, p. 13). Until the mid-

1990s, there was very little reference to women's literacy in English Studies

journals and collections, with the exception of Jacqueline Jones Royster's

"Perspectives on the Intellectual Tradition of Black Women Writers (1990), which

grew out of a 1988 presentation delivered at the Right to Literacy conference in

Columbus, Ohio, and later evolved into the book, *Traces of a Stream: Literacy*

and Social Change Among African American Women (2000). Among other

notable studies during the decade were Ann Ruggles Gere's "Literacy and

Difference in 19th –Century Women's Clubs (1994); Shirley Wilson Logan's

"Literacy as a Tool for Social Action among Nineteenth-Century African American

Women (1995) which is anthologized in Catherine Hobbs' *Nineteenth-Century*

Women Learn to Write (1995), one of the early interdisciplinary collections of

studies of women's literacy in contextualized spaces; Susan Miller's *Assuming*

the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing

(1998); and Ellen Cushman's *The Struggle and the Tools: Oral and Literate Strategies in an Inner City Community* (1998).

Gere examines the literacy practices of women affiliated with "nonfederated" women's clubs in the late 19th century, their complex representation in the public sphere, and their private texts, while Royster and Logan look at the rhetorical practices of individual Black women. Miller, on the other hand, stresses gender analysis in presenting 18th and 19th century educational models, and Cushman's ethnographic study features inner-city Black women as "cultural brokers" (p. xii) in their community.

Royster

Royster's *Traces of a Stream* (2000), like Logan's *"We are Coming": The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women* (1999), analyzes the text of nineteenth century African American women, some of whom are affiliated with women's clubs; however, Royster's work provides the theoretical paradigm for this study as she goes beyond rhetorical analysis to lay out an Afrafeminist ideology that references identity, culture, and power in relation to Black women's literacy practices and behavior. She provides a "kaleidoscopic view,… sense of landscape … [and] closeup views from different standpoints in the landscape" (2000, p. 6). The view is one of "thick description" (p. 6) as Royster examines these 19[th-]century women's non-fiction works. She considers them from a rhetorical perspective; historical perspective tracing their literacy framework to pre-1619 Africa; and a methodological and ideological perspective discussing the

use of "historical ethnography". Thus, Royster effectively exercises reflective practice in laying out the scholarly tradition of Black women's rhetoric.

Royster frames literacy metaphorically as a thread in the communicative fabric which includes orality and other closely intertwined symbolic systems. Her study is one of the first to consider the blur or overlap between orality and literacy in African American female literacy practices and to suggest that researchers need to recognize that literacy be envisioned in the lived experiences of African American women. The research of Smitherman (1977) and Moss (2003, 2001) also notes the blurring or merging of the oral and written traditions in the Black church, which is consistent with the African American literary tradition apparent in the literature of Black women writers such as Zora Neale Hurston (1936/2003), Toni Morrison (1987) and Alice Walker (1973, 1982).

Using Sojourner Truth as an example, Royster defines literacy as a social cognitive ability. Truth is traditionally viewed as illiterate because she was unable to decode and encode text. However, social cognitive ability includes "ways of knowing and believing" as well as "ways of doing" and broadens language practices to include storytelling, singing, etc. (p. 46). Drawing on Hymes' concept of communicative competence that language must be internalized in order for the communicator to have sociolinguistic knowledge of how and when to use language effectively, Royster points out that Truth's ability to "read men and nations" was in fact a form of literacy because she "had the ability to understand sociocultural information and to operate with power and authority in the communities in which she spoke" (p. 46). This understanding allowed her to

communicate her world view in the situational context because communicative competence is based on language experience. Royster continues that communicative competence can be spoken or written and refines the term to rhetorical competence to distinguish between the written word and oral word. Rhetorical competence suggests:

> that writers have a base of sociocultural knowledge and language experience (as communicators generally do), which they use in the process of making meaning and conveying that meaning to others in the satisfaction of specific purposes. The task of the writer is to understand the world around her; to determine how she should face and negotiate literacy challenges, given her knowledge and experience; and to determine what she should do to perform in a way that produces the desired effects… (p. 48)

Resonating with Vygotsky, Royster suggests that writing is internalized social speech, a monologic use of language which the writer completes in a conversation with herself while remaining cognizant of the language use in a specific discourse community. Rhetorical competence is enhanced by continual language use and regenerative learning. Thus, writing is a skill, and writers generally get better with experience as they learn from their literacy practices. However, all writers see the world through "terministic screens" (Burke, 1966). Each writer has her own tinted lens which colors her world view based on her way of making meaning. Although Royster is talking about Black women essayists as a group, this may also apply to Black women writers individually.

There is no lack of studies related to socially constructed literacy practices or multidimensional literacies among African Americans conducted in the past several years.[21] It is only in seeking to examine research in which African American female literacy practices are the focus, that the dearth is evident (Baugh & Smitherman, 2007; Lanehart, 2002; Morgan, 1999). Of the number of studies published in the last fifteen years, in addition to those of Logan and Royster, only those of Lanehart (2002) and Richardson (2003) stand out as having dedicated space exclusively to the literacy practices of women of African descent.

Lanehart

Sonja Lanehart's *Sista, Speak! Black Women Kinfolk Talk about Language and Literacy* (2002) is devoted to female language and literacy practices. A linguist by training, Lanehart examines African American Vernacular English (AAVE), also referred to in this study as African American Language (AAL), as well as literacy, education, and identity. She believes language use and literacy are intricately connected, and her research specifically speaks to my study as it explores literacy identity through the lens of culture, language, education, and power and makes connections to current education policy, pedagogy, and implications for change.

This study is a collection of autobiographies of women in Lanehart's life whose stories she recalls from childhood—her grandmother, mother, aunt, and older sister—as well as her own. It is the story of three generations of women. Each of the participants in the study is at a different stage in life in regard to age,

education, identity, and language usage. All were born and raised in the south; some speak "Standard English"; some speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE) or African American Language (AAL); some speak both; some have attended college, some have not; some are working class, some are middle class. All have an interlocking history that connects them to each other by virtue of family, community, and social, economic, and political forces which influenced their language and literacy practices.

Their language/literacy autobiographies reveal the diversity of attitudes about language and everyday literacy practices and highlight the complexities of language, literacy, and identity, even in the same family. Although the participants are older than the population I examined, Lanehart's study also looks at the early literacy practices as well as the current practices of her narrators. Lanehart begins the narrative section with a discussion of her early literacy practices, and she recalling her second grade teacher's drilling her in speaking "good" English:

> I used my precious grammar book to conduct classes out of my garage for neighborhood children. By teaching others, I was able to practice "good" English... My teacher had a profound effect on my desire to learn all that I could about "correct" pronunciation and "correct" English….I would constantly correct the way my parents and others in my family spoke. (p. 16)

Although a child, she took on the role or identity of teacher and speaker of "good" or "Standard English" in a household where AAVE was the home

language variety. Although her mother, Grace, finished high school, attended a
trade school and is literate, Lanehart maintains, almost thirty years later, she still
is perceived as the teacher of "good" English, a role which she becomes
impatient with as Grace asks her to dictate notes in "good" English or to
"translate" reading passages for her. Throughout the study, there are implications
of sensitivity to the mother tongue concept (Richardson 2003) and the negative
effects upon literacy of devaluing an individual's language variety.

The narrative analysis of these autobiographies connects these stories to
those of many African American women as it becomes apparent that race and
culture, language, and power relationships or sponsorship have a significant
influence on the education and identity of these women. Grace, Lanehart's
mother, shares her thoughts about her education and language use:

When I was 13 or 14, I was the oldest at home. That's when my life
turned around. I was a child responsible for four children…trying to go to
school and learn. I didn't have a lot of time for homework. Eventually, I
lost interest in school. See school was not important to Maya [my mother].
That was just a state law to her, so we had to go….I feel I would have
gotten a better education if I had the time to apply myself and someone to
help me understand the importance of education…. The school I went to
was okay. All the Black kids went to Jefferson or Roosevelt schools from
Elementary to High School. we [sic] didn't have a choice….I don't [like
myself that much because of my language and literacy] [sic] because I feel
I don't use my words correctly; I don't talk correctly. It's ok talking to my

family and whatever. But when I'm at work and people looking at you and

judging you by the way you speak… I don't feel comfortable talking alotta

[sic] time and the whole time I'm talking, I'm wondering if I'm saying the

right thing. (pp. 41, 56)

Lanehart suggests that early language awareness and literacy practices

contribute to identity.

Although the focus of her study is literacy identity, the subtext seems to

be what literacy is and who determines the worth of one's literacy. Thus,

Lanehart concludes her study with the least formally educated of the participants

being termed the most literate. Representing three generations, mother,

daughter, and granddaughter, Lanehart labels Maya (her grandmother and an

octogenarian) as literate because she was "pleased with her life," and her literacy

functions well for her purposes. Although she is unable to fill out the

questionnaires/ instruments for the study, she reads the Bible daily and is well

versed in biblical topics. The latter not the former is significant to her existence.

The two participants, Lanehart suggests, are less literate than Maya, despite

having post-secondary educations and having more formal schooling than Maya,

have low literacy esteem and little confidence in their abilities given their

perceptions of having received inadequate educations based on social inequity in

the South. Thus, Lanehart suggests that confidence in one's literacy ability has a

greater effect on literacy identity than formal literacy achievement or education.

Lanehart's work is particularly relevant as she speaks to the ideology of

Black women researching ourselves and telling our own stories. It also

addresses the concept of double consciousness as well as the effects of language, culture, power and literacy on identity. The narratives demonstrate that language, literacy, and identity may be distinctive in theory, but in practice are undeniably linked.

Richardson

Richardson's *African American Literacies* (2003) adds another dimension to this discussion. It brings together theory and practice as Richardson reports the results of teaching an African American-centered composition course she developed as a graduate student. Drawing on her own experience as a student placed in "dummy English" (p. 3), her text is a mixture of memoir, historiography, rhetorical analysis, language theory, cultural theory, literacy/literacies study, original research, and social discourse as she critically argues for an African American-centered approach to writing for students of African descent. In the context of this larger work, Richardson focuses on the female contributions to African American literacies and how they can be used in literacy education.

In "'To Protect and Serve': African American Female Literacies," a chapter in the book but also an article published in *College Composition and Communication*, Richardson (2002) looks at language, identity, and power, arguing that due to negative and "twisted" images of Black womanhood passed on from American enslavement, the Black woman has had to develop critical literacy and language practices to "fulfill [her] quest for a better world" and to counteract and resist dominant cultural stereotypes. Thus, the mother tongue concept, and understanding its significance as a cultural and social phenomenon,

is essential to understanding African American students and their literacy education. Women, as the first socializers of children, have a profound effect on who they become. The mother tongue concept connects language to identity. It is usually learned from our mothers; we speak their "native" language, thus their mother tongue.

> Our language, our mother tongue, is at least partly how we know what we know. Every language represents a particular way of making sense of the world. As contextual factors in our realities change, our language changes to accommodate our world/view. Non-standard languages typically change faster than standard ones because they are not authorized in larger society or carefully written down (Gee, 1996). Nevertheless, various nuances and ideas are descended in those languages that reflect a past and help to shape the future of the language users. (75)

This is particularly important since most Black Americans participate in African American discourse communities (Smitherman, 2000). Richardson works with literacies as dynamic and fluid social practices. She defines African American literacies "as including vernacular resistance arts and cultural productions that are created to carve out free spaces in oppressive locations such as the classroom, the streets, the workplace, or the airwaves," etc. (p. 76). She argues that formal schooling erases individual identities and creates conflicting views of reality among African American women that need to be codified and verified to help these women successfully "cross borders. Making

explicit some of the literacies of Black females can help educators to build on that foundation" (p. 76).

African American female literacy practices reflect living in a racial, gender, class, and sexually exploitive society in which women of African descent utilize "their language and literacy practices to protect and advance themselves and their loved ones in society" (p. 77). Such practices include storytelling; conscious manipulation of speech and silence; code and/or style switching; signifying; and the performance arts (singing, dancing, acting, steppin', stylin'; and quilting and other crafts.) Richardson goes on to explore these practices as the chapter proceeds looking at storytelling in the public texts of Black American authors, Paule Marshall and Alice Walker and the private text of her mother, Evelyn Richardson; speech manipulation and silence in Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Anita Hill's testimony before the 1991 U. S. Senate hearing to appoint Justice Clarence Thomas; codeswitching and stylin' in the work of Zora Neal Hurston, Marva Collins, and hip-hop language; and steppin' ("spelling of words or the saying of rhymes to dance routines which feature hard body movements") and rhyming to jump rope routines or rhymes Black women often learn as children (p. 88).

In assessing Black female strengths, Richardson notes that Black females are socialized to act as protectors, nurturers, and independent individuals. Research demonstrates that these values often play out in the classroom as early as the first and second grade as Black female students become "messengers," "caretakers," and "enforcers" (p. 90). Long term, these roles can

have a positive or negative impact on students' literacy development as socialization, rather than academics, may be emphasized in aiding the teacher to maintain classroom order.   In addition, Black communication styles sometimes act as barriers to literacy access as student/teacher conflicts develop. In the end, Richardson suggests that recognizing the mother tongue concept and the implicit differences of language/culture since the Black woman is often the first teacher of Black children will enhance a teacher's sensitivity to Black culture and alternative approaches to learning, thus better positioning Black females to acquire higher levels of literacy.

Richardson's concept of African American female literacies is significant to this study because it provided an expansive perspective as literacy practices were considered. In addition to the practices already mentioned, I also considered communications/media technology (computers and their various applications, MP3 players, cell phones, etc.) as this is a literacy it is presumed most students of the twenty-first century possess, as well as hip-hop consciousness, or hip-hop rhetoric, as a literacy practice. Yasin (2008) says that many young people participate in some sort of youth culture or common culture as defined by Paul Willis (1990), which includes elements of hip-hop consciousness. In fact, there is a whole generation of African Americans who are considered part of hip-hop culture (Kitwana, 2002), and hip-hop is generally recognized as an element or subculture of African American culture.[22] Hip-hop includes graffiti art, break dancing, emceeing/rapping, and dee jaying (Chang,

2005; Davey D, 1984), and in this study is generally considered under performance arts.

Conclusion

Although my study varies from those mentioned in this chapter, given the transdisciplinary nature of the study, these works provided a cross-section of the conceptual basis of my study. Research related to power, language, identity, literacy, women's literacy, and Black women's literacy all inform this study. In particular, the works of Royster (2000), Lanehart (2002) and Richardson (2003) all relate to women of African descent as an historically marginalized group and proved useful in my research.   Royster's Afrafeminist ideology provided the theoretical paradigm for this study while Richardson provided a definition of African American literacy which undergirds the study. All were useful in considering the dichotomy between African American culture and American culture.

The work of Lanehart and Richardson, in particular, presented models for this project. Lanehart's research is an empirical study presented in narrative form, a form used in the present analysis. The results, like those of Lanehart's *Sista, Speak!,* include both narrative excerpts from the interviews and interpretative sections. Richardson's work takes a mixed genre--historical, theoretical, and empirical approach, a feature also used in this study. Both relate to the research questions regarding identity as literacy learners, early literacy practices, view of literacy, and value placed on literacy. Both offer suggestions for pedagogical changes to empower students.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN: QUESTIONS, METHODS AND ETHICS

The Study Overview

This research is exploratory in nature and is concerned with the link between literacy and identity. Its purpose is to reveal how college-age Black women view themselves as literate beings in the 21st century. Their perceptions of themselves are key to understanding who they are and how they function as literate individuals in their private discourse communities outside the classroom. It is a cultural as well as a literacy study, a study of identity and the social/cultural forces which shape it. It considers real people and how they make meaning of the world in which they find themselves. For these reasons, I have chosen a qualitative method as my approach to this study.

The study explores the out-of- school literacy practices of ten college-age Black women from New Jersey area colleges to determine how the intersections of language, culture, and power contribute to the construction of their social/literacy identities and, presumably, relate to their academic literacy practices.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

- What were the early literacy development practices of these college-age undergraduate Black women? This question relates to identity and Lanehart's research, which suggests that early literacy

practices and language awareness strongly impact the formation of literacy identity (2002).

- How do undergraduate Black women view themselves as literate beings in the 21st century? The purpose here was to discover how young Black women generally view literacy and the significance of literacy in their lives.

- How do Black undergraduate women use literacy in their daily lives?

- Does double-consciousness apply to the non-academic and/or academic lives of Black undergraduate women? If so, how does this affect their literacy practice? This relates to the lingering feeling, already noted, that many people of African descent experience regarding the conflicting cultural notions of being Black and American.

As noted in the "Review of the Literature," Chapter 3, the concept of identity is multifaceted and fluid (Ferdman, 1990 cited in Kucer, 2005, p. 205; Ball & Lardner, 2005, p. 52). Since the 1990s, identity has become an important analytic tool in academic research and has been described in a variety of ways in studies (Moje & Luke, 2009). However, in this study, based on Gee's discussion of attributes of identity being related to nature (our biological makeup), discourse, group affiliation and institutional affiliation or perspective (2000-2001), I take a "multi-lensed," or interdisciplinary, and feminist approach to this complex subject and investigate language, culture, and power (Royster, 2000).

My working concept of African American female literacies as womanist ways of understanding and making meaning of the world draws on Richardson's explication of social theories of literacy (2003). These imply that literacy is not just broadly positioned as interactive social practices which are connected to reading and writing but is multidimensional, shaped by institutions and power relationships, purposeful, embedded in social and cultural practices, historically situated, and ever changing (Barton & Hamilton, 2000.) Consequently, this study includes an historical analysis as a means of elucidating African American culture and tradition (Gee, 1996). It is through these lenses of history and culture that literacy traditions, values, and practices are presented.

As a researcher, I find it impossible to engage in this study (a literacy practice) objectively because literacy is personal. The effects of various literacy practices impact our individual identities permanently (Lanehart, 2002). Shaped by culturally-related ways of seeing the world, literacy encompasses language, values, beliefs, experiences, and social interactions. It is not a concrete observable unit of behavior. This study, therefore, is an examination of my own literacy background as well as that of the participants. This theory of reflexive practice calls on Freire's dialogical approach to learning, in which the teacher and student, or in this case, researcher and participant, learn from each other (1970/2005). I recognize that critical examination of my views, assumptions, and biases in this exploration of literacy is key to my interpretation of data. I believe disclosure of such views in the course of the research and as a natural response to other data being presented strengthens the validity of my findings (Bourdieu &

Wacquant, 1992; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Olesen, 2000; Reinharz, 1992; Royster, 2000).

Research Strategies

The purpose of the study is to explore the link between literacy and identity. It is intended to deepen our understanding of

1. the impact of culture on literacy and literacy practices;

2. the connections between the academic language and the identities of college-educated Black women.

A cohort, 18-24 years, has been chosen because it represents the traditional college student, as opposed to the older non-traditional student who often returns to college for different reasons. The study is restricted to Black women students because there is a need for research which specifically relates to their needs and concerns (Baugh & Smitherman, 2007; Etter-Lewis, 1993; Evans-Winters, 2005; Lanehart, 2002; Morgan, 1999; Woods, 2002). Traditionally, Black women and men have been lumped together as one group although feminist research indicates that women have different needs from those of men (hooks, 1981; Showalter, 1985; Freedman, 2002).

For my purposes, qualitative analysis is the best way to address the socially constructed nature of the collected data since it is based in part on feelings, intuitions, and experiences. It provides the opportunity for the research participants to tell their own stories and engage in cultural presentations in which they describe their worlds as they see them (Brandt, 2001; Lanehart, 2002). Thus, the in-depth interview is the primary method of investigation for this study.

It is an appropriate tool in this age of interviews. The interview has become a ubiquitous feature of everyday life as evidenced by news events, talk shows, reality television, and even academic events and presentations. As a researcher, I recognize that the interview required me to be an active listener (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Seidman, 1998), to note the understanding, knowledge, and insights of the participants, and to be aware of shifts in responses to themes and ideas. The interviews were conducted as in-depth conversations in which there was a joint construction of meaning between the participant and researcher (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Mishler, 1986).

Pilot Study

Since the in-depth interview is the primary source of data, the interview guide was tested in June 2008 to determine whether the intended questions would provide the necessary information in response to the research questions. The sample included two students who had completed freshmen composition courses at North City Community College (NCCC).

Participants: Xara is a twenty-two year old full-time student at NCCC who is also a full-time EMT worker. She lives with her boyfriend and maintains very close family ties. An honors student majoring in economics, Xara expects to transfer to a four-year institution and then pursue an MBA before going into investment banking. This was a recently-changed goal. She came to North City with the intention of going into medicine, but, after receiving a B in biology, she changed her major. Xara is an avid reader who reads one to four books a week, writes poetry for herself, which she does not share, and does very little online

reading.   At the time of the interview, during the summer, she had completed twenty-eight credits and had plans to go "home" to Colombia and take *Moby Dick* and a pre-calculus book in preparation for her fall semester courses. Xara wore jeans and a tee shirt with "Think" inscribed on the front and a head wrap knotted into a bun at the back of her head. The audio-recorded interview took place in a local café and lasted about 80 minutes.

Celia is a single twenty-three year old who recently graduated from State University. She shares a house with three people in a local suburb. She graduated *summa cum laude* with a major in Spanish, which she describes as her passion. During the summer of the interview, she was working full-time for a social service organization that provides support to young women. In the fall, she expected to leave that job to go to an academy in Spain to earn a certificate to teach English in Spain. She describes herself as a poet who occasionally shares her poetry with others. Celia reads mostly non-fiction related to Spanish, sociology, or politics. She considers herself an average reader and much of her reading is from online sources. Celia is Afrocentric in appearance—dreads, pierced nose, and double piercing on her ears. The audio-recorded interview took place in the living room of her home and lasted about 95 minutes.

Changes as a Result of the Interviews: The interview questions (see Appendix A) seem to have solicited responses that contributed to a conversation and exchange of information, although Xara seemed more forthcoming than Celia with her responses.

As a result of my conversation with Xara, an American-born woman of Colombian and Trinidadian descent, I decided to use the broader term Black women's literacy in the title of the study to acknowledge people of the African Diaspora living in the U. S. Xara considers herself "brown," and she sometimes describes herself as African American "because it is easier" than giving an explanation. Her detailed explanation alerted me to the possibility that other young women of African descent who identify with other national groups might participate in the study, reminding me that Black people are not a homogenous group, a fact that this study acknowledges.

However, in this study I continue to use African American, Black, and women of African descent interchangeably as a style consideration.

The Interview Guide: The site of the interviews was ideally the participants' homes where some field observation could take place; however, since some the participants were reluctant to invite me into their homes, I added a question to the interview guide asking the participants to describe their bedrooms/private space if they share living quarters, or apartments if they live alone. The intent was to see if there was evidence of reading material or other literacy-related activity apparent in their living spaces, such as computers, books, magazines, posters, musical instruments, etc.

A second question was added as a follow-up to the segment on double consciousness. (See the last question in the segment below.) Celia's response to the question about experiencing double consciousness seemed evasive. The

last question provides an opportunity to check or return to the previous response

if necessary and refocus the conversation.

- Are you familiar with W.E.B. DuBois' *Souls of Black Folk?*

- Do you understand DuBois' concept of double consciousness?

- Do you think it still exists?

- Have you had any experience that exemplifies double consciousness?

- How do you consider yourself? As Black first or as a woman?

Themes and Coding: The audio-tapes were transcribed and sections

were coded based on the question response, i.e., View Self as Reader, or Early

Education. Within those sections, a second round of coding took place for shifts

in ideas or subject that might belong in another category.   Then the coded

sections were reviewed and analyzed for similarities or convergence. For

example, response coding of Early Education, Read to by Others, and

Mementoes all suggested an overarching theme for the pilot study with

implications for the final study. For these women, early literacy practices were

enhanced by strong at-home sponsorship of literacy. Divergence, or

inconsistency and contradiction were more difficult to predict for the final study

because of this small sample. Other common themes emerged at the time based

on this pilot sample, including:

- Education and achieving good grades are important, even in subjects
  that are not favorites

- Literacy is empowering

- Technological literacy is important, but not essential to existence

- Passion for communicative practice (reading, Spanish)

- Race does not seem to be a major factor in self-definition

All of these themes were not evident in the resulting study. See Chapter 6 for specific information on themes.

The Study

Participant Selection

Michael Patton (2002) outlines 16 purposeful sampling approaches. In this study, I used a mixed purposeful sampling strategy. In drawing on a base of my former students, I sought typical case sampling among a student population with which I was familiar. At the same time I asked study participants and colleagues for referrals. Thus, I used maximum variation sampling in combination with typical case sampling. This method contributed not only to triangulation (Patton 2002), but was appropriate as I considered yet again the heterogeneity of women of African descent. Participants were chosen to ensure a diverse group of Black female students, 18-24 years old (Maxwell, 1996). The participants were primarily my former students and former or current students of colleagues in the English Department at North City Community College in North City, New Jersey. Some of these women had graduated or transferred to four-year institutions; some were still students at North City. I conducted 10 interviews, five with former students, four with former and current students of colleagues, and one with a student referred by a participant.

The young women participating in this study are diverse in family background, age, educational level, social class, and lived experience. They

represent various aspects of the heterogeneity of the Black community and most

live within a twenty-five mile radius covering two counties in northern New

Jersey. Both counties are considered parts of the New York City metropolitan

area, and each contains a major city (which happens to be the county seat)

where 25% or more of the residents consider themselves Black or African

American. Four of the ten participants in this study live in those areas; four live in

diverse suburban areas with similar populations; while two live in "stereotypical"

suburban settings where Blacks are 10% or less of the population. One of these

participants, Amira, lives in southern New Jersey, in the Philadelphia

metropolitan area (see Table 3). According to the 2000 census, the median

income per family in these areas varied from $32,983 to $84,971, and the

participants' backgrounds reflect these variances. Some come from family

backgrounds, which according to the *American Heritage New Dictionary of

Cultural Literacy,*[23] might be described as working class, while others come from

backgrounds which might be described as middle class. All of the women

consider themselves Black or African American, although one is African

American and Puerto Rican and recognizes both heritages. They range in age

from 19 to 24. Two are mothers, and all are single, except one who is separated

from her husband.

Table 3

Participants in Study: Demographics

	Age	Residence	Parents' Education*	Year in College
Amira	21	Suburban**	College	Senior
Amy	19	Suburban(d)	College	Freshman
Kara	21	Suburban	College	Sophomore
Kendra	23	Suburban(d)**	College	Senior
Khalida	20	Suburban(d)	Some college	Sophomore
Jamila	21	Urban	High school	Sophomore
Michelle	22	Urban	High school	Freshman***
Sade	24	Suburban(d)	High school	Freshman***
Zalika	21	Urban**	Up to high school	Junior
Zena	22	Urban	Training beyond high school	Freshman

*Highest level of attainment of one or both parents
**Area of permanent residence with parents; lives on or near campus while school is in session.
***Enrolled in pre-college course.
(d) Diverse community

Table 4 shows the participants' majors and diverse levels of undergraduate academic attainment, including two who are enrolled in pre-college level courses. At the time of the interview, two were seniors, one was a junior, three were sophomores, and four were freshmen. The seniors and junior lived on or near their college campus and attended State University. This is an institution with an 8% African American enrollment. The remaining participants resided in their parents' household, except for two freshmen, who maintained separate households. At the time of the interview, all of the freshmen and sophomores attended North City Community College (NCCC), which reported a 5.8% Black student enrollment in 2009.

The participants represent different areas of the African Diaspora. Although all live and attend college in the United States, some spent part of their lives in Jamaica, Trinidad, and Nigeria as well as the United States.

Study Site

Since the study focuses on out-of-school practices, ideally I wanted the interviews to take place in the participants' homes where data collection and field observation could occur simultaneously. However, since this was not always practical for the participants, particularly those whom I did not know, interviews were conducted in the local public library, in a local café, and in the homes of participants. After each interview, my field notes and impressions of the participant were recorded in an effort to contribute to the consistency and validity of the study (Adler & Adler, 1998).

Table 4

Participants in Study: Academic Attainment

	Age	Major	Year in College
Amira	21	Africana Studies	Senior
Amy	19	Nursing	Freshman
Kara	21	Psychology	Sophomore
Kendra	23	Africana Studies	Senior
Khalida	20	Political Science	Sophomore
Jamila	21	Journalism	Sophomore
Michelle	22	Nursing	Freshman*
Sade	24	Criminal Justice	Freshman*
Zalika	21	Biological Sciences	Junior
Zena	22	Wellness & Recreation Science	Freshman

*Enrolled in pre-college level English

Data Collection

  Interviews. The interviews took place over a 12 month period from June 2009 through May 2010. The specific questions I asked (see Appendix A) all relate to the broad research questions: How do college-age Black women view themselves as literate beings? What were their early literacy development practices? How do they use literacy in their daily lives? Does double-consciousness apply to their private/academic lives? If so, how does this affect their literacy practice?

  These audio-recorded interviews provide information on the students' individual literacy autobiographies as well as on my own. Interviews ranged from 1 hour to 3 ½ hours, depending on the participant's personality, her level of comfort with me, and presumably her level of comfort with the process. (See Table 5.) The longest interview was with a former student; however, two of the next longest interviews were with students whom I was meeting for the first time. They proved to be very self-confident, gregarious young women.

  The interviews were designed to be open-ended conversations rather than strict closed-ended questions and answers. An "interview guide" or "aide memoire" (Mason, 2004) was used to ensure that certain areas were covered during the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) as conversations often strayed to tangential topics. These interviews were in-depth conversations which sought "deep" levels of understanding (Johnson 2002) or what Clifford Geertz has classically described as "thick description" (1973). During our conversations, some of my literacy background was revealed to the participants. These tended to be the longer conversations in which there was a strong level of collaboration.

Table 5

Participants in Study: Interviews

Name	Length (minutes)	Site
Amira	166	Apartment building lounge
Amy	59	Local library
Kara	145	Home
Kendra	225	Apartment building lounge
Khalida	147	Local cafe
Jamila	171	Local cafe
Michelle	61	Local library
Sade	84	Local library
Zalika	126	Home
Zena	124	Local library

Most of the interviews were only one session, although I met with one participant twice in the same day to complete the interview because we initially met during her lunch hour, which did not allow enough time to complete the interview.

Interview tapes were transcribed verbatim, with false starts, repetitions, um, um hmms, self-correction, code switching, laughter, etc. I have intentionally preserved "the messiness" of everyday speech (Devault, 2004, p. 242) cognizant of the ability of each participant to express herself cogently in her own unique voice with minimal editorial intrusion. There is no doubt that the richness of the conversations dissipated the moment they ended. The tape recordings could not capture body postures, gestures, or facial expressions. Nor could the voice register or lilt of English spoken with a Jamaican or Trinidadian accent be transposed into words. Therefore, excerpts from the interviews may not conform to the traditional practices of editing to present the participants in a particular light (Sohn, 2000). Instead, the slang and vernacular speech add another dimension of these women's self-representation and positive linguistic identity (Devault, 2004).

Writing samples. Participants were asked to provide two short (1 to 2 typewritten pages) reflective papers—one on the development of their early literacy practices, the other on the value of literacy. The prompts appear below.

Topic 1

Reflect on some significant early literacy learning memory or event from pre-school age to the first or second grade. It can be learning to read, write, use a computer, or play an instrument. It doesn't have to be learning a particular skill, but can be practicing the skill, so maybe you recall learning a part for a program at church or a school play, or playing your first board game, or an especially effective show-and-tell occasion. For instance, I recall my older brother teaching me to play Blackjack when I was about 6. In retrospect, I believe the lessons began out

of boredom for him. They started on a car trip to visit an uncle in another state and lasted over a period of days. I had not yet mastered addition and subtraction, so in the process of learning to play cards, I had to learn math as well as recognition of the card symbols and what they were worth.

Talk to your parents and/or siblings if necessary to help jog your memory. Write about that memory or a series of memories. Be as creative as you choose; your response may be in the form of poetry or some other genre if you wish.

Topic 2

Write about the value of literacy. How do you define it? Why is it important or not important to you, to your family, your community, and/or society? Again, do not limit your thoughts to literacy as it is used in school, but also consider how you use it outside of the classroom.

Eight of the ten participants provided written statements via email on each of the topics; one participant provided a statement only on the value of literacy, and one participant, who has a history of not turning in written assignments, conversed with me for almost 2 ½ hours but did not give me any written documents.

Journals. I kept a literacy journal that reflects my early literacy development and literacy practices, and my current literacy experiences, including the dissertation experience. It helped me reflect on my early literacy experiences as I conversed with the participants, and it was mined for data in the analysis.

As another element of reflexive practice, a separate journal was maintained to include field notes on interview impressions and observations that may not have

been evident from the transcriptions. Data recorded were useful in increasing the interpretive validity of the study (Altheide & Johnson, 2002) and responding to ethics as a feature of Royster's Afrafeminist model (2000).

Artifacts. Hodder (2000) and Berg (2007) note the importance of material culture to qualitative research and the interpretation of social experience. Since the basic premise of this study is that literacy is a social phenomenon and culturally situated, I asked participants to share cultural and literacy-related artifacts. These could include any type of documents or tools, childhood picture books, writing tablets, "historical or journalistic accounts, works of art, photographs, memos, accreditation records, television transcripts, newspapers, brochures, meeting agendas and notes, audio-or videotapes…notes from students, teachers,… computer printouts, disks, writing instruments" (Erlandson, et al., pp. 99-100).

The participants shared a variety of artifacts, including report cards, certificates, note books, journals, drawings, picture books, school pictures, letters, cards, original stories. All of the artifacts related to early childhood experiences, except artifacts shared by three participants. Michelle shared the notebook she used her first year of attending school in the United States after arriving from Jamaica; Khalida shared journals/diaries she kept from age eight to eighteen, and Zena, shared notebooks/journals from middle school, in which she collaborated with a friend in writing stories.

The participants who were interviewed earlier, in summer through fall 2009, met with me a second or, in some cases, a third time to share their artifacts. Most

of the participants, who were interviewed later, during the spring of 2010, brought

their artifacts with them to the interview. I met only with Zena a second time to

return her journals/stories, and I met with Sade a second time because she had to

retrieve her artifacts from an older sister.

Observation. Observation was a key element of the interview.

Observing non-verbal behavior and the physical environs are important factors in

considering literacy practices and identity. I observed how the participants were

dressed and their general appearance, for example, African-inspired jewelry, hair

style, manner of speech—formal, informal, guarded, assertive. Although I

recorded field notes following the observation, no comments were made to

participants. These observations took place on the occasions on which I met with

the participants either for the interview or to discuss or return their artifacts.

Analysis

My journal and the participants' responses to the writing prompts detailed

above were examined for emerging themes and issues by coding. The artifacts

provided additional insight into the identity of the participants, generally confirming

data already analyzed. The audiotapes were reviewed after each interview,

analyzed and transcribed as necessary. In particular, Kendra's 3 ½ hour interview

contained a good deal of information which did not inform the study, so those

portions of the tape were not transcribed. I transcribed all of the interviews for the

pilot study and three of the interviews for the study (including Kendra's interview.)

However, in the interest of time, the remaining audio interviews were transcribed

verbatim by a local transcriptionist. After the transcriptions were received, I

reviewed each against the tape and made any necessary corrections. The

transcripts were then uploaded into NVivo 8, a data management software

program. I then coded the transcripts and began the process of analysis. My

strategy for analysis of these in-depth interviews was contextualization in an effort

to look for connecting themes, statements, and events in the autobiographies told.

The findings are presented as narrative analysis as defined by Catherine Kohler

Riessman (1993) and Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin (1995).

Narrative analysis. Unstructured in-depth interviews often solicit

narrative responses because the narrative is one of the ways in which we naturally

present ourselves to one another (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Mishler, 1986;

Riessman, 1993; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Thus, narrative analysis is particularly

suited for studies of subjectivity and identity because agency and imagination are

the primary determinants in how information is presented and what it is supposed

to mean (Riessman, 1993).

According to Rubin and Rubin, "The purpose of data analysis is to

organize the interviews to present a narrative that explains what happened or

provide a description of the norms and values that underlie cultural behavior"

(1995, p. 229). Based on my experience with the pilot study, data analysis of

narratives began while interviewing and was an ongoing process in the

conversations as common themes and concepts began to emerge. After the

interviews were completed and the tapes were transcribed, I coded and

categorized each transcript by theme or concept (Rubin & Rubin, p. 251). The

coding was facilitated by the use of NVivo 8, a database management software

program. Sections were coded based on the question response, i.e. View Self as

Reader, or Early Education. Within those sections, a second round of coding took

place for shifts in ideas or subject that might belong in another category or the

emergence of new categories. Then, in a third round, the coded sections were

reviewed and analyzed for convergence or divergence of data. The coding and

categorizing suggested similar themes and concepts of concern among the

participants and allowed for a basis of comparison of ideas.

NVivo 8 was especially useful in organizing and keeping track of the raw

data produced by almost twenty two hours of interviews as well as by the

participants' written statements and field notes. It helped to manage and connect

ideas and expedite the querying of the data for emerging themes.

Triangulation

  In *Feminist Methods in Social Research,* Reinharz writes that feminist

researchers use the multimethod research approach, also known as triangulation,

for a variety of reasons: "to link past and present… [to] achieve heights of rigor, to

integrate individual and social explanations of phenomena, and to test

hypotheses…" (1992, p. 213). This view is supported by Gubrium and Holstein's

observation that triangulation "adds rigor, breadth, and depth" to a study (1998, p.

4). I used methodological triangulation as described by Denzin *The Research Act*

(1978) to provide evidence that helped me interpret the connections between

Black female literacy practices and identity (Mathison, 1988). The across-method

or between method triangulation combines two or more research strategies in the

study of data. Different methods have various strengths and weaknesses. As

suggested by Denzin (1978), the combining of methods, the in-depth interview, writing samples, artifacts, and observation helped compensate for the deficiency of any single method.

As expected in a project sensitive to social environment and lived experiences, all of the data produced by the various methods did not converge to support one proposition or perspective on African American female literacy, but rather, as Mathison (1988) suggests, exhibited inconsistency. For example, convergence was clearly evident in early childhood literacy practices. The interview data relaying reading and writing as an early childhood literacy practice for most of these young women was supported by children's books, notes and cards to parents, and short stories. These same data were inconsistent for two participants, Michelle and Zena. Michelle, who immigrated to the United States in her teens, did not have artifacts supporting her early learning as they were left behind in her native Jamaica. Zena, who is self-supporting and independent, at the time of this writing was estranged from her mother and did not have access to early documents. The lack of artifacts pertaining to a specific period in the lives of these young women does not negate the experiences themselves. In addition, both provided artifacts that related to a later period in their lives, suggesting their active participation in the research project. Therefore, despite such inconsistencies, based on the various levels of understanding of women of African descent and their literacy/literacies practices, the data presented display a holistic picture of the phenomena and were useful in interpretation.

Member Checking

I used member checking, allowing the participants the opportunity to read and respond to my interpretations of the data obtained in interviews to determine if they are accurate or true representations (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996). Initially, I sent out transcriptions of the interviews via email. However, the first email and a follow-up email did not yield any response. The lack of response to this email may have been caused by several factors: the vast amount of data presented on the transcripts, which ranged in length from 70 – 100 typewritten pages; the timing of the email during late summer, the beginning of the school year; and a return time frame which was too broad, two – three weeks. A second email was sent reminding the participants. The last effort was to send the actual excerpts which are used in the analysis along with my comments. This text is considerably shorter and the participants were asked to respond within a week. Seven of the ten participants responded.

Informed Consent

When a young woman expressed an interest in participating in the study, the details of data collection—the interview, written documents, artifacts, approximate time involved—were discussed with her. After she agreed to be interviewed, but before conducting the interview, the participant was given an informed consent form, advised of her rights as a participant and the confidentiality of her participation and anonymity of her responses if reported. (See Appendix B.) After she signed the form, the interview process and data collection began.

Researcher Bias

No study, even quantitative studies, which are distinguished from qualitative studies, in part based on their "objectivity," lacks researcher bias. This study used reflexive practice as an accepted procedure in feminist qualitative research (Olesen, 2000; Royster, 2000). However, it is evident that in analysis and interpretation, the final presentation reflects my view of what the participants present as their world views or meaning-making experiences. It is what Royster refers to as "passionate attachments," the idea "that knowledge is produced by someone and that its producers are not formless and invisible. They are embodied and in effect have passionate attachments by means of their embodiments" (2000). Riessman (1993) adds to this interpretation of knowledge based bias in her representation of the narrative experience in the research process when she suggests that there is no master narrative. At each level, as the participant tells her story and as the researcher listens, transcribes, analyzes and presents, each selects features to narrate while omitting others.

Recognition of the inherent nature of interpretation and efforts to enhance credibility of the study helped keep me ever alert to the conclusions drawn from the data.

Audit Trail

Consistent with Huberman and Miles' (1998) suggestion in "Data Management and Analysis," I have constructed and make available an audit trail, including all records of the inquiry of the study. Halpern (1983) as cited in Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 319-320) suggests the following types of data be included in an audit trail.

- raw data (writing samples, interview tapes, artifact photos);

- data reduction and analysis products (interview transcriptions, NVivo data);

- data reconstruction and synthesis products (reflective journal, field notes, NVivo data);

- process notes (field notes, literacy journal);

- material relating to intentions and dispositions (literacy journal, e-mail correspondences, informed consent forms),

- instrument development information (notes concerning interview questions; pilot study of instrument).

This is expected to be useful for other researchers who may be interested in reconstructing the project.

Interpretation of Data and Presentation

As interpreter/researcher, I have reflected on my findings, attempted to represent the reality of the participants and to recreate their voices. I have used pseudonyms for the participants, the colleges they attend, and local towns mentioned in an effort to protect their anonymity. Further, excerpts from our conversations are presented unedited with um, um hmm, false starts, repetition, etc. to help the reader "hear" the natural voice of the speaker. Likewise, excerpts from the written statements are unedited unless noted, except for information included in brackets for clarity. Generally, one can distinguish between the dialogue and the written statement by the formality of language.

Further, I sought implications for culturally relevant literacy pedagogy in their stories (Ball & Lardner, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Logan 2006; Richardson, 2003).

The transdisciplinary nature of the research and the complexity of the subject matter suggested presentation of the data in the cultural and historical milieu of women of African descent (Chapter 2.) Some of my narrative and reflection, as well as some historical background, particularly as it pertains to Black women and the education of Black women are interwoven with those of the women interviewed.

Limitations of Study

Although the study gives voice to the ten women participants, it does not claim to provide a comprehensive picture of their lives. Rather, their collective narrative "provide[s] one window with multiple panes" (Banks, 2009) through which to explore literacy identities and literacies practices. Indeed, it is a local or "little narrative" presenting one truth about literacy, not the only truth (Daniell, 1999).

CHAPTER 5

I AM WHO I AM: ANALYSIS OF DATA, PART 1

In this chapter I present analysis of data collected for the study. While reviewing the demographic and biographic information provided by the participants during the interview, I was able to see the uniqueness of each young woman. This chapter presents my autobiographical reflection along with excerpts from data so that the reader can begin to identify and hear each participant's voice.

Data for this chapter were collected from four sources:

- my literacy journal;

- the extended conversation/interview;

- a later conversation regarding artifacts;

- field notes.

Pseudonyms representative of women of African descent have been chosen for the participants. Pseudonyms are also used for colleges they attend and cities and towns in which they live as the disclosure of either, along with the biographical and other information they revealed, might identify the participant.

Who I Am: Reflections

I come from a working class background. My mother worked in a knitwear factory and my father was a maintenance man for the telephone company. I grew up in a housing project in the northeast Bronx in New York City, an area that was considered middle income and was predominantly Jewish and Italian. I attended public schools all of my life. Before we moved from the south Bronx,

when I was 8, the schools I attended were predominantly Black and Latino. In the northeast Bronx, they were predominantly white. This was the case until I went to high school in Manhattan, where the student population was more racially balanced. I went directly to college after graduating from high school. I didn't have a clear idea of what I wanted to do. I just knew I had the desire to further my education. I had received very little guidance in high school and there were no college graduates in my family. I decided I would major in business education because I felt I could always teach if I hadn't found a vocation by the time I graduated. I had attended a commercial/academic high school because at some point in junior high school some older friends wanted to be administrative assistants, so I thought that was what I wanted to do as well. But in high school I realized I wanted something more.

I have been a reader since childhood. There were always books and *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines in my house and my parents read the newspapers daily. In addition to leisure reading of children's and young adult's books at home, especially when the family television was broken, during the week, I read from our church hymnal as I practiced first with the children's choir and then with the youth choir. On Sundays, I read my Sunday school lesson, the Bible, and our church hymnal as we studied scripture and participated in worship. In high school, I read primarily magazines and newspapers. I wrote poetry during my leisure time.

Although I loved to write, at that time, I couldn't think of a way to parlay that love into a profession, a way to make a living. I didn't know of any Black

writers; at least I hadn't read any in school. I had attended schools in which I was in the minority for most of my life, and there was very little presentation in social studies or language arts of people who looked like me or reflected my world view. However, even though my family lived in a predominantly white neighborhood, our connections to the Black community remained intact. We still travelled to Friendship Baptist Church in Harlem, where my parents had been members before my brother and I were born. I still attended choir rehearsal every Friday at 4:00 PM and the Junior Elks every third Saturday of the month (except July and August) at 2:00 PM. Nothing changed except we lived about fifty-five minutes from Harlem by subway instead of the fifteen minutes before we moved, so we simply left home earlier. Besides, there was no Black church in our neighborhood, and our church family was as important as our biological family. The Sunday family gatherings with my great-aunts, aunts, uncles, and cousins all remained the same, except there was no opportunity to go home to change into play clothes after church.

My educational activities were different, but my family and cultural activities all remained intact. And so, yes, there were very few images of me reflected in the academic world around me, so the possibility that I could write professionally did not seem real. Nor did I understand that most writers, at least most Black writers, supported themselves in some other way, usually teaching. The first book written by a Black author I recall reading was James Baldwin's *Another Country*. I was perusing books on display at the local newsstand while waiting to take the subway into Manhattan. It was in a "candy" store which was

more of a variety store because it served as a newsstand selling newspapers,

magazines, and paperback books, but it also sold candy and snacks and had an

ice cream counter where one could buy all kinds of sundaes and fountain-made

drinks. Naturally curious, whenever I had time, I would pick up a book and read

the back cover. When I saw the picture of a Black man on the back, I felt I had to

buy the book. Although I knew about many Black entertainers and athletes, I

didn't know about any Black writers except Paul Lawrence Dunbar, and I knew

his name only because a school was named after him in our old neighborhood.

I'm not sure that the book made much sense to me, but it did open up the world

of Black writers which I didn't consciously know existed. From that point forward,

when I was given a research or writing assignment in school, if I had the

opportunity, I sought out Black authors. I remember an assignment for freshman

composition when I had such an occasion: I chose Langston Hughes's last work

which was published posthumously, *The Panther and the Leash.* I think I

analyzed a few poems, but the one that stands out in my mind is "A Dream

Deferred."

I received a "B" on the paper, which was acceptable, but what surprised

me was that my professor never had heard of Langston Hughes. (Like many of

my students, I was in that naive period of my academic life when I thought

teachers and professors knew everything and had read every book.) All of my

research indicated that he was considered one of America's best known poets,

and arguably the best known Black poet. Her ignorance crystallized for me what

I had always known, but subconsciously assumed might be different in college. I

had to pursue culturally-related interests on my own. They would not occur in the classroom, particularly if I was the only Black student in the class.

Who We Are

The young women in this study tell a collective story, but they also tell individual stories. It is essential to view these women as individuals first to understand the commonality of their experience. Their short biographies are followed by excerpts from our conversations.   These excerpts are provided as glimpses into the lives of these young women and their construction of their literacy identities. Again, this section is presented to help readers identify with each individual and to begin to hear her voice as I hear it every time I read her transcript or other document. All of the women who are juniors or seniors are students at State University, a large public research university and have attended North City Community College (NCCC), except Amira. All of the women who are freshmen or sophomores currently attend NCCC, a two-year institution. Five of the women are former students from my Black Voices in America literature class at NCCC. One of the women, Amira, was referred by a participant, and four were referred by colleagues in the English Department at NCCC.

As this study relates to out-of-school literacies, it is appropriate to acknowledge the vernacular speech patterns of the participants, including myself. Therefore, as noted in Chapter 4, unless specifically stated, the excerpts of transcripts are presented verbatim unedited with false starts, repetitions, ums, um hmms, code switchings, self-corrections, etc., except for ellipsis and brackets, which are used for clarity. The intention throughout this analysis is on

allowing the women to speak for themselves. In some cases, excerpts are presented in dialogue format to make the pattern of thought more transparent and also to show the participatory nature of the conversation/ interview. Although I had a teacher/student relationship with my former students, as the interviewer, I attempted not to be the "professor" but rather a joint participant in this process.

It should also be noted that, although language and identity are addressed in the next chapter, discursive features are evident in this chapter as well.

This section is supplemented by the demographic information in Chapter 4, "Participant Selection," pages 89-92.   It references sociocultural influences outlined in Chapter 2, which are strong influences in shaping Black women's various world views and contribute to the construction of the participants' identities. These include resistance to unfair practices and injustice, spirituality, the oral tradition, music, creative expressions, and a strong sense of community and family.

This section broadly sketches the individual literacy/literacies identities of the participants as they position themselves through their diverse lived experiences as women of African descent.

I Am Who I Am

Amira

Amira**,** a senior majoring in Africana Studies, has a double minor in Women and Gender Studies and Political Science. She plans to attend law school when she graduates. Her father was born in "rural, rural, rural" southern

New Jersey, in a town which "is literally inhabited by all of his relatives who came up from Mississippi post World War II." There are so many family members in the town, it is referred to by locals as the family's last name, Johnsonville. Her mother is from "Philadelphia, PA, by way of Atlanta, Georgia." Both of her parents attended college. Her mother works for the federal government, and her father, who has recently retired from his federal government job, works as a substitute teacher to keep active. Amira is the youngest of three siblings and the only female. One of her older brothers is also attending State University.

Amira spent a semester as an "exchange student" at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. Spelman, founded in 1881, is an Historical Black College (HBC)[24], the first college founded to educate Black women. Amira speaks of her experience.

It just solidified the fact that I am who I am. I'm comfortable with who I am, and I know, I know that being me is okay. I don't, cause sometimes I don't, like with my generation certain things they do, certain things they say, their mentality. I wouldn't say I'm above it, but we're just not, we're not connecting. So just being at Spelman really confirmed to me, I've always known it, but it just confirmed it in my face. It's okay to be me. I am fine with who I am. God made me this way for a reason, and just go with it. Um, I like that. That's what I like about myself. About Black women, um just that we, yeah, I'm a Black woman, we're complex. We're complex on so many deep and great levels, not negative levels like finger snapping and all that, but no, on intellectual, spiritual, sexual, we're so complex…. I

learned a greater appreciation, I guess, for sisterhood… and just that sisterhood is really important. I mean that can go for all women regardless of race, ethnicity, color, or whatever, but that being immersed in that community with Black women and really feeling that sisterhood… is strong, and it's real.

In this excerpt, Amira positions herself as a young Black woman who is clear about her identity. She refers to Spelman, thus aligning herself with the African American women's intellectual tradition and formal education (Royster, 2000; Logan, 1999, 2005); speaks of the strength of Black women bonding as discussed in "Strong Sense of Community and Family," Chapter 2; and resists and distances herself from the "negative" stereotypes associated with her generation as partiers.

Kendra

Kendra, also a senior, is a former student from my Black literature course. She has a double major in Africana Studies and journalism and a minor in psychology. Kendra plans to attend business school when she graduates. She spent the first twelve years of her life in the Bronx, New York, before her parents moved the family to a small New Jersey suburb about twenty miles outside of New York City. Both of her parents are Nigerian. Both are college educated and are social workers in New York City. Her mother is a supervisor of social workers. Kendra has one older sister and two younger brothers, all of whom were born in the United States. The two younger brothers are in college. Her sister

works and cares for her three-year old, who also lives with the family. Kendra is the first of her siblings to complete college.

 I remember Kendra as an active class participant, someone who was genuinely interested in reading and learning about the Black experience from various points of view.

Kendra is gregarious and has an outgoing personality. My interview with her lasted about 31/2 hours because the response to every question turned into a story which suggested another story and possibly a third before there was actually a direct answer to the question. We later talked about this rhetorical practice when we discussed writing, and indeed the pattern was much clearer to me in looking at the transcript of our conversation. (See Chapter 6, "Identity and Language.") The excerpt which follows the next paragraph has been reorganized in the interest of an efficient use of space for this study. The language has not been changed, just the ordering of ideas.

At the time of our conversation, Kendra had been working through some identity issues, which will be discussed in the next chapter. However, here she talks about a life-changing event which may have contributed to that conflict. When she was fifteen, she and two of her siblings remained in Nigeria after the family travelled there to witness her parents renew their marriage vows. It was her second trip to Nigeria. The first occurred when she was around 6 years old.

> They had a plan. My parents had a plan to leave us there [in Nigeria] for a
>
> year and to stay there with my aunt, and that's what happened. We were
>
> bamboozled… I actually came back and I wrote a whole essay on how

you know Nigeria changed my life… I started to understand like the value

of things. …I'm like now I get why they sent me there. I see why my father

was scared. …

My grandmother lived in a village.…It wasn't a hut, but it was more,

um, like a small little building, a brick building…   almost like a cottage.

You know it was like three rooms, the bedroom, um I guess the living

room, … and then it was the kitchen. … You know we were surrounded by

like trees and like there's the orange tree, and like you know it was

different. There wasn't a bathroom. We had to go outside to the

bathroom, like all the way back, behind the building. We had to take a

shower outside, but uh, it wasn't a shower it was actually bathing, you

know. So … I was a villager for about a couple of months. So you know

there um, I used to have to carry wood on my shoulders to my

grandmother so she could use it to cook.… Common water. Oh man, we

didn't even have common water. Electricity. NEPA [the power and electric

authority].… would turn the lights off and you would be without lights for

weeks, like three weeks. And if you didn't have a generator, then you were

just screwed.…

And then we were going to school in Abuja (Lou: Um hmm) which is

the capital, and we went to, it was like a private school. (Lou: Um hmm)

We had to wear a uniform (Lou: Right.) and we got orders, like you had to

fix your hair. There's a hair style for the week. (Lou: Oh really!) Oh yeah!

(Lou: Wow!) Oh yeah, we were under control. (Lou: Everybody wore the

same hairstyle?) Oh yeah, and there were some girls that didn't have hair because you know they were bald headed, but if you had hair, you had to put your hair in a certain hair style. You know you couldn't wear extensions. And you know me, I love extensions. (Lou laughs) There's one woman by the name of Mrs. Lazarus who would say "Your hair is not that long. Your hair is not that long." Then she would actually unbraid my hair and take the extensions off. (Lou: You're kidding.): Uh uh, oh yeah….

If we were late [to school], we had to cut the grass. And you use cutlasses. You have these long knives and they like cut. I mean it was a culture shock. [I said] "This is school?" I was serious. I'm like "we're supposed to be getting an education." (Lou and Kendra laugh) And I'm…I'm mad, I'm mad. I started to cry. "We're supposed to be in school. You are starting to take away from my education."…

So…that's where my parents are from… But my father had it tough. You know we actually had money, or they were giving us money (Lou laughs) to enjoy our lives. My father didn't have anything…. he came from a different era. We experienced some struggles, but struggles like there is no TV, there's no AC, no McDonald's, where's the entertainment…. That was our struggle, but um…so my father was like, "You guys you really don't know." I'm like "Dad, I understand. I understand." … Yeah, now I appreciate it more.

There are a few layers to Kendra's story. As she relates her experience, the greater lessons took place in the village outside of the educational setting.

She lived like a native "villager" and came to appreciate the life she and her siblings had in the United States and to understand her parents' experience growing up in Africa. Kendra gained a perspective that had been foreign to her before this event. "I get why they sent me there." Her reference to the rules of the school she attended also suggests the aesthetics of African women may be different from those of western women. She casually mentions that some girls were bald, but she loved her extensions. Lastly, she is cognizant of the differences in education in the U. S. and Nigeria as she notes the rules and structure of the school she and her siblings attended. "We were under control." Nevertheless, she represents herself as someone interested in her education. When she and her siblings were penalized for lateness to school, she believed time was unfairly being taken away from her education, and she spoke out.

Zalika

Zalika, the junior, is a former student, who is majoring in biological sciences with an undeclared minor in public health or psychology. Zalika plans to attend medical school and eventually specialize in pediatric oncology. During the semester, she stayed on campus in a dormitory, but we met to talk a few days after final exams ended in her family's home in an urban area in north Jersey. She and her family live in an in a spacious basement apartment of a building of which her father is superintendent. Her mother is a baby nurse who helps first-time mothers and mothers suffering from post- partum depression care for their newborn babies. Her father is from Guyana, and her mother is from Trinidad. Neither completed high school.

Zalika is the youngest of five children. She and two sisters closest to her in age grew up in Trinidad under the care of an older sister and her maternal grandmother after her parents immigrated to the U. S. She came to the United States after she finished high school, about four years ago. Zalika is a very focused young woman. She was on the Dean's List at NCCC and received honors from the Educational Opportunity Fund Program upon graduation. She explains that she has always been competitive. The sister she speaks about is four years older than she.

> I was like really competitive when I was small…. I just hated anyone doing better than me. I remember when I was like maybe six or seven or something, and we had this spelling test every week and there was this one girl, she like irked me. She would get like one point above me or whatever … when she would get a point over me, she would gloat and say "na-na-na" and stuff like that. I'm like "no, she's not gonna beat me this week." When I didn't do good, I used to cry. My sister, she still laughs at me. She's like "every day you used come home cryin' because you didn't get a 100 on your spelling test." (Lou laughs at Zalika's teasing tone.)
>
> Lou: So you'd get 99 and you'd cry?
>
> Zalika: She was like "You're so stupid." I was like "No, but you don't understand." (Zalika and Lou laugh.)

Even at the age of six, Zalika had begun to define herself as someone who takes education seriously. Her competitive spirit drives her to be the best at whatever she does inside or outside of the classroom. This is evidenced by her

ability not only to be an excellent student, but to be an expert on cars who often gives automobile-related advice to her family and friends.

Kara

Kara is an upper sophomore and is majoring in psychology. She is a former student who has completed two courses with me. Although she will have enough credits to graduate in December, Kara intends to transfer to a senior college in the fall. A student who was working full-time and going to school full-time, she occasionally stopped by my office to keep me updated on how she was doing.

During the summer, we met in an apartment she shares with her mother and aunt.   Kara currently lives, and has always lived, in a predominantly white suburban area of northern New Jersey. Her mother is a teacher. Kara is soft-spoken but a very determined young woman. She has overcome a number of obstacles. She was labeled a "special education" student in the first grade and continued in "special education" classes until the 11th grade when she was moved into "regular" classes. Upon graduating from high school, she went to her dream school, Xavier University, in New Orleans, the year of Hurricane Katrina. The trauma of the event set her back considerably. Upon returning home, she initially went to Williamston State University, and, unable to pay the tuition, eventually transferred to NCCC. Like me, although she grew up in predominantly white communities, her family has maintained its ties to the Black community.

> And, you know, people look at me differently, but that's the way
> [confident] I was in high school; I didn't play around. I did my work, and I

did what I had to do.… You know, it's not a game for me because I knew

that I had to be better than the next person. You know… if no one's going

to have my back, if they're not going to have my back …. who else is

going to? Where am I going to go? You know, all those kids were, you

know, they had nice cars. They had parents who had money. I had to

work for what I had to get….

People were like, well, you go to Harlem? And I'm like, "yeah,

yeah." You know, they think it's a bad area because of what they hear…. I

get kind of upset about it. And they're like, "Well, why are you getting

upset?"

"Only because you're not… you've never been there." They don't

know what it is. Although I have never lived there, but I grew up there,

and I, I think of it as my second home.

So I kind of get upset when people, you know, think, well, Harlem,

why are you going to Harlem? …You know, when they said something, I

had to comment, and I said what I had to say.

Kara takes her education seriously. She identifies with the Black

community and presents herself as a strong, independent woman of African

descent. She describes herself as shy; nevertheless, she appears to be

outspoken in her response to comments about the Harlem community.

Jamila

Jamila, a lower sophomore, is majoring in journalism and expects

eventually to specialize in broadcasting or to start her own magazine. She lives in

the same urban area as Zalika with her parents and her older brother. Her mother was born in South Carolina and came to northern New Jersey as a child. Her father is a disabled Vietnam veteran. Jamila's mother graduated from the local public high school in the city in which they currently live. She is a secretary in the guidance office of a middle school in a nearby town. Jamila has never attended schools in the city in which she lives. Her first experience with school was a Christian school in the area where her grandparents live. After the second grade, she attended public schools in the predominantly white town adjacent to her home town, in the suburb in which Kara lives.

Jamila is also a former student. I remember her as being very quiet in class. She would respond only if called upon and then she always spoke softly. She is extremely shy. Consequently, I was pleasantly surprised when she gave a video presentation on singer Lauryn Hill. Technically it was far more sophisticated than the PowerPoint I am capable of producing or that other students put together. It contained film clips and pictures, and Jamila came alive as her portrayal of Hill unfolded. I saw this same level of engagement during our conversation when she started to talk about music, which is her "second love" following writing. She listens to all genres, except hard metal and country, but especially to jazz, hip-hop, rhythm and blues, and soul.

Jamila: I always get this look when I tell people I'm a very big fan of Al Green. I love, love, love Al Green.... Cause people think that he is so before my time, but I like Al Green, the Commodores, the Temptations,

the Isley Brothers.… My mom put me on to all that stuff when I was little,

so that's the music I grew up around, so I'm really…I like the oldies.

Jamila is a music aficionado whose musical taste favors music by Black artists from the 1960s and '70s. This distinguishes her from many of her generation who favor hip-hop and contemporary music.

Khalida

Khalida, a lower sophomore, who is majoring in political science is also a former student. She plans to do an internship in spring at American University in Washington, D. C., and attend New York University in the fall. Khalida anticipates attending law school. She lives with her mother and younger sister in a northern New Jersey suburb about fifteen miles from New York City. Her younger sister is a student at State University. Both her mother and father were born and raised in the same town in which the family resides. Her father is in the military. Her mother completed high school while her father took some college courses but did not complete a degree. Khalida attended grades 2-8 at a predominantly white Catholic elementary school and the remaining grades at a diverse magnet public high school.

Khalida's family is creative. Her grandmother was a professional singer, and her mother was a dancer. Both Khalida and her sister, who is a year and a half younger, are dancers. Khalida teaches jazz, tap, ballet, and hip-hop part-time to youth ranging in age from three to eighteen. Khalida talks about how literacy is expressed creatively as she and her sister collaborate on writing stories during their leisure time. She began writing stories at age seven, and her

younger sister eventually began to write with her. They collaborated on writing

until her sister went to college in summer 2009.

> Khalida: I know that I used to write a whole bunch of stories when I finally
>
> did learn how to write properly. I used to write so many stories about …
>
> my dog, Patches. We used to write about him…. Me and my sister used to
>
> make little booklets with pictures [photographs] and draw pictures....
>
> All the way through the summer of 2009, me and my sister were
>
> writing stories. I mean she was into vampires; I wasn't. I was into like
>
> scary stuff like suspense. And we used to write these little stories
>
> together… We would sit down together, and I would say, "Read my part,"
>
> and she would read it, and she was like, "Oh, I think you should do it this
>
> way." So we would read it as we were doing it, you know like, "Maybe she
>
> [the character] should do this. Maybe she should do that." And then we
>
> would come up with the dialogue together….
>
> My sister went away for the summer, so I didn't want to write it by
>
> myself… So I figured I'd just stop it for a while….

Khalida maintains that she and her sister need to be in the same physical

location in order to write. This may be a matter of routine since both are

theoretically technologically adept and speak by phone almost every day. They

have a strong bond, and for them the physical collaboration may outweigh the

actual practice or act of writing itself.

> Ah, usually she is the one doing most of the initiating because … she'll say
>
> to me, "Hey, Khi, do you want to work on the project today?" And I'll say,

"Um, I'm not really in the mood." And she's like, "Okay, we'll do it

tomorrow." And then we'll set up something, usually, I mean, this is when

she was home. And she's like, "Okay, you want to work on it today? I

really want to work on it." Or, "Khalida, come on, let's go, let's do it." I

was like, "Okay." So she pushed me to do it. And after a while I'd sit

there because she wanted me to, and then I'd get into it, so –

Lou: So who comes up with the ideas?

Khalida: I'm usually the one coming up with the ideas, and she puts it on

paper. (Lou: Okay.) She's better at putting it into words than I am. I'll

come up with the ideas, and she's like, "Oh, well, if she's doing that then

maybe she should do that." She's a lot better in writing it than I am.

At an early age, Khalida (like Zena mentioned below) identified with

creative expression and the Black women's literary tradition. She presents

herself not only as a writer, but also as a collaborator in the tradition of sisterhood

and female bonding.

Zena

Zena is one of four freshmen participating in the study, and she is the most expressive of that group. An upper freshman majoring in wellness and exercise science, she is considering switching to English. She plans to be the "best personal trainer" and is also writing a book. Zena lives in the same area as Zalika and Jamila, a city which has many of the problems of other large cities in the northeast. Her mother is Puerto Rican, and her father is African American. Her parents are divorced.   Both live outside of the city.

Zena speaks English and Spanish. She describes herself as a "geek" who reads four to five books a month when she has leisure time. She reads in all genres, novels, fantasy, comic books, Manga (Japanese graphic novels), and non-fiction. Zena had recently moved into an apartment with her two cats. She was still unpacking. When I asked her about her books, this was her response:

My books, um, those get put on basically like pedestals. (Laughs.)   Not pedestals, but you know some people keep books in boxes …. Um, I always keep my books, especially ones that I read, and now that I'm writing like the story, there is so much information that I know that if I reread it, it would just spark an idea, spark an interest.

And I have all types of books. I have, like obviously there's just the sex books. There's *The Clitoral Truth* or something like that. And then there's like *The Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark*. And there's *Play or Be Played*. There's this little – I call them the hood books, which is like all about like the streets and all that. But there's so much information that I

can take from there and just evolve it and just put it into my own story, so I keep all my books out. I can see them where I can just easily reach; I can just grab them.

Zena is driven to write, she positions herself as a creative person in the Black women's literary tradition, who also is a bibliophile. Her reference to hood books or books about "the streets" suggests an interest in urban literature and identification with the urban lifestyle.

Amy

Amy**,** a lower freshman, plans to major in nursing intends to become a registered nurse. Amy began college last semester, but dropped out after a few weeks. Her mother is Jamaican and her father is Antiguan. Her mother is a licensed practical nurse who is taking courses now to get her registered nurse license, and her father is an engineer.   She is first generation American. She lives with her mother, maternal grandmother, and older brother.

My conversation with Amy was the shortest, fifty-nine minutes, and although she seemed comfortable responding to my questions, her persona is a bit reserved. However, my field notes suggest that "she was not telling me what I wanted to hear, but rather what she was feeling," and I thought it was a "good interview." One of Amy's special abilities is that she speaks sign language:

I do sign language…Yeah, that's another thing I learned when I was maybe 13. I took it at the hospital. My mom signed me and my brother up for it. I was the only one that stuck to it, though. And from there, I did… there was a signing group in church. So we would perform sign, yeah, sign

language songs in church. So it was like a nice performance…. But [I don't perform] publically like in church any more. [Now] it's just between me and my brother. Like when we want to keep a secret, we sign. You know, we're, yeah, we secretly talk. And a couple of people in my church who were in the signing group with us, we talk to them. And it, it's never really anything publically like that anymore. But, yeah, so I have sign language.

By discussing signing in church, Amy distinguishes herself as bilingual, a performer, and a churchgoer.

Michelle

Michelle, a lower freshman, also plans to major in nursing. She is separated from her husband and has a three-year old child. Michelle immigrated to the United States when she was fifteen. She served in the Army until the summer 2009 and resides with her parents, two younger siblings, and her daughter in northern New Jersey. Both of her parents are Jamaican. Her father is a construction worker who graduated from high school, and her mother is a stay-at-home mom/student who recently returned to school to study for her GED. Michelle is very proud of her mother.

Michelle is extremely soft-spoken, and as I reviewed her transcript, I realized that she talked more about her family and friends than she did about herself. Here she speaks about her military experience while she was stationed in Hawaii:

Um, I actually wanted the experience. And I was like, you know, I want to do something different because I actually wanted to go. I actually got accepted to Dominican College upstate. But then I was like, the Army, hmm, let me go do something different…. Um, I worked with, uh, like the vehicles. I worked with vehicles, um, like ordering the parts for them. I sometimes worked on them with the mechanics. I cross trained, and I did admin[istrative] work. Um, I worked in a warehouse.

Since Michelle is a native Jamaican, her military service implies she is naturalized citizen, but also suggests literacies in areas not generally associated with female gender roles. She defines herself as an independent thinker who made a conscious decision to do "something different."

Sade

Sade, a lower freshman, is majoring in criminal justice and works part-time as a pharmacy technician. She lives in a city fifteen miles from New York City. Although she maintains her own apartment for herself and her four-year daughter, her grandmother lives in the apartment above her, and her older sister lives around the corner. Her mother, a native of the area, relocated to North Carolina and has returned to school to study nursing. Her father remained in the North and is a factory worker.

Like Michelle, Sade is enrolled in pre-college level English. Possibly because she is relatively new to higher education, she initially seemed uncomfortable answering some of my questions. My field notes indicate that she impressed me as bright and someone who is "becoming more directed in pursuit

of her education." She seems to be "developing the kind of self-confidence she needs to be a good student." During our conversation she talked about her oldest sister's influence on her early literacy practices. Sade has a jovial disposition.

> Sade: She [my oldest sister] used to, um, she taught me, um, she used to always play Bobbie Brown [a rhythm & blues singer]. And, um, and I used to listen to it over, and over, and over, and over again. So I started doing the dance, and, um, um…
>
> Lou: Now what dance is this? She taught you a dance, or you made up a dance?
>
> Sade: I made up a dance. I don't remember the dance, but she always told me that I used to dance to it. And the song was, um, you know, "It's My Prerogative."
>
> She said I came into the room one day, and I said, "Sister, Sister, listen, I know the song." And I said, "it's my 'judition' or something like that." And I was trying to say "prerogative," but it didn't come out right. (Sade and Lou laugh.) I'll have to ask her what I really said because she knows….And every time to this day, when that song comes on she teases me, and she says, "Look, it's your song." And I used to be like, "Oh, my God; that's so not my song." (Laughs)
>
> Lou: That's funny. So about how old were you then do you think?
>
> Sade: Um, probably about five or six.

Lou: That's nice, that's nice. Okay, so, um, you learned music. (Sade:

Um hmm.)   And, and, and even though you didn't get the words right,

you heard the words. (Sade: Yeah.) And, you know, part of literacy is

learning language.

Sade: Learning language, yeah.

Lou: Yeah, so you were learning vocabulary.

Sade: Exactly.

Lou: Prerogative is a big word for a five year old.

Sade: (Laughs) Exactly. That's probably why it didn't come out right.

Sade is referring to an early out-of-school learning experience and one

common to many children—the music of older siblings and parents (as

mentioned by Jamila). She juxtaposes her current position as a young adult

student with her early vernacular learning experience. Also the family nickname,

Sister, suggests southern roots as it is not uncommon in the South to refer to the

eldest daughter as Sister. This was also my mother's family nickname. I don't

ever recall hearing any of her seven siblings address her by her first name.

Conclusion

These biographical sketches distinguish all of the participants as

individuals who have had a variety of experiences and came to the study with

differing world views.   Of the ten participants, eight were born in the United

States; four are the children of parents native to other countries, and two speak a

second language (excluding native dialects). Some live in areas heavily

populated by people of color; some do not. Some attended schools in these

areas; some did not despite their place of residence. Each positions herself in relation to some distinctive literacy practice, be it those traditionally associated with formal schooling such as reading, writing, language use, or out of school, vernacular practices such as music, singing, and performing.

Nevertheless, as the analysis proceeds, the commonalities of some experiences which define them as literate beings become clear.

CHAPTER 6

WE ARE WHO WE ARE: ANALYSIS OF DATA (Part 2)

The data in this chapter move beyond the elements focusing on the uniqueness of each participant.   Although each of the participants tells a different story, there are common strands or threads in their narratives. Using Gee's (2000-2001) theory of identity analysis discussed in Chapter 3, which suggests that individual identity is linked to multiple identities through nature or biology, institutions, discourse, and groups, I begin by looking at language and discourse.

For purposes of this study, as all of the participants are women of African descent enrolled in undergraduate public institutions, the biological and institutional perspectives are apparent. Each participant is a Black woman by birth, an identity inscribed upon her by the genetic disposition of her parents and state or government forces which require race on birth records. She is also a student in North City Community College (NCCC) or State University, an identity empowered by each perspective institution. This identity is voluntary and a choice that each participant made although some took a brief hiatus from the academic world after high school and returned no less than a year after graduating from high school. It is the discourse identity that varies from individual to individual, yet there are common style features in the language use of the participants.

Although the following section is labeled "Identity and Language" for purposes of classification and clarity, discursive features are evident throughout

the analysis as excerpts from the transcripts are used throughout the chapters on

analysis (including the preceding chapter.) Therefore, references to language

may be made throughout this chapter beyond the following section.

Identity and Language

This section presents the participants' perceptions of themselves and the

way in which they believe others view them. The analysis is based primarily on

data collected from six sources:

- field notes;

- interview question on description of self ;

- interview question on how others see participant;

- interview question on whether participant identifies herself as a
  woman or Black person first;

- interview question on importance of literacy to identity;

- interview questions based on DuBois' theory of double
  consciousness.

When asked during the interview to describe themselves, the respondents'

answers varied in length and approach. Some were brief; some were longer.

This section is an analysis of both content and linguistic features. It represents

the variety of styles present in the community of women of African descent

(Hudson, 2001). However, the passages chosen are only a sampling of the

various style features. In some cases the speaker's voice is quite clear while in

others it is less so. African American speech is performative, and in our

conversations, there is often code switching and the interjection of African

American Language. Some of the responses are humorous; some are straight to the point. The participants see themselves as ambitious; they see themselves as supportive of family and friends, or they see themselves as both. What is most evident in how these women identify themselves through language is that all of the responses stem from a position of strength. They display a certain strength in the way in which their diction or language choices position them. They use words such as "independent," "ambitious," "determined," "supportive," and "adventurous." "Supportive" was the most frequently-used descriptive term. It was mentioned by half of the participants.

Much of the language they use draws on what Troutman (2002) and others have identified as Black women's distinctive speaking styles. These are identified as authoritarian; direct, opinionated, vocal; and self-assured, confident, and cocky.

The speaking style of all of the participants is direct with confidence and self-assurance. About half display a sense of authority as well in their responses.

The concept of identification is related to the interview question, "How do you consider yourself--as Black first or as a woman?" Some of the women were very clear in their choice. Others were ambivalent. Seven of the ten participants identify with being people of African descent or Black culture before identifying as women. Again, the language which the women use, whether their positions are ambivalent or clear, corroborates their linguistic expressions observed in other areas of our conversations. The same style features of directness, clarity,

confidence, and self-assuredness are evident in their comments as they position themselves.

I Always Had To Be a Strong Person and Being Black Gives Me a Sense of Identity

Amira's family is proud of her academic accomplishments, and apparently her friends think highly of her abilities. "They always tell me, you're going to be President [of the United States]. I mean like a lot of people say that…" She lived in a diverse community, Willington Township, until she was fourteen. Her family then moved to the less diverse community of Williamsburg, where Amira experienced overt racism first hand. She talks about the different perceptions the townspeople probably have of her:

> They [Willington Township] remember me from when I was thirteen, so the Amira they remember then--Amira was a smart girl. She was the captain of the softball team. She was so nice. She always helped you. She gave you good advice. She was a Christian; she would always pray for you. That is what everyone sees me [as] from Willington Township because they have not seen me since I was thirteen…. From Williamsburg, Amira is smart. She is so intimidating. She is so militant. She's a Christian, but she's racist. She's racist; that is what they would probably say 'cause I was a Black militant according to them…But then, she's successful.

Given these perceptions of her, it is no surprise that Amira, who has an activist spirit and is straightforward and communicative, speaks with authority, is direct, and self-assured. "I see myself as an independent, outspoken young woman. I

think I'm intelligent, trying to learn more. I enjoy learning. Um, I think I'm

ambitious."

The same features are evident in Amira's response to whether she

identifies as a woman or Black person first. Note our exchange as I asked this

question towards the end of our conversation.

Lou: This is an unfair question, but I'm going to ask it anyway. It is not, I

don't think as much of an issue for your generation as it was for mine

because I … came through the civil rights, Black power period when

women were subjugated. So the question is are you Black or are you a

woman? I don't know that … your generation separates the two anymore.

But if you had to choose between your Blackness and being a woman…

how do you think you would align yourself?

Amira: I had this discussion with my mother too. I um, I always consider

myself being Black first because like I'm involved in the Women's Institute

for Leadership Program on Hillman, and my first year in the program me

and one other sister in the program, I mean it was a mixed class, but the

dominant ideology of white women was espoused in the class. So, even

if we were all women coming together, there would still be contention

because I'm a Black woman and my experience is different from you, a

white woman. So I would definitely choose Black over… plus you have

more of a community when you choose Blackness over being a woman. It

is a diverse community, but it is much, much larger I think than just

women. So…

Amira's style of speaking and her tone are firm; her language is certain. There is no question about her position.

The same strength is evident in Zalika's language. As is apparent in the upcoming sections on power and views of literacy, Zalika takes full responsibility for modeling persistence and achievement for her family. But there is a residual effect on her friends. Her family and friends are proud of her, but the latter consider her a nerd. Zalika's response is authoritative and direct:

> Some sacrifices I have to make. 'Cause I know what I, my family came from, and I'm trying to get out of that situation… I have to do what I have to do…. Yeah, they're proud of me 'cause I'm a nerd. Like one of my friends from Trinidad she like, every time she gets into this, feels like she can't focus and she can't study, she always calls me to like calm her down and tell her that she can do it, and pep her up.

For Zalika and some of the women, self-assurance and confidence in themselves is so strong that their language seems to border on cockiness. In the following excerpt, Zalika, who is articulate and assertive, describes herself. As a researcher, I found the difference between spoken and written language is apparent. Body gestures, facial expressions, and voice inflections are all lost on the cold type of the printed page, making Zalika appear to be a bit cocky (Lippi Green, 1998). However, in our face-to-face conversation, her manner is cordial and warm, although she too speaks with authority:

> But once I'm really close with someone, like I'm really crazy, um, making stupid jokes, um, funny, can be loud when I want to, I support…

supportive, I'm always there when you need me. Um, I'm gonna say *I'm more than a good friend.* [My italics.]

Her language remains self-assured as Zalika's response is direct and suggests the importance of culture to her identity. She refers to her cultural experience as being different, but she also notes the importance of community in the culture of people of African descent:

> Oh, I'll probably say Black first, because being Black, it gives you, gives me a sense of identity and I have a culture and certain backgrounds that I carry and without those things then I wouldn't be able to say that I'm a Black woman you know. Like the upbringing...upbringing that I got from my grandparents and my mom. It's traditional, and I would say without those upbringings and beatings (laughing), all those things, then I wouldn't be able to say I'm a Black woman. So I would say being Black first.

Both Amira and Zalika have assertive personalities, and, therefore, it is no surprise that they exhibit authority, confidence, and directness in their speaking styles. However, one might not expect to observe the same style features in the language of Jamila, who describes herself as shy and timid and is very soft-spoken. "Um, serious, easy-going, adventurous, um, learned, determined, ambitious, caring" is how she depicts herself. Even with the sprinkling of "ums," Jamila's language is as direct and self-assured as that of Amira and Zalika. This further demonstrates that the same style features exist for Black women regardless of personality differences.

Jamila responds like Amira and Zalika to the question of identity, but she

equates being American with the dominant culture. Then she complicates her response by observing that other people of African descent equate being American with nationality and not culture.

> I was brought up and kind of taught at a very early age, especially with school, that being African American and being a female African American that I'm always going to have to work harder for something. I was always taught that, and sometimes when I tell other people that, they don't really understand it regardless of what race they are. Some people just don't understand, and they're like, why do you have to work harder? But it is like you said, people don't see me as just a female doing well in school. It's "she's a Black female" you know, so at an early age that is something I have always been taught in school.

> I've gone to predominantly white schools, and much as I would love to say that I don't see color when I see people, it's apparent. You know no matter where I go, I look around [speaks softly,] "I'm the only Black person here." Sometimes it makes it awkward but even if I'm in school, being the only Black person in school, I think I have no option but to separate myself from an American culture and say no, I'm African American. I'm a Black student, so you know I don't think I have ever considered myself like in the American culture. I think I just always saw myself as an African American person…

> I dated a guy who was of Jamaican descent, and when I would listen to his mother talk, and when she refers to Black people, she would

say American. She would never say a Black person or an African

American. She would say, "Oh, they were American." And in my head,

I'm thinking "Are they white?" And she's like "No they were Black. And I

would say, "Then why do you say American?" And she would say "'Cause

they're from here. They're not from Jamaica or somewhere else." And I

would say, "Very interesting because I would never say it like that." So

that's a whole other culture [Jamaican culture] that I learned about.

Jamila is speaking with authority; she is direct, assertive and self-assured.

She is clear as she identifies with African American culture. Other participants,

however, displayed a bit of ambivalence.

Sade: I see myself as a, I was going to say African-American woman.

Lou: Okay, you see yourself as an African-American, oh, African-

American, you said African-American first.

Sade: I said it first? Um, but, no, I see myself as a woman first

because, you know, um, over and all, we're all people regardless

of our skin color or whatever, so…

Although there is ambivalence in the exchange, Sade in the end seems to

be very clear and confident about her position.

In her self-description, there is no hint of ambivalence. Sade's language

portrays her as direct, self-assured, and humorous. She code switches at the end

as she lightens the conversation with her natural wit.

I'm well-spoken. I'm loud sometimes. I can be obnoxious. I'm funny,

outgoing, intelligent, have common sense. I'm a woman even though I

sound like a man. [She has a low voice register.] I'm a reader. I'm a writer. I'm a photographer [but] not professionally. (Laughing) I'm a singer, but I can't sing. And I like to skate. There you go!

Sade's self-identification as a photographer, but not professionally, and a singer who can't sing resonates with Walker's (1973) "In Search of Our Mother's Garden's" and the need for Black women to find creative outlets in everyday activities referenced in Chapter 2, "Cultural Context.

Amy's exchange with me expresses similar ambivalence. The first section, however, references her self-description. Amy is the only participant who gave a physical description without referring to her character traits in response to the question to describe herself. Nevertheless, her language is direct and evokes a level of confidence in her physical appearance as her depiction of herself as "solid" suggests strength.

> Amy: (Laughs) I would say I'm five-five. I have chocolate skin tone. Uh, I think I have a nice smile; I think it's cute. And I'm thick. That's how I describe myself.
>
> Lou: Now why do you say "thick"? … Is that because other people say you're thick, or because you see yourself as thick?
>
> Amy: Because I am, I mean, I don't think I am... I'm not skinny, so I'm thick… Uh, I think, looking at myself, thick means developed and solid. So like, I have meat on my bones. I'm not thin, yeah.

On the question of identity, however, Amy's position appears to be clear,

but then her closing sentences interrogate her opening position.

> Amy: I'm a woman first. Black is just my skin color. That's just, that's just a part of me that can't change, and I'm a woman. So I am, no matter where I go, I'm going to be a woman. Of course, I'm still going to be Black, but I'm a woman. That's a stronger title.

Although Amy says that being a woman should be elevated over race/culture, she recognizes that neither can be naturally changed, which deflates her declaration that woman is a stronger title. In addition, that observation is in direct contrast to Amira's observation at the beginning of this section that the Black community is much larger than the community of women. Amy's ambivalence is further complicated by her earlier physical description of herself as having chocolate skin tone but no mention that she is a woman. Nevertheless, on the surface, her style remains authoritative, direct, and confident.

These characteristics are evident despite the personality of the participant. Kara like Jamila is very soft-spoken and considers herself shy. Nevertheless, her language style in her self-description displays the common Black women's speaking styles of authority, directness, and self-assurance:

> I always had to be a strong person. I couldn't be a weak person. I had to walk…with confidence. And people might think, you know, I'm a, you know, a bitch or whatever. But, you know, that's how I was brought up. I had to be like that [a strong person].

However, her response to whether she identifies with her culture or gender created such a quandary that Kara never answered the question. I'm talking about identity, and she is making the question analogous to a disagreement and having to choose sides.

Kara: Could I not choose both?

Lou: You can answer any way you want; I'm just asking the question.

Kara: I think…I think, um, I would choose in the middle. It all depends on what the circumstances are, what the disagreement is about. Because sometimes, you know, our culture can get a little bit like, what's the word? What's the word?

Lou: I don't know. You tell me the word.

Kara: They, we always, we can have, we, we have a point that they sometimes are wrong, and sometimes women are wrong, as well. So I try to go in the middle and see who's really, you know, try to – what do you call that? …I don't think I would ever choose sides.

In addition to authority, directness, and self-assurance, other language features are evidenced by Zena, Kendra, and Michelle.

Zena did not have strong family support of her academic endeavors. During our conversation, when talking about her voracious appetite for reading, she proudly referred to herself at different moments as a geek and a nerd, a perception apparently supported by her friends:

But they [her friends] recognize, they know I'm the one who reads. I'm the one who writes. And I have this one friend … she's not the

brightest light bulb out there, but every – she'll have the most random question, the most random question. And before she asks anyone else immediately, "Zena, what's da, da, da, da, Zena?" And it's always random. I'm like, "Why are you asking me? Like, why don't you just go look it up? Why are you always asking me?" "Because you know everything. You just know. Why do I have to ask anybody else? I'm just going to ask you." I didn't realize that until she said it. Every question she had, I literally had an answer for.

Zena's voice is also clear. She is honest about her views, articulate, outspoken, and colorful. She too speaks with authority, is direct, cocky, and humorous. Here's her self-depiction.

I would think that I'm funny. I definitely think I'm funny. I'm – I'm interesting. I am a character. I always want people to be honest with me whether it be good, whether it be bad. Yeah, the truth might hurt, but I feel the truth doesn't hurt more than a lie does. So just keep – just keep it 100, and keep it true to me at all times. Um, if you feel any type of way, you got to talk to me. Tell me how you feel, and I'll tell you where I'm coming from.

Um, I'm very – I can be very supportive of you. Like, I will take you in. I have a few amounts of friends because I get protective over them. Not like stalker and shit, "Don't look at my friend," but if someone's bothering my friend, you're going to have to go through me. It's just as simple as that. You're not going to mess with my friends…

I do say that, um – this is my motto: I have to be experienced because I can't be explained.

Zena identifies with both of her heritages but seems to have more of an affinity for people of African descent. (Physically she looks like she could be a light skin Black person, and the colleague who referred her to me presumably thought she was Black.)

I do identify myself as Black and Puerto Rican. Yes, proud of it. I do feel that I give in more towards the Black culture because I don't … I just … I know more … I don't know, I don't know why. I just feel more comfortable with the Black people.

And even like with Spanish people, yeah, we joke and we talk and blah, blah, blah, but I'm still going to turn around, and I'm going to feel more comfortable with my Black people. Not that I feel uncomfortable with Hispanics, but I just feel more comfortable with Black people. And not only that, it's not just Black people. It's like Jamaicans. Like I swear I'm part Jamaican. I love my Jamaicans, Africans, Trinidadians, just all of them.

Zena's innate voice is one of authority, directness, strong opinion, and self-assurance. However, Kendra displays an additional feature of Black women's speaking style as she presents a "cool" persona or social face (Morgan, 1999, 2002) while speaking with directness and self-assurance.

…I [am]… free-spirited, worry free, you know. I would say I'm a good hearted person. I take time to understand people because I feel people

can be interesting. I would describe myself as somebody who is kind-

hearted and compassionate, and optimistic. [As] someone who believes in

personal development, I believe that anybody can change. I believe in

transformation. Um, genre free, no genre. I think I would describe myself

as somebody who is willing to help the next man, and I would say willing

to give my all.

Kendra, as noted in the biographical section of Chapter 5, is first-

generation American born of Nigerian parents. Here she shares a sensitive

subject and is resolving some identity issues which are related to but seem to

expand Dubois' concept of double consciousness; nevertheless, the language

she chooses displays a certain directness as she is talks about the issue with

candor. There is also a level of confidence as she declares who she is.

To me, it brought a lot more understanding about why there is such a

large separation between myself and Black Americans here. Now, he [a

professor previously mentioned] made me realize that the fact that I was

born here I have two, um, I have three identities. Me being that my parents

are Nigerian, so I have to accept the fact that I'm Nigerian, that I'm

African. I was born here, so I'm African American. I am battling with three

identities. He made me feel like you know what. (Lou: And you're also

American.) And I'm American. So there is this war between me and my

mom, and there's a war with me and Black folk, so there is no win, win. I

guess that is where I was a little confused just growing up. (Lou: You were

trying to find your place, and you have many places.) Exactly! I'm all of

you guys. I'm African. I'm Black. I'm Nigerian. (Lou: Yeah.)   I'm

everything…

Kendra does not articulate the idea in the same manner as Jamila, but she too does not seem to align herself with the broader American culture. I suggest she is American, but, when she reiterates her identities, again she does not mention being American although during other moments in the conversation, there is a distinction between mainstream American culture and Black American culture. This unconscious disassociation with American culture that Kendra and Jamila express is suggestive of the outsider culture referenced as early as 1832 by Maria Stewart and more recently by Collins (1990), Williams (1992) and other women of African descent.

Michelle, like Kendra, presents a "cool" persona; however, she recognizes the social face she presents. Although Michelle speaks in a soft tone, her voice suggests she is strong, direct, and confident. She references honesty as an important feature of a relationship as does Zena, and her interpretation of "phantom" Bible scripture[25] also suggests a level of self-assurance and a sense of humor as she code switches at the end of the description.

I'm very calm. Cool. I'm, I'm one of the nicest persons you'll find. As long

as you don't cross that red line, I'm fine. Don't pass boundaries. Like,

don't, like talk bad about my family, my daughter, me, or just pretty much

go behind my back and talk about me …I'd rather you come to me and

confront me if you don't like something… I think I care too much

sometimes. Um, but that's just me.

People take advantage of you sometimes, but I don't know, that's just who I am. I don't know if it's how I grew up or... But that's just me. I care about people. I love to give people the benefit of the doubt. If you need help, I'll try to help you in the best way I can. But I'm not going to, like they say, "God don't help those who don't help themselves." So that's the same thing with me. If you need help, you have to work towards what you really want to work towards, and I'll help you the best way I can. As long as it's positive, we're okay. Anything negative, I'm out. (Laughs)

Michelle combines the two concepts, culture and gender, as she identifies herself. She speaks with authority, is vocal, direct and self-assured

A Black woman, an independent Black woman because that's, that's me. I love to be independent. I cannot depend on – I mean, I, I can depend on people, but I'd rather depend on myself first. Because at the end of the day, whoever you might be depending on might fall, make you fall. But you have you and God to pick you back up....

As noted earlier in this section, there is convergence in the data (Mathison, 1988) suggesting that the style features most evident in the linguistic expression of all the women are directness, confidence or self-assurance, and authority projected from a position of inner strength. These commonalities exist despite differences in personalities, points of view, and whether the women are assertive and outspoken or more reserved and soft spoken. These features are also evident as the women define themselves even when their language suggests ambivalence.

Further, more than half of the women identify with their culture first as descendants of African ancestry as opposed to their sex or gender of womanhood. The remaining participants "could not choose" or chose both equally, i.e. Black woman.[26]

Despite these positions, all of the women believe that W. E. B. Dubois' concept of double consciousness, that is the "warring of ideals" or "unreconciled strivings" as a Black person and as an American, continues to create internal conflict even in the 21st century in an historical moment when the country has elected its first Black president. All related experiences they have had or witnessed. For some who have immigrated or are the children of immigrants, the conflict is being an American but still identifying with their native cultural heritage. For others, it is being in a classroom or work situation, where as the only person of color or one of a few people of color, one feels like both an insider and an outsider. Still, for others, there is the observation of friends or associates who seem to struggle with the identity of who they are or who their parents want them to be.

Reminiscent of cultural anthropologist Johnnetta Cole's observation forty years earlier, one of the participants felt that gender added an additional layer of tension to being not only of African descent and American, but also of being a woman as well. Amira makes this point. "Well, I definitely think double consciousness still exists. I think me as a Black woman, I think we have a triple consciousness. I mean we're Black, we're women, we're in America. I mean we

have those three." Her sentiment is similar to that which I occasionally feel and expressed in a conversation with Kara:

I'll give you my situation, for example. I'm a Black woman in a school that clearly is predominantly white in terms of faculty….And because I was raised in an integrated neighborhood, and for much of my life was like the only Black, or one of a few Blacks in a, you know, predominantly white situation, I'm not uncomfortable with it. But I am very clear that when someone looks at me, he or she doesn't see me the way he or she sees other people. I get it from students…particularly white male students….

There's this constant, um, and often it's unconscious, … constant feeling that, um, that you're not really being viewed in the same way as, as white faculty members are being viewed. And, and it's real clear with students. I mean, I mean, I have had students who didn't out and out say racial things. (Kara: Um hmm.) But they resisted me first because I was Black, and then secondly because I was a woman. Um, and I'm not sure that a white male would've gotten that at all. (Kara: Um hmm.)

That's the kind of grief that I get from students. Um, and so that's sort of a part of what the issue is. It's like, you know, you're a part of something; you're part of something larger that sort of dictates that you're supposed to be treated a certain way; but, in fact, you're not treated a certain way. So that you're always made aware of your Blackness; you're always made aware of the fact that you're different. (Interview with Kara, 7/11/2009)

Like my generation, these young women recognize that double consciousness exists as a matter of being persons of African descent in America. In fact, as already suggested, in the 21st century, the theory could be extended to a multiplicity of consciousnesses if one also considers gender and place or locale as conflicting notions for today's generation of young Black women. For them, there seems to be relatively little concern about the conflicts caused by culture, gender, or a changed nation status.

> I don't let it bother me actually because, see, I have a goal in life to accomplish. I came here to better myself as a person. …And I'm not going to let anybody stop me from doing that… I have to be like… if it's not killing me, it's going to make me stronger…So I just move forward, and like brush it off, and keep moving. (Michelle)

> I think it is good to keep that notion of individuality, knowing that you are part of the greater community, so long as you are not ostracized because you part of that other community. (Amira)

Narrative Style

The overall structures of the participants' stories are consistent with Black women's narrative style. Most of them combine unified narration, using words and phrases that directly relate to a specific idea or topic with conversational narration, which reconstructs past conversations and interjects them verbatim into their narrative accounts (Etter-Lewis, 1993.) Kendra, however, more than any of the other participants, is a natural storyteller. We had an extensive conversation in which she displayed unified, segmented, and conversational

narration. Often Kendra's response to a question appeared to contain "shifts in

focus" as mini-narratives unfolded before Kendra answered the question (Etter-

Lewis, 1993, p. 179). When our conversation turned to writing, Kendra shared

that structure presents challenges for her. As a journalism major, the courses

she had taken in magazine writing and news reporting forced structures upon her

with which she was uncomfortable. She found this confining, and she believes

she is just beginning to learn how to write "from the heart," to write what she

feels. So she turns to writing poetry for creative relief as a natural self-

expression:

> I wanted to write like that; [the professor said] you have to write like this….
>
> Just very structured.… It just wasn't what I wanted, and I felt like there
>
> was too much structure. So I figured, let me just write some poetry. I write
>
> poetry …for myself. I have my little poetry book here. I carry it with me.

We stray from the topic as Kendra talks about an upcoming radio show

she is co-hosting on a public radio station, a "weird" dream she had which she

doesn't understand, the subconscious mind, the effect of advertising on the

subconscious mind and the conscious mind before I bring her back to her poetry

writing, and then we move to academic writing. She admits that she has

mastered academic writing and gets A's on her papers, but that has come

through practice and persistence. During our conversation, she eases me into

the teacher/student mode by asking me to recall her writing in my literature class.

By the end of this portion of our conversation, she seems to come to the

realization that her "issues" with unilateral structure stem from the internalization

of the traditional rhetoric of her African-born parents. Although we are discussing

writing, the same pattern is evident in her speech.

Kendra: You remember [my writing]; you remember (laughs).

Lou: I don't remember what you did. What did you do?

Kendra: I've always had great ideas…but … I've always had a problem

with structuring.

Lou: Okay, okay.

Kendra: I still to this day have an issue with structuring. Because…

Lou: But you should structure [your essay] before you actually write.

Kendra: Like the introduction, body, that stuff is good.

Lou: Yeah, but you just do a little sketch outline. You don't have to write it

out, but just kind of sketch it out for yourself so you'll know the order.

(Kendra: Right.) Either that or write it, and you'll have to go back and order

it.

Kendra: Right. And that's my issue. I'm now…you know, I've gotten better.

Lou: Okay, okay. So you're cognizant of it. …Part of the issue is that if you

recognize you have a challenge, it's working on that challenge. (Kendra:

Right.) But you know, once you recognize it, and you know what to do,

you just go ahead and do it. There are very few "perfect writers," whatever

that means. (Kendra: Yeah.) People think, you know, that professional

writers just throw it out there, and it is. But that's not the way it works.

They throw it out there, and they take it back, and they throw it there, and

they take it back (laughs), and they rework it, and they rethink it.

Kendra: I thought it was an issue, but um maybe it's just the way I was brought up… The way my parents spoke to me.

Khalida, like Kendra, is very articulate. My field notes indicate that while talking she, like Kendra, often told stories. I met with Khalida three times. During one of those conversations when she talked about her journals, she launched into a strong segmented narrative. Note that my question relates to a code she used in the back of the journal and a point in time when she was keeping the journal.

Lou: So this one [journal] is the one that has the code in the back. That's from high school, right?

Khalida: That's high school. I did a summer program between sophomore year and junior year or junior year and senior year. I did a summer program at Hampton University. I wrote about it, but let's put it this way. I went down there for the wrong reasons.

Lou: What did you go down there for? A guy?

Khalida: Yeah. But I didn't tell my mom that because Hampton University is like a college that kind of runs in our family. My mom's good friend went to Hampton. I wanted to go to there for this guy, and I told my mom I wanted to go there because the summer program was good. I liked the summer program. I heard it was good, but my actual dream school was Georgetown University. And I didn't want to go to Georgetown University 'cause I had gone to a school where I was the only Black girl in my class,

and walking at Georgetown University [during a campus visit] made me feel that way again.

Lou: Okay, so you were not comfortable in that situation.

Khalida: Not at all. So I went to Hampton for the wrong reason and came back home and worked my butt off in high school some more so I could get into Hampton. Applied, got in, didn't have the money, didn't go, went to the Urban League of North Jersey asking for monetary assistance to go to Hampton. They said instead, we'll give you two years at North City for free. So that's how I ended up coming to North City… I mean … I wasn't even happy about it. I cried my eyes out.

Khalida answers my initial question, but like Kendra her response triggers a story. Although this is one story, and Kendra might have two or three stories, Khalida talks about eight subtexts or events, any of which could be developed into a story—the summer program at Hampton; Hampton as a family tradition; the guy who was also going to Hampton; the Georgetown University tour; her elementary school feeling of discomfort at being the only Black in her class; the lack of funds to attend Hampton; and the scholarship situation.

Zena is another articulate participant. My field notes describe her as fiery and passionate about her beliefs. During our conversation, she also displayed a propensity for narrative. In this brief exchange, she discusses stories she wrote collaboratively with a friend while in middle school. Notice how she naturally combines unified and conversational narration:

You know what, this one's [referring to a journal] actually the one I shared with my friend. I think this is the most interesting one because we literally had no plot for the story at all. These books went on straight for years. (Lou: Really?) Like years, maybe like two or three years. And it would be I started the scenario, or she would start it. And we would leave it and we would be like, "Ha, ha, you figure it out." And then we would start. And then I write a lot, so we're both competitive, so she would try to like beat my record. Like say if I wrote thirty-two pages, she'd be like, "Well, all right, I'm going to write thirty- three." And I'm like, "Yeah, well, I've got the book like on the weekend. I'm going to write like sixty pages." And we would do that (laughs), sixty pages back and forth. And, um, we didn't know where to start or it would lead, so we'd be like, "I'll start it, [you] finish it." She'll continue it, and I pick up from there, and it just came so randomly, but the story was good.

As these excerpts suggest, narrative form comes naturally for women of African descent because of our strong cultural identification with orality and the oral tradition. "Narrativizing is a characteristic feature of general Black discursive practices. Everyday conversational talk may be rendered as a 'story'" (Smitherman, 1999, p. 275; also see hooks, 1989).

Power

This section presents data on power relationships as they relate to literacy and literacies. The analysis is based primarily on data from four sources:

- Lou's literacy journal;

- interview questions on early childhood literacy practices;

- written statement on the value of literacy

- written statement on early childhood literacy event or practice

It's all about power. How do I view myself? I'm a part of the dominant establishment, but not a part of the establishment. When I look in the mirror, I don't see myself as a power broker, but in fact I am. At least in the classroom, my students certainly see me that way. … Certainly the various domains all have power constructs – North City [Community College], the classroom, the [English] department, home, and each has a specific culture and literacy practice. No wonder I feel like a chameleon. (Lou, Literacy Journal, 6/14/07, Appendix D)

In Chapter 3, "The Review of the Literature," it was noted that power relationships are implicit to literacy. The privileging of reading and writing as a literacy of power has become normalized not only in the educational system but in society in general. Although we met outside of an academic setting, some of the participants knew and related to me as "Prof. Roliston." Therefore, I was very conscious of decentering the professor persona and simply being a collaborator in the research process. I dressed more casually than I generally dress for the classroom and tried to set a "relaxed tone" for the conversation/interview. I asked

questions and encouraged my collaborators to ask questions. As noted in the

methodology section, with many of the participants, our conversations often

strayed from the "format," as we spoke about tangential topics. I continually used

the interview guide to bring us back to the topic. In reading the transcripts, it is

clear that there are conversations where there is true collaboration. Not only am

I listening and co-signing or affirming by accenting the conversation with "um

hmm," "right," "okay," but so is my conversation partner (Smitherman, 1977).

These tend to be the longer interviews, conversations which sparked some

reflection or insight about my lived experience that I share. But also these are

conversations in which the collaborator speaks with a clearer, stronger voice.

Sponsorship: I Kick Knowledge to Her

So, as I begin to look at power as evidenced in Brandt's theory of

sponsorship (2001), I begin with the young women who participated in this study

as my sponsors in this academic endeavor. Brandt defines sponsors as "any

agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and

model as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain

advantage by it in some way" (2001, p. 19). This project falls under what Brandt

might term literacy development. That is "the accumulating project of literacy

across a lifetime" or what my collaborators in the next section refer to as lifelong

learning. Although there was no tangible gain from this project in the form of a

grade or finances, some of the participants have said that the project made them

think and reflect on their literate lives and how they view literacy in general.

Indeed, some had revelations about their literacy practices during our

conversations. Others, I believe, may have initially participated because they were encouraged by their professors who told them they would be helping out a colleague, but, once we sat and talked, all were interested because the study would give them voice.

There have been a variety of influences on the in-school and out-of-school educational experiences of the participants. Using Brandt's theory of sponsorship, I present the participants' accounts. As noted, these data were collected in conversations and written statements although some written statements reflect the same experiences described during our conversations. I present here a general summary of the types of sponsorship, then focus on four of the participants. Some of my journal entries or excerpts from conversations are included. Again, since the emphasis is on allowing the participants to speak for themselves, verbatim excerpts rather than summaries are used.

Parents

It is no surprise that mothers and, to a lesser extent fathers, are the single most stated early influence on literacy learning, development, and opportunity. Support and encouragement are evident through reading, teaching, and providing various types of support for the participants. Before attending school, almost three-quarters of the participants recall their parents teaching them the alphabet and how to count, reading to them, buying them books, and taking them to the library. Some parents placed emphasis on their daughters being ahead in school and provided additional support through the reading program "Hooked on Phonics" or educational video tapes. In contrast, one participant, who spent her

early childhood in her native Jamaica, reflects on being taught using a more traditional method. She writes about her early literacy practices:

> I learned to spell using a chalk board. My mom would set up the chalk
>
> board in the living room and made it like a classroom setting. I learned my
>
> ABC's and 123's by using these methods. (Michelle)

Parents also modeled and sometimes taught specific literacy practices other than reading and writing, which I generally refer to as literacies to mark the distinction. During our conversation, Michelle said her father read to her, but she also described him as the musician in the family who instilled the love of music in his children and continues this literacies practice with them even as young adults.

> My dad plays the keyboard, the guitar and even sings. He taught my
>
> brothers and I how to play. I loved singing more than playing the
>
> instruments. My younger brother took up the guitar, he now plays it. My
>
> family is musical and we love to interact with anything in music. My dad
>
> still tries to teach me how to play the guitar, but it's just not my scene.

While most participants remember their parents reading to them, only one, Amy, who credits her parents with keeping her supplied with books, nurturing her desire to read, and fostering literacies in music, recalls regularly reading to her mother:

> I was reading early. Um, and I was reading all the time. Like I would
>
> always, I remember always running up to my mom with a book. I'm like,
>
> "Mommy, can I read this to you?" (Lou: Oh, you would read to your
>
> mother?) Yeah, I would read to her; instead of her reading to me, I'd read

to her. And that's when I started writing. Like I was always writing when I was little…

Among this group of participants, it was not uncommon for parents to encourage their daughters in the arts. All of the participants portrayed themselves as having sponsorship in the arts.   Four have played and/or continue to play instruments. Five have taken dance lessons and/or participated in dance groups, while two continue to dance. One third of the participants have been members of choirs or formal singing groups, and one half describe music as a "passion" or a "love."

Siblings

After parents, female and male siblings are the single biggest influence on the early childhood experiences, with six of the ten participants mentioning sponsorship by siblings. Like some of the parents, they taught their younger siblings to read and write, passed on books, and generally modeled reading, writing, music, and playing sports. In most cases, there is an age difference of three to six years between the two siblings. Two participants cited their older sisters rather than parents as major influences on their early childhood literacy/literacies practices. Sibling sponsorship is very diverse and often continues through the school years into adulthood. Amy started reading before she went to school. Her sister, six years older, was a major influence in her literacy learning and literacy development:

I think it was my sister who helped me learn to read because she was always reading around me, and I was always behind her. She's my sister;

she's my older sister. So I was always behind her. And if she's always reading, I wanted to be just like her…. And so I just started reading.

Amy writes poetry and short stories. The artifact she shared was a short story anthology she wrote when she was seven. Amy also credits her sister with modeling writing:

…Short stories, I write occasionally. And I get that from my sister… She's a short story writer. Yeah, so I get that from her. That's really where I picked it up from because I was, when I was younger, I'd always see her writing. And I would always like be over her shoulder. (Laughs) And then, I was just like, okay, I'm going to start writing too. Can you help me write this? And she'd help me.

Sade's learning vocabulary can be attributed in part to her listening to music played by her oldest sister, who was ten years her senior and who also helped her learn how to read. (See the biographical section in Chapter 5 for this discussion.)

Siblings also influenced literacies learning. Michelle's brother used to read to her and also taught her cricket:

My older brother taught me how to play cricket. This [is] a popular game in the Caribbean. He would use three sticks for each end and make the bat using a coconut bow or from a piece of board. I was three and one day my brother decided he was going to play cricket, and so he was going to bat first. I took a rock and threw it at him and it accidentally hit him in the shoulder. He started crying and until this day he reminds me of how I

hit him with the rock.

My older brother, possibly like Michelle's brother, took responsibility for teaching me certain literacies so he would have an "opponent" for some of his favorite games:

> At age six, he taught me to play blackjack during our biweekly outings to visit our uncle who lived out of state. I had not yet mastered addition and subtraction, so in addition to learning the card symbols and their values, I enhanced my mathematical skills. That same year, I learned to play checkers. (Lou, Literacy Journal, 9/23/08, Appendix D)

Grandparents and other relatives

After parents and siblings, grandparents and other relatives are most frequently mentioned as influences. They too read to the participants as children, bought them books, and generally modeled reading. Interestingly, in some cases the grandparents were perceived as readers by the participants, in others they were not.

Khalida spent some of her early childhood years in a house which her family shared with her grandmother. In addition to her mother's reading to her and buying her books, she recalls her grandmother's reading to her and to her sister, although she doesn't think of her grandmother as a reader. "…So as far as reading was concerned, besides the cookbook and besides reading to my sister and I when we were younger, I didn't really see her reading." Khalida's comment perhaps suggests something about the genre of reading material rather than the fact that her grandmother was reading. Cookbooks are generally associated with

vernacular literacies, which do not easily correspond with Khalida's view on literacy. (See section "Views on Literacy.")

In contrast to Khalida's perception of her grandmother, Jamila talks about her grandfather, who modeled reading on a daily basis. Her grandparents babysat for her regularly including after school and summers until she attended middle school.

Jamila: My grandfather always read the newspaper… I was always there [at the grandparents' home.] Whenever my mom was out, that's who babysat me, my grandparents. I always remember seeing him at the table with the newspaper, and me being little [I would sit with him] pretending that I could read all the stuff….

My grandparents always read the newspapers…I remember it seemed like he [my grandfather] sat there for hours and hours and hours reading the newspaper. And I would say, "That's a big newspaper!" He would just sit in one spot with coffee and his glasses and just read for hours. And he read the Bible a lot too.

In addition to her mother's buying books, Jamila also remembers receiving books from her aunt and uncle.

Lou: Did your mom buy you books when you were a little girl?

Jamila: Yeah, and my aunt too. Well, my uncle is a teacher and my aunt is…a child psychiatrist, so she always had like the children's books and everything, so I always got books… They always brought me Black books…. When my uncle went on teachers' conventions, [he brought

back] that kind of stuff.

Grandparents, aunts, and other relatives were major influences on the participants' literacies development. They not only modeled reading and writing, but, as observed in my "Reflections," Chapter 2, also modeled vernacular literacies such as the oral tradition, music, and creative expressions.

Educators

Educators and counselors are perhaps the most obvious literacy influence on an institutional level. The participants shared various experiences. They range from preschool to current experiences as undergraduates. Here are a few examples. Others appear in the individual cases which follow.

Teachers found all kinds of creative ways to instill learning. Sade's first grade teacher made a lasting impression:

Mrs. Niece…she would make you spell something before you went to the bathroom, like something short… like cat… And you would have to take a horseshoe with you to the bathroom; it was her bathroom pass. Um, and, yeah, she always made you spell something before you go…

Amy had a teacher who was more traditional but special.

I had a special teacher, like a special teacher who would always help me write. Like she was the one who helped me put this [the artifact, an anthology of short stories she shared] together…she would always teach me where to put the commas, and where to put the period, and how to spell the right words, and how to organize a sentence. And she would always come in the class and pull me to the side, and we'd work on my

writing.

Kara, labeled "special education," struggled in school in some subjects, but an exceptional teacher awakened an interest in a subject she previously found challenging.

Lou: What kind of grades did you get?

Kara: History, I could tell you I got Ds.

Lou: I thought history is a subject you like.

Kara: In high school…When I got into 9th grade, I got straight A's. And it was because I never liked history when I was at school in middle school and elementary school. And there was this one teacher, Mrs. Sexton, and she, she made it fun; she made it interesting. She made me want to learn. …She made you think. She made you want to ask questions. And I got straight A's. I did well on the tests. I never do good on tests. And I did so well on the tests; I was like I was so happy.

Friends

As the young women began to mature, in addition to having the support of parents and relatives, increasingly they also experienced influences outside the home and outside the classroom from friends and participation in formal and informal organizations.   Sponsorship varies from encouragement and support to debate and advice. The following individual cases include the sponsorship of friends.

Amira

Amira's family is very close and supportive. Both her parents and her maternal grandparents are college-educated and clearly education is perceived as an essential to life. From her early childhood through adulthood, sponsorship continues to be factor in Amira's life.

Amira attended an independent private preschool/kindergarten run by African American women.

That fact alone made a lasting impression in my life…. I remember you know having fun, loving to learn, doing crafts, it was just a great environment…It was routine every morning for us students to begin the day by writing a short story to hand in. Another staple in the curriculum of the school was the "Hooked on Phonics" series that strengthens young children's reading, writing, and comprehension skills. I think having students write short stories every morning was a way for us to put into praxis what we were learning.

Amira describes her father as an "avid reader" who keeps a journal. He has always modeled reading and writing for her:

His library is huge. He always has kind of inspirational books. He's always giving them to me and my brothers for Christmas presents [or] … birthday presents. Yeah, but I never get a chance to sit down and read them, like "Okay, dad. Yeah, thanks, I'll read them." But, yeah, I have a collection of them, even in my apartment…. He carries a bag full of books everywhere we go 'cause he's like, "In case we get stranded, I have to read."...He

probably gets through two books a week.

Amira has a passion for the arts. She loves to sing and perform. At one point she wanted to act professionally and has played the piano and cello, taken ballet and tap dancing, performed spoken word, and performed in school musicals and an African dance troupe. In these areas as well, parental sponsorship is evident through encouragement and support.

She discusses her poetry.

> Amira: [I wrote about] anything that was like, that I felt especially affected the community, the Black community, and then women. Like those two things I wrote about. I have like notebooks full of what I wrote. And that was when I was in Williamsburg. Any kind of oppression, any kind of racist things I was feeling, things… again that dealt with the community, with women, independence, self-expression, anything like that.
>
> Lou: Did you share the poetry?
>
> Amira: Yeah, I was a part of the Revolutionary Poet Café in Philly.. ..I [also] shared some with my church.
>
> Lou: Now um, now so when were you a part of that group?
>
> Amira: When I was fifteen and sixteen, 2002-2003.
>
> Lou: So did you get on a bus or something…?
>
> Amira: Uh, actually my parents would drive me…. and usually I would go with a friend who was either living in Philly or who was from Jersey and we would go there and listen to other people or perform ourselves.

For a while, Amira stopped writing poetry when she felt spoken word had

become too "commercial…almost like it lost its sanctity." Eventually, she began writing again, but now only writes occasionally. She no longer shares her poetry.

Amira's mother is a trained vocalist who has sung with the Fisk Jubilee Singers[27]. However, Amira says her passion for the arts was not inspired by her mother as this information was not shared with Amira until she was in her preteens. Nevertheless, at home her mother is always singing and occasionally plays the piano. She also sang in the church choir thus modeling the performing arts for Amira although she consciously did not push her in that area.

In addition to her parents, Amira talks about her brother, Jonathan, who is three years older and also at State University. They often talk about books they have both read and have even taken classes together though they have different majors. Jonathan modeled reading for her as a child and continues to influence her reading habits as an adult:

> Yeah, Jonathan reads. Um, and maybe that's what helped influence me 'cause we're very close, so growing up seeing him read a book, I would read a book too. … Yeah, well Jonathan reads, not as much as me, I don't think, but he reads….
>
> Now he's older; he got me into [James] Baldwin, and like I think also Black autobiographies. 'Cause we like the same things as well.

In addition to her parents and sibling, Amira also had the sponsorship of her church and the spoken word group with which she performed.

Kendra

Kendra's parents are also college-educated. She says when she was a young girl, her mother sometimes worked with her but often used educational programs and videos to help Kendra and her sister, who was a year older, to develop their reading and writing skills.

My mom was the first to help me out with writing and reading sometimes. I was just encouraged to read (laughs.) "Read your books."

I think I learned a lot from watching TV, like PBS, [channel] 13... *Sesame Street* and *How to Write…* I guess it [the educational video tape] taught me how to count and to say my alphabets. She would just pop in the tape, and that's how we learned.

Kendra is an avid reader. She says that some of her earliest memories are of wanting to read. At her kindergarten graduation, when most children said they want to be a ballerina, firefighter, police officer, teacher, doctor or lawyer, Kendra said: "I wish I knew how to read. I just want to read….That's what I want to do. (Emphatically) I want to read!"

Kendra maintains that when she was a child, her African parents were not in touch with the conflicting feelings she had growing up as a first-generation American. In middle school, she turned to dance as a way to express herself creatively. It was a dance teacher at school who fostered this outlet.

Kendra: But I think I [will] teach my child …how to express herself a lot more. All the stuff I didn't learn. I wasn't taught how to express myself, you know.

Lou: So how did you learn? It came naturally to you?

Kendra: It came natural. (Lou: Yeah) My mom never…I had all of this stuff bottled up inside… I decided to dance my way out, you know…(Lou: Yeah, well…) That was my way of expressing it. (Lou: Yeah) I found my little outlet.

Lou: What kind of dancing?

Kendra: Hip-hop.

Lou: You did hip-hop?

Kendra: With Mr. Holliday…. He was my first like hip-hop, jazz, ballet teacher. (Lou: Okay) I went to school up in Riverdale, and …he was the only male Black dance teacher I ever had. And he wasn't gay or anything. (Lou: Um um.) He was a dancer. And I got turned on to dance when I was younger; actually before that, might have been kindergarten with Michael Jackson, "Billy Jean." (Lou: Okay) And ever since then I was like in love with dance…

Her sponsorship beyond childhood is evident today in her interactions with friends. Kendra talks about a friend, Johnnie, who is a graduate student in philosophy who challenges her thinking:

He criticized me, he said you damn bourgeoisie people; you guys don't ever…he criticized me, I mean breaking me down. And that got me really thinking… I wanted to see where he was coming from, so before I attacked, I said, let me see where he is coming from. He's like, "Well, your beliefs, your whole, your values are not Black people's values." He had

me thinking. I was like, "All right, whatever." So I kind of, we were going back and forth. We constantly were debating ….When I say I've never met a Black genius before. (Lou: He's a genius?) He's that. He surprises me with some of the things he comes up with…. But I can only sit there and learn from him because he has a wealth of information, so when we argue or debate it's just like he shoots me down. He pokes holes in my little philosophy, my theories, and he makes me think….

He reads too. We can go to Barnes and Noble and just [be] chillin' or whatever…. I bought these books and he helped me out with some of the books. [One of them was by] Joan Morgan. She wrote *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost.*… She's a Black, she's a hip-hop feminist. She talks about her experience, just her finding her voice, you know being her.

Later in our conversation when I asked how her friends felt about her academic accomplishments, we had this exchange. There is clearly a mutual exchange occurring in this relationship.

Kendra: My closest girlfriend right now, she's actually proud of me. She, we commend each other you know not constant but give enough of um, we encourage, support each other. You know she's happy that I'm still in school.

Lou: Is she in school or is she finished with school?

Kendra: She's finished with school… We just like um, give each other encouragement and support. She is proud of me.

Lou: Good. Because you are doing well? Because you are still in school?

Kendra: And I kick knowledge to her. (Laughs)

Lou: Okay, that works; that works.

Zena

Zena's influences stood out because she was the only participant who maintained that her mother, who has technical school training, generally was not interested in her education. According to Zena, her mother was not nurturing in that aspect of her life. Her parents divorced while she was young. Since reuniting with her father as an adult, he has been very supportive of her academic and writing ventures. Nevertheless, during her early years, there were other sponsors who consciously or unconsciously promoted her reading and writing skills. Here, in her written statement, she discusses an unusual sponsor that she recalls as her early childhood companion:

 I don't remember when exactly I started reading, but I do remember why. I was just a young girl, maybe four or five, and reading to me meant I was about to earn some quality time. No, I don't mean quality time with mommy or daddy. Not even with a brother, sister; but a cat. Her name was B.J. and she was my best friend. B.J. grew to be a magnificent cat, the perfect pet companion, but as a kitten...B.J. was wild. She was wild, untamed, and never stood still long enough for me, or anyone else for that matter, to pet her. The only time she was seen was when she was running from one place to another, chasing entities that I never did see….

One day, while eating cereal, I happened to look over into the

pantry. That's where B.J.'s food and water bowl were and I noticed that she seemed comfortable. I figured it might of been because thats where her food was, but the regardless of the reason, the fact was that she was comfortable in there and that observation didn't go ignored. From then on, I started waiting for her in the pantry. There was a canister of paint not being used and I deemed it the perfect seat, where I'd relax and patiently wait for her to come in. She would get hungry soon, and hungry she was. She would have to come to eat, and that she did. For two days, she'd come into the pantry, eat, stretch, then leave me miserably looking after her when she'd leave.

It was on the third day that I asked B.J. why didn't she want to be my friend. I promised her that I would make a good best friend and I told her that I thought she was very pretty. I told her I'd play with her everyday and that I would sneak her milk whenever I could. I told her this and I promised her that. I rumbled on and on and on. Then it hit. She wasn't eating, she wasn't drinking. She was just sitting there. Staring at me. Then she purred as her eyes caught mine. That's when I realized that B.J. enjoyed me talking to her. From then on, I spoke to her several times a day about numerous topics that my young mind could conjure….

Desperate to keep my friend, the friend who's friendship I'd work so hard to earn, I thought long and hard of things to say to her and wondered how else I could keep her interest. I had, after all, promised her that I'd make a good best friend and I couldn't go back on my word. That was

around the time that I noticed B.J. liked books. Every time I'd come home from where ever I went, I'd find B.J. sitting on a book that was neglected at the windowsill…. At my impressionable age, I saw that as B.J. trying to send me a message, and that message said that she wanted me to read to her.

From that day forward, I read to B.J. every day for years to come. It started off with children's books, but those ended too soon, so I moved onto series books. B.J. must of heard the entire GooseBumps series, in her fourteen years of life, because of me. She did remain my best friend, and I read to her every chance I got. Now, at twenty two years old, I read almost religiously. Reading has become my adventures, my haven, escape. Reading has become a part of my life and it's something that I would never terminate. All thanks for that must be given to B.J. who was the one that got me to read in the first place….

While in elementary school, Zena remembers spelling bees with her older brother, another unknowing sponsor.:

My brother, he, um, like I say, he has a little learning disability. Like he couldn't talk well, and he functions like everyone else, but when it comes to learning, he's a little slower. So I would read to him. I would help him read. (Lou: Oh, that's great!) And from there we would, um – we used to do like – we used to always compete, so I swore I was smarter than him. Like I had to be, even though he was five years my senior. And, um, we would like do like spelling bees just to see who spelled everything right.

We would use like my spelling book or his spelling book. (Lou: Um hmm.)

And we would just compete, like, "Oh, yeah? Well, spell queen.

Oh, yeah? Spell hate. Oh, you spelled hate wrong…. That's hat, that's

not hate." Just back and forth with each other, and that's how – I guess

that's how I started reading more. I didn't think about it until now. Yeah.

A naturally curious adult, Zena was a naturally curious child who was

always interested in diverse cultures. As a student, she sometimes initiated the

lead in areas of interest. She talks about a favorite teacher:

In third grade, I had this Chinese teacher. Her name was Mrs. Chin. I just

loved her because she was Chinese. Like I didn't see too many Chinese

people, and I love cultures. And I was always in her business like, "So

what do they do in China?"

I just love… it wasn't like me trying to be funny. I really wanted to know.

And, um, yeah, I learned a lot in her class.

Like the other young women, as an adult Zena continues to have

sponsors. She has a cousin who is a sponsor of her literacy in that they have

joint creative writing sessions, and she is writing poetry to accompany some of

his art work.

Every Wednesday I go to my cousin's house, and we do this thing called

… creative writing. And, um, like I said, my cousin, he's very into school

and helping the children and all that good stuff. And he's starting to write

his own book as well…[and] I'm sitting next to him writing my book. And

then he does like a lot of these nice, nice portraits of like African American

people just together just like in love and blah, blah, blah. So he – like he'll draw the picture. He's a great artist. And he'll have me put – just make up a poem or something short for it…When he publishes his book, …whoever the poet was who wrote towards that picture, he's going to have them there, standing there to recite the poem to like the audience.

Zalika

Zalika is from a very close family. She is the youngest of five children. Her sister, who still teases her about crying over receiving a less than perfect score on her spelling test, was her role model when she was a little girl. (See Chapter 5.) During our conversation Zalika shared:

…Like the first memory to read and write probably was like my sister when she was younger and she was coming from school. I was like trying to write and write down what she's doing. She was doing math and stuff, and she was like "I hate this class." I was like "Oh look, I found that answer," but it was wrong. But that's what I remember and I used to like I recall reading books that she had. I used to like reading Enid Blyton books.

According to Zalika, she used to mimic much of what her sister did.

I remember her teaching me my ABC's and putting like pen to paper. I remember her handwriting. She writes big, and up to this day, I think I tend to write like her 'cause I still remember her handwriting. I used to try to do her fancy curves…I used to… mimic her handwriting.

Grandparents not only read to and modeled reading for their young

grandchildren, they also used other vehicles to enhance their knowledge of the world around them and to develop their critical thinking skills. Zalika watches the news on television every morning. She says this is a literacy practice her grandmother instilled in her when she was a young girl growing up in Trinidad.

> Um, like one thing my grandma, when she was alive, she got us into this pattern when we were small. Like at seven o'clock she's always saying, "Kids, news time, come and watch the news." And then she would like make us like tell her what's going on. … Just to recite it and keep us in the know I guess.

Zalika wanted to be a pediatrician from the time she was a child growing up in Trinidad, but, as she got older, she realized that her family could not afford the expense of a medical education. Therefore, she abandoned her dream of becoming a physician for a career in engineering. It was after talking to her own doctor and some faculty at NCCC, who encouraged her, that she again decided to pursue her dream with the help of student loans:

> Yeah, definitely I didn't see like the financial backing required when I was high school so [I thought] like I gotta be realistic about something that I can actually achieve. So then I changed my mind, and then when I came over here I was doing my Associate's in Engineering at North City, and then … I went by my doctor once and she was talking to me… She's like you know, "What's your major?" I'm like "Oh, engineering." She's like "Why?" I'm like "I don't know." She was like "You should be a doctor." [I said] "When I was smaller I actually wanted to be a doctor, but I'm not so

sure." And she was like talking to me about it and showed me like all the

different groups and ins and outs of it, and like I got to think and think

about it like a couple of weeks, and I'm like you know, "I think I'm gonna

change my major." … I told my parents…

[Also] I was taking a sociology class with Professor Benjamin; he's

from the Dominican Republic…. And I was talking to him and he was like

yeah you should go for it. He has a daughter; she was twenty-eight or

twenty-nine. She was like just finishing up like her master's in something.

He was like "You should go for it; don't let anyone or anything hold you

back, and don't worry about the loans." Like he was like "Look at Obama.

He just finished paying off his loans."

Although this section has focused on sponsorship of the participants, it

should be noted that all of these young women are sponsors themselves through

individual/ personal support or through organizations. Michelle and Sade read to

their daughters. Sade, an avid reader, also models reading, is teaching her

daughter to recognize letters and helps her with educational computer games.

Michelle is teaching her mother how to use the computer, and she provides

major support and encouragement to her mother, who has returned to school to

complete her GED, as well as to her younger siblings who range in age from six

to seventeen. Kendra, Jamila, and Zalika help younger nieces and nephews with

homework, reading to them and purchasing books for them. Zena, Zalika, and

Kendra also encourage and support their friends' efforts. Kendra teaches

liturgical dance at her home church. Kara helps second graders enhance their

reading, writing and math skills as an assistant teacher in a summer program.

Amira is a mentor to urban high school students and is president of an

organization that links West African students with African American students and

their families. Amy performed signing at church services while Khalida

coordinated a book club for Harlem teenagers and teaches dance to children and

teenagers. All model education on various levels.

Through their actions as sponsors and/or from their written statements, it

can be discerned that half of the women consider literacy a legacy and believe it

is important to impart certain life skills and literacy practices to others, particularly

future generations. The evidence is their association of literacy with success; it is

viewed as a commodity or capital of a sort. Perhaps Zalika stated it most directly:

> Literacy is important to me as I know the value of having a good education
>
> and being well rounded in order to stand a *chance in society*. Having a
>
> degree or a skill is essential to my family and me because I will be the first
>
> person in my family to have made it so far in obtaining my degree. Thus, *I*
>
> *will be able to set an example for my nieces and nephews and encourage*
>
> *them that they can achieve anything they put their minds to as long as*
>
> *they work hard and be diligent.* [My italics.]

Indeed, it was at Zalika's home that the power of literacy was most

evident. Her parents greeted me as "her professor" with great respect and

cordiality. Her father made light conversation, asked about the origin of my last

name, perhaps trying to place me in the African Diaspora.

Her mother had baked fresh coffee cake, according to Zalika, in anticipation of my visit, and repeatedly offered it until I finally agreed to a break from our conversation so we could partake of coffee cake and Martinelli's sparkling apple cider in her lead crystal stemware. When her father left to run an errand, he said goodbye. As I was preparing to leave their home, Zalika's mother inquired about a certificate program at NCCC which she might have assumed I was familiar with as a professor at the college; however, she also asked me a question about income taxes, to which I couldn't respond as I have no special expertise in the area. Apparently her husband had filed his tax return, and it came back saying that something needed to be done. They had passed the information on to Zalika, but presumably at that point, she hadn't followed up. When I told her mother I could not be of much help, Zalika's response was "Don't worry, I'll just call IRS."

In this household, the parents turn to their daughter, Zalika, the person with the most formal education, to interpret and represent their interests with institutional authorities when they are uncomfortable doing so themselves. Zalika is also the resident expert on resumes for all of her family members, not just her parents. She mentioned that her sisters as well as her mother ask her to prepare their resumes. As Zalika said to me, "When I don't know something, I just Google it. You can find anything on Google." She is a young woman who has expertise in addition to being very resourceful.

The data attests to the individuality and heterogeneity of undergraduate Black women. They represent various lived experiences including family background and socio-economic status as well as literacy/literacies practices.

Views on Literacy

I open this section with an excerpt from my conversation with Khalida.

I have a broader view of literacy because I look at literacy in terms of culture, maintaining that literacy is different things in different contexts. And so, yes, it's reading and writing, but reading and writing are basically the encoding and decoding of words. Do you know what I mean? (Khalida: Yeah.) And so it goes beyond that. I mean there are different forms of literacy, and so when you look at it in a social context, then you're really talking about literacies, so people have different kinds of literacy. So when you were talking about your grandmother who does not have as much formal education as you do, but she may have literacies that you don't have, such as cooking. … But she has knowledge, and that's why when you describe literacy you said something about having knowledge and an understanding of the concept. (Khalida: Um hmm.) …. And so there are also various levels of literacy. So I guess I'm just more open to the idea of literacies, A-C-I-E-S, as opposed to literacy – (Khalida: Right.) because it helps us to look at the world a little bit differently and to look at teaching a little bit differently. Um, and it impacts upon the way in which we think about people and the way in which we engage with people. (Lou, Interview with Khalida, 9/9/2009)

This section presents the participants' views on literacy. The analysis is based on data collected from four sources:

- written statement on the value of literacy

- interview question on defining literacy;

- interview question on the importance of literacy to identity;

- artifacts from early childhood literacy-related activities or events.

For these undergraduate women, literacy is an essential part of their beings and ways of understanding in the world. During our conversations, and from other data collected, it was clear that some of the participants recognize literacies or literacy practices in various contexts, and although other participants evidently recognize that literacy is more than reading and writing, when discussing the importance of literacy in their lives, all clearly reference reading and writing.

For them, reading and writing are the beginning of developing metacognitive skills, the starting point of knowledge that they can consciously recognize. Few of us remember our first utterances or forming our first words, the recognition of our mothers or fathers, the recognition of color. Knowledge, although we possess it on some level even at birth (Gleason, 2005; Sachs, 2005), does not make sense to us until we are able to express it verbally, and eventually for those who learn effectively to encode text, through the written word. I believe this is the connection this group is making. Only one participant defines literacy without specifically mentioning reading and writing in our conversation or her written statement. Only one participant directly connects

literacy with opportunity, but for all, this is a benefit inherent in their definitions. Opportunity, as the participants define it, relates to the pursuit of personal as well as financial goals.

The data supporting these views are presented beginning with the broadest and moving to narrower interpretations of literacy by the participants. I also provide data on the reading and writing habits of the young women. There does not appear to be any direct correlation between reading and writing habits and the perceptions of literacy. Table 6 captures these perceptions.

All of the participants read and write for academic purposes. All read and write to varying degrees for pleasure. All use text messaging and email for academic, job-related, and personal communication.

Literacy is Life

I begin with Zalika. A pre-med major, she doesn't have much time for leisure reading while in school, but she hopes to get some reading done during the summer. Zalika likes to read suspense, autobiography, and spiritual/ inspirational works during her leisure time. She also reads the newspaper online daily, usually *The New York Times* or *Star Ledger* and *Essence, Ebony,* and *Time* magazines.   Zalika used to write poetry, but no longer has the time for creative writing. Her conception of literacy is that it can never be taken away and that literacy is a lifelong practice:

> I define literacy as something that you, that, all the knowledge that you
>
> gain from either experience or a skill or from by just doing it, and once you
>
> gain it, it's yours forever. No one can take it away from you. You always

Table 6

Literacy is Life: Participants' Views on Literacy

	Age	Major	Year in College	Perspective
Amira	21	Africana Studies	Senior	Understanding, knowledge, ways of knowing and comprehension
Amy	19	Nursing	Freshman	How individual interprets life
Kara	21	Psychology	Sophomore	Reading and writing
Kendra	23	Africana Studies and journalism	Senior	Reading is essential to life; technology, TV, Internet & music/ radio are types of literacy & vehicles of literacy
Khalida	20	Political Science	Sophomore	Being able to understand, experiment, infer, and apply
Jamila	21	Journalism	Sophomore	Life changing; oral; the arts
Michelle	22	Nursing	Freshman*	Competency in an area; opportunity
Sade	24	Criminal Justice	Freshman*	Life learning
Zalika	21	Biological Sciences	Junior	Continuous learning; a way of life**
Zena	22	Wellness & Recreation Science	Freshman	Life; music

*Participants enrolled in pre-college level courses.
**Participant specifically does not mention reading and writing in conversation or written statement.

keep adding on to your literacy. What else, through research or by

knowledge, or just by hearing something, just keep adding onto it. That's

the good thing about it, it's actually, you could always add to it but you can

never take away from it.

Zalika's written statement affirms this idea:

I will define literacy as continuous learning. A specific something, such as

a hobby, one's job, education where each day you learn a little more than

you had previously known. Literacy to me is also a possession as I view it

as once you have it, no one can take it from you.… So to sum everything

up, literacy is a way of life…

Zalika is the only participant who does not make a specific reference to reading

and writing in her written or oral statements about literacy. Her statement

suggests a strong identification with vernacular or out-of-school literacies

practices as well as in-school multiple literacies practices.

Amira, too, has a strong identification with out-of-school literacies. As

mentioned earlier, she was a dancer, singer, performing artist, spoken word artist

and occasionally still writes poetry. She carries a notebook with her to jot down

her thoughts.

Amira describes herself as a "CNN junkie" and an "ardent reader." She

keeps a list of books she wants to read, so, eventually, she gets to the books

which interest her. She reads the *New York Times* online daily and primarily

reads autobiography and fiction although she had just finished Ntozake Shange's

play, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is not*

Enuf the week before we met. Her personal library includes a number of unread self-help and inspirational books which her father regularly gives her as gifts. During our conversation, she began to recognize that she reads Black literature only during her leisure time. She had not consciously thought about it before but believes this is a "repercussion of high school work—all I read was white literature."

Amira's perspective is generally stated, but she also acknowledges that literacy extends beyond reading and writing. In her written statement on the value of literacy she says:

> I define literacy as the knowledge and competency of something or to do something. It could apply to knowing how to read, write, and/or comprehend. I think the broader definition of comprehension is best for my personal definition of literacy. Literacy is one's understanding of something, their competency in a subject matter. One's grasp of knowledge enables them to function in society, and so literacy is pivotal to a person's existence. Literacy is necessary for communication between individuals and for needs to be met. Again, literacy in this sense expounds beyond reading and writing. It encompasses understanding, knowledge, ways of knowing and comprehension.

Amira's reference to literacy as "pivotal to a person's existence" implies that one cannot exist without it, or, at the very least, one's life might be out of balance without literacy. Literacy includes ways of knowing and understanding. Like Zalika, Amira suggests that literacy is a way of life.

Kenda also recognizes literacy in various contexts. Kendra currently writes poetry on a regular basis. She describes herself as an avid reader who tries to read at least two books a month for leisure. Kendra clearly connects literacy with reading and "finds books more interesting than people…. Call and see how I'm doing, but I'd rather sit in the house and read." She primarily reads inspirational or self-help books and autobiography and says she "can't relate" to fiction (although she reads it for school if required.)

As observed in the section on language, Kendra's parents are African, and she has a strong oral tradition inherent in her background. She naturally speaks in narrative style. When I ask her about the importance of literacy to her identity, the storytelling quality of her response is apparent. Also, note her code switching to African American Language at the end of the second paragraph and her emphasis on oral communication in the third paragraph:

> One day I was in the shower, I guess I just had like an epiphany. I figure okay, I'm just one person, and I feel that everybody in some way we are connected. And I feel like, the more I travel, the more I think we all have something in common, something we all share. And what reading has helped me to do is to understand that we are all connected. So I feel like another way something that helped me to understand that is to read and open books. So if I'm not …how would I know about somebody in China, or in Africa, or in Germany if I never open up a book. So if I want to be universal, and I feel like we all have a connection, the closet way for me to know that is through books. I can travel through books.

I open up a book and read about Assata Shakur and say we have a lot in common. I've felt the same way she's felt before, and that's where books come in. And it helped me. You can say, "I've traveled." That's my escape through books, you know.   Plus, books give you experience. You don't really have to go out and experience stuff. You can open up a book and read somebody else's experience and take it from them. And there you go; you've increased your knowledge.

Technology you don't have to actually….um you can learn to do anything. You can travel the world through technology and computers, computer literacy also. [And with] TV, television if you watch certain channels like the Discovery channel, or PBS, like all the education programs you know about a broader world. You know you're not close minded. So it's TV, it's the Internet, there's books, there's people. Literacy you learn by actually communicating with people, and the more you talk to people, the more you relate to them. You know that you do have something in common, so that's how the whole interconnection happens. And then also, there's a fifth one…. I just can't think of it just now. But there's all this stuff that I am able to learn about things and people. [Kendra later mentioned the fifth area as music/radio.]

In her written statement, Kendra makes specific mention of reading and writing and says literacy is "being able to understand and apply Knowledge [sic] in practical terms; that will allow a person to survive and thrive within an ever changing society." She recognizes that literacy takes place in many contexts and

her opening comment, "I don't know how I would be if I didn't open a book"

suggests the essential nature of literacy to her existence. She, like Zalika and

Amira, suggests that literacy is essential to life.

Amy, a short-story and poetry writer, echoes this sentiment. She writes

daily. Amy reads in many genres but prefers Black romance (Zane[28]) and horror

for leisure. Her personal library includes Shakespeare, which she doesn't read

because she doesn't understand his work, but she keeps the book nevertheless.

She doesn't read as much as she used to when she was younger but will "pick

up a book and read on a random basis." She had begun reading *The DaVinci

Code* shortly before we met. Here is Amy's written view on the value of literacy:

> Literacy not only defines one's ability to read or comprehend, but it
>
> expresses how an individual interprets life itself. It is as essential to life as
>
> breathing, crying, feeling and tasting. It is like a living thing growing in
>
> everyone at every moment, building up or breaking down. It is like a wild
>
> fire, spreading as far as it is allowed, it requires massive amounts of
>
> power and pressure to slow it down. Literacy is in your fingertips when
>
> picking up a basketball to make a slam dunk. It lives in your vocal chords
>
> when singing "Amazing Grace." Literacy festers like a sore with no
>
> healing, continuing to spread yet causes no pain or discomfort to its host.
>
> A child depends on it not only to enjoy singing their ABC's, but to fully
>
> enjoy his or her life, not accepting learning as a chore but as an activity. A
>
> teenager depends on it not only to get through grade school but to expect

to learn more to grow further in life. An adult thrives to achieve more of it, because the value of literacy only increases never is depleted.

You still think it is just reading and writing? Literacy manifests in the minds of women calculating the 30 percent discount off of a pair of Jimmy Choo's from Saks. Literacy manifests in the minds of men who sit around the living room table deciding whether to hit or stay in a Blackjack game. Literacy manifests in the pen I hold to write these words, allowing my brain to make connections like magnets. Without this personal gain, this personal power, this gift to learn and expand my thinking, how would it be possible to steal words from the crevices of my mind and allow them to bleed from my pen to this paper? In all reality, it would take pages upon pages to define literacy in my own words. *It's just an open book waiting to be read.* Being able to know that literacy is there for the taking is like standing in a hallway surrounded by doors and the one key you hold unlocks them all. It is important to receive it, understand it, and treasure it. Not everyone is given the opportunity to describe themselves as literate. Not everyone has the chance to hold that one key that opens every door. Literacy to me, is my ability to walk with my head held high knowing that I can achieve all things.

Amy clearly recognizes literacies. Like Zalika, she mentions vernacular or out-of-school literacies, basketball, singing, math, and card playing as types of literacy. She also blends traditional literacy practices with out-of-school literacy practices: singing the ABC's, calculating discounts while shopping or the odds in

card playing. Amy continues the theme of literacy as a life force which is necessary to her existence. It is the open book waiting to be read, the hallway with many unopened doors and one key, the physical and moral support that provides the confidence that all things can be achieved.

Zena certainly subscribes to this theory of literacy as a life force. An avid reader who reads four or five books a month when she has time, Zena is currently working on a young adult novel. She also writes poetry and short stories in her leisure time. During our conversation, Zena said simply:

Literacy is life. You can't put literacy in a category because there's so many different types. It's literally life. There's emotion behind literacy… The only one word I can use is life. You will find life in literacy.

Later in her written statement, she expounds on this idea that for her literacy is life. Again, note the narrative, storytelling quality of her response:

…If it weren't for literacy, I wouldn't know how to express myself with words, and I truly believe that I'd be mentally boring. Something that'd be tragic for me seeing as I'm finally starting to write my first book.… I get excited as I dream about this, because dreaming is the first step to achieving, and I know none of it would be possible should it not be for my literacy of reading and writing….

I have a strong taste for the arts… I also have a literacy for music. I can appreciate music with no words in it, so even though there are no are no words to paint the picture in my head in the notes for playing my keyboard, it doesn't make the melody of it any less beautiful. I learned

how to read piano notes and play the keyboard when I was a sophomore in high school. So let me tell you now, whoever said that music classes aren't fundamental...they clearly don't know what they're talking about and probably couldn't carry a tune if it came in a box with handles. Music class was something that I looked forward to every day. Before, during, after class, and even at home, I had those tunes and melodies stuck in my head.

The way my class would carry a tune in harmony, the passion behind my teachers eyes as the music grew more and more intense, the roar of the beat coming from the drummers behind me, and the power I felt at my finger tips for being one of the many to create the magic that many call music, was nothing short of enchanting to me. I'd get so into the music to the point that I felt it was almost spiritual for me. The music felt strong, the band was powerful, electrifying, and at times, even dark and dangerous. I couldn't get enough of music….

Learning how to read the notes was like learning how to read all over again. Once I did, the reward was endless. Learning to read those notes was the first time I had to challenge myself to do anything. "Had" to isn't exactly the right word to use. It's more like I "wanted" to challenge myself. I yearned to learn it. I had forgotten the creative being that I am and, in a sense, my literacy for music brought me back to life. My point being, is that the value of literacy is endless…. I honestly don't know where I would be in this world if I were ignorant to literacy. I'd fail all my

classes, would never have a job or start a career, my book would never be written, my music would never be heard, I wouldn't be able to cook out of cookbooks, I wouldn't be able to do anything, really. I wouldn't understand direction, I wouldn't be able to comprehend the things that I enjoy so much in life. I'd have no way of self expression, because even colors, I believe is another form of literacy. Long story short, I wouldn't be the me that I am today if it were not for literacy. Something, that not for all the money in the world, I would ever give up.

Zena has a complex and seemingly ambivalent definition of literacy. She acknowledges that there are multiple literacies, but in the last paragraph seems to suggest that literacy is primarily encoding and decoding text. Thus, she implies that one must be able to decode and encode text to have a job, play music, or even recognize color, which seems to contradict her expansive definition during our conversation that literacy is life. She seems to suggest that literacy and critical thinking skills are connected.

This connection between literacy and critical thinking is also implied by Jamila who carries her journal with her and writes in it every day although she does not consider herself a writer. Jamila "loves" writing and says that writing in her journal helps her maintain her sanity. While driving her car, she has even pulled over on the side of the road to jot down her thoughts.

She has little leisure time to read and feels she doesn't read enough although she reads the newspaper two to three times a week and reads *Jet*, *Ebony*, and *People* magazines every two weeks while "sitting under the dryer" at

the beauty salon. Her written statement initially seems to limit literacy to reading and writing, but she then goes on to suggest the oral nature of literacy, literacy in the arts, and the life-changing nature of literacy (not in that order):

> Literacy is defined by our ability to read and write. I find literacy to be our means and way of communication. To read a letter, to write a letter, to understand words and sentences and their many meanings is literacy. To hold a conversation with a person or group and be able to discuss, argue, relate, judge or simply just listen is literacy. To deliver a speech and impact a single person and change their mindset or life is literacy. To develop a passion for and skill for the arts is literacy.

Again, there is the connection of literacy as a life force and the recognition of literacies.

Sade, another avid reader, is completing her first semester. She expresses a less broad perspective of literacy than other participants, but she still connects it to life and life-long learning:

> People describe literacy in many different ways. Literacy is the basic ability to read and how to write. That's how most people would describe it …. To me I would say that it's the mastering of communication in different ways. Those ways can be through learning a basic skill, school work, texting, etc. …. Knowing literacy is very important to me because you will need this skill all through out life. … All in all literacy is important no matter where you are at because these skills can help you learn and develop the capacity for lifelong learning skills.

This idea of lifelong learning is reiterated by Khalida, who has collaborated on writing short stories with her sister since she was a young girl. Until her senior year in high school, she was prolific journal writer. She shared dozens of journals with me which she had kept since age eight. Khalida views herself as "a selective reader." She writes critical essays during her leisure time, a habit she developed preparing for the SAT and ACT tests while in high school. A book has to capture Khalida's interest in the first few pages; otherwise, she won't complete it. She has no preference among genres and might read a book twice a year for pleasure. She had just completed *Lovely Bones,* by Alice Sebold, the week before we met.   She reads the newspaper about four times a week and reads CNN.com every day. She describes herself as a "magazine junkie" who reads "stuff" like *People* and *Cosmo[politan]* magazines.

Khalida expresses a narrower view of literacy than other participants, but she too sees literacy as having the ability to change life and society. During our conversation, she said literacy was "being able to read and write and comprehend ideas … being able to understand concepts …through… a text." However, when I asked if her ability to dance (which she teaches) and use the computer were literacies, she said they were. Then she went on to connect these two abilities with reading and writing. She clearly privileges formal education (in the form of reading and writing) over vernacular literacies. For Khalida, all of life seems to be connected to reading and writing as her written piece on the value of literacy demonstrates:

It's being able to use the information I have accumulated to create my own

solutions to life's and societies problems. It is also being able to teach,

and be taught, guide, be guided with a full understanding of what it takes

to go above and beyond expectations. I would like to be more than just a

citizen; I want to be a contribution. I want to be able to say to myself that I

had a say or a function in something that changed society for the better….

Literacy is more than just being able to read and write; it's being able to

understand, experiment, infer, and apply. It is our function [to] change

when society changes and grow with society's growth and without literacy,

there are no accomplishments.

Although Zena and Jamila implied it, Khalida directly connects literacy to critical

thinking skills, to accomplishments, and to the ability to be a contributing

member of society. Although she says literacy is more than reading and writing,

it is not clear that the knowledge one must have to "understand, experiment,

infer, and apply" relates to vernacular literacies.

Michelle mentioned vernacular literacies in her references to sponsorship;

however, she, perhaps more than any other participant, directly connects

literacy with opportunity and success although she does seem to think of literacy

as being more than reading and writing.   Michelle wrote poetry in high school

and describes herself as "not much of a big reader." She works, goes to school

and cares for her three-year old daughter. In the little leisure time she has, she

occasionally reads the newspaper, reads *In Touch Weekly* magazine, checks

the news online at Yahoo.com or AOL.com and reads to her daughter. During

our conversation, she described literacy as

A person's way of learning, because everybody learns different. Some

people grasp on to information faster than others. Like me, um, it

depends on what it is. Sometimes I grasp on, like English, I grasp quickly.

Rather than math, where I'm like, not slow, but I'm like right in the middle.

Because so many formulas, and… numbers…. It's, just… depending on

how you learn.

In her written statement she added:

Literacy is important because if we didn't know how to read and write, half

of the businesses wouldn't be as successful as they are if the people who

own them couldn't read or write. My family and I moved from Jamaica to

the United States to accomplish our goals, and take every advantage of

the opportunity given to us. My mom didn't finish high school, and she is

now going back to school after having five children…. My brothers and

sister came to the States and learned something new, and we have been

given the education to become someone of great importance. It's just up

to us to make the best of it. We all have different goals but we just want to

work hard and achieve those goals. Our parents taught us never to give

up, and if at first we don't succeed, pick up ourselves and try again.

As Michelle clearly suggests, and other participants imply, literacy is

valued as an accomplishment. Therefore, their language, "making a contribution

to society," "socio-economic privilege," "opportunity," "personal development,"

"self-sufficiency," "value to community," and "achieve all things" suggests the

breadth of literacy in their lives on individual, community, and societal levels. The

participants view literacy as a necessary element of their existence, which they cannot imagine themselves without. They do not have reductive, simple views of literacy. For them, literacy is complex. They generally view literacy as life or life-changing, as legacy, as opportunity, as communication, as continuous learning, which only increases and cannot be taken away, as multi-faceted—multiple literacies which operate in various contexts, and as related to critical thinking.

Overall, for these young women, literacy is a life force which is treasured and should be passed on to others.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

My solitary and individual life is like the lives of the tribe; it differs in these specific ways, but it is a balanced life because it is both solitary and representative (Morrison, 1984, p. 339).

From the outset, this study was conceived as exploratory. There are relatively few studies related to women of African descent, and even fewer studies specifically related to the literacy practices of Black women. As noted in Chapter 3, Royster's *Traces of a Stream* (2000), Richardson's "To Protect and Serve" (2002), and Lanehart's *Sista, Speak!* (2002) are the only projects which focus on Black women's literacy. Of these, only Lanehart's research is qualitative. Her study differs from this study in that she examines the language and literacy practices of three generations of one family. Further, her emphasis is on linguistic analysis as it relates to literacy rather than on a fuller picture of literacy identity presented in this study.

The ten undergraduate women participating in this study mirror the type of heterogeneity one might expect to find in a state-funded university system. The data show that each woman has her own personal literacy autobiography. Together they represent differing levels of socio-economic status, educational experiences, places of residence, academic attainment, and world views based on lived experience. Nevertheless, despite these distinctions, their collective story is demonstrative of the story of undergraduate, Black women, 18 to 24, in

predominantly white universities as corroborated by recently published studies on academic success by Cerri A. Banks (2009) and Rachelle Winkle-Wagner (2009), which are discussed at length later in this chapter.

The following section provides an overview of the participants' responses to the research questions outlined in chapters one and four. It demonstrates how the intersections of language, culture, and power contribute to the construction of social identity/literacy identity and the ways in which the undergraduate woman of African descent views herself as a literate being.

I Can Achieve All Things

1. What are the early literacy development practices of college-age undergraduate Black women?

Based on Lanehart's observation that early childhood literacy experiences strongly impact literacy and language development (2002), my first research question was designed to elucidate how early literacy practices contributed to language development and later literacy development in the lives of the participants. The participants had a variety of literacy practices during their early childhood years.

- Most attended preschool;

- Most had the primary sponsorship of parents or older siblings;

- Some parents provided supplemental aids, such as educational video tapes or Hooked on Phonics;

- Most vernacular literacies practices were taught and supported by older siblings.

All of the women had strong early childhood influences, and more than half specifically mentioned attending preschool. All, except one, seem to have had strong home and parental support and sponsorship. Zena, the participant who maintains that her mother was not interested in her education, at a young age exhibited agency not usually associated with five year olds. She turned to the family pet as a friend who would listen to and require her to read every day. Within the hegemonic structure of her home, where educational support was lacking, she found a unique benefactor. She, in effect, repositioned herself within the social hierarchy of her home to elevate literacy practices as she created new identities as a reader but also a friend and caregiver to the family pet. Here there is a distinct connection among literacy, culture, power, and identity (Maybin, 2000).

At an early age, these women exhibited both agency and creativity. Several of the participants were not only decoding and encoding text at an early age, but, by age 7, Khalida and Amy actively were engaged in writing stories during their free time outside of the classroom. By middle school, a third, Zena, was writing short stories in collaboration with a friend, an activity which began in a mathematics class out of boredom and blossomed into a writing competition out of class. All of these women were early readers and are today articulate young adults. All three continue to write for leisure, and two describe themselves as writers. Both write every day. Zena is writing a young adult novel, Amy short stories and poetry.

2. How do undergraduate Black women view themselves as literate beings in the 21st century?

Overall, the participants' definitions and views of literacy recognize the complexity of literacy as a number of studies suggest. (Brandt, 2001; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Moje & Luke, 2009.)

- The women generally think of themselves as strong, intelligent, independent, and supportive of others;

- Literacy is considered essential to their lives and individual development;

- Literacy is viewed as a legacy to be passed on to others to help them enhance their lives and the lives of others.

- The women recognize that they have literacies beyond the technical skills of reading and writing

In describing themselves, the women exhibit a strong sense of sisterhood, family, and community. References were made to being supported and being supportive of literacy/literacies. The participants clearly see themselves as empowered by literacy, and some consciously resist negative stereotypes associated with their generation via the media as partiers or slackers.

This empowerment is evidenced in the manner in which the women position themselves as "learned," "intelligent," "ambitious," "determined," "outspoken," and "strong." These women use language and literacy/literacies practices to carve out spaces for themselves in oppressive situations, whether in the classroom, work place, or internal conflicts brought on by life situations (Richardson, 2002). More than half of the participants have a "passion" or "love"

for a communicative practice—performing arts, music, poetry writing, and reading. Through poetry and spoken word, fiction, journal writing, music and dance, they have resisted racism, dealt with feelings they were otherwise unable to express, and maintained some sense of balance in their lives. Amira's reference to writing poetry and performing spoken word during her high school years when she was experiencing overt racism is evidence of this. She specifically wrote about things that "especially affected the community, the Black community, and then women, like…any kind of oppression, racist things… [and] things… that dealt with …independence [and] self-expression." Expressing a similar sentiment, Jamila noted, "Writing keeps me sane... When I don't have anyone to talk to, I can write it down and vent. If I didn't have that, Lord knows what I'd be into… I have no idea what I'd being doing." These women have developed critical literacy skills outside of the classroom to "protect and advance themselves" in a racialized, genderized, and sexually exploitative society (Richardson, 2002, p. 680.)

Their literacy autobiographies vary, but the mother tongue concept is evident as most of the women point to a female figure, their mother or an older sister, as a major sponsor of their early literacy practices (Brandt, 2001; Lanehart, 2002; Richardson, 2002). Other childhood sponsors were fathers, brothers, grandparents, other relatives, and a family pet. As the participants matured, sponsorship naturally extended outside of the home to educators, friends, and organizations. Often the development of vernacular literacies, music, sports, games, and card-playing was sponsored by male figures.

The theme of literacy as life points to the essential nature of literacy, not only in the participants' roles as students, but also as thinking individuals. For all of these young women, literacy is an important aspect of their identity. As Collins (1995) observes, we live in a stratified society that has elevated formal education in a structured school environment and discredited vernacular or out-of-school literacies. Therefore, given the status placed on reading and writing in our society and that all of the participants are actively pursuing higher education, their reference to reading and writing as literacy in their conversations and/or written statements was not a revelation. However, the recognition of other literacies by three-quarters of the participants is significant. Among the literacies they mention are mathematical, technological, artistic, rhetorical, musical, culinary, and athletic. Further, they recognize that the literacy practice of reading and writing may be connected to other types of literacy or literacies and should not be isolated (Gee, 1991, 1996; Richardson, 2002; Street, 1993, 2003).

The participants recognize literacy as a marker of a level of achievement and a vehicle to achieve their desires and goals. This association of literacy with success is evidenced in language such as "making a contribution to society," being self-sufficient," and "being of value to the community." Although their definitions and views on literacy vary, they are marked by the common themes of literacy as a legacy; literacy affects life and the interpretation of life; literacy is life-changing; and literacy empowers one to have a positive impact upon society. Literacy has enabled these women to grow and continue growing. It is linked to opportunity and accomplishment. Literacy has allowed the participants to

venture out into the world to explore, to make connections, to recognize that learning extends beyond the classroom, and for each "to walk with her head high knowing she can achieve all things" (Amy).

Their narratives also reveal that all of the women exhibited features of AAL or their native patois; nevertheless, all are relatively competent in spoken and written "Standard English." Although some of the participants placed in pre-college level English courses, none seems to have the low-literacy esteem displayed by participants in Lanehart's study (2002). All are confident about achieving their goals. Their written statements demonstrate varying degrees of rhetorical competence, suggesting different levels of language use and regenerative learning (Royster, 2000).

The discursive identity as defined by Gee (2000-2001) varies for each participant; however, collectively they display the Black women linguistic features of strength, directness, and confidence (Houston, 1997; Troutman, 2002). The oral tradition is apparent in the narrative quality of our conversations, and all of the women seem comfortable code switching/style switching between "Standard English" or the Language of Wider Communication (Smitherman, 2006) and AAL. Individually, most of the women identify with their culture first, while others identify themselves as women first, but all have voluntary affinities or group identities with Black culture through attendance of Black churches; reading books, magazines and news services that are directed to a Black audience; and participation in clubs and organizations that have missions related to people of African descent. Thus, all have shared practices and beliefs (Gee 2000-2001).

3. How do Black undergraduate women use literacy in their daily lives?

- All read on a daily basis;

- All read for leisure purposes;

- Approximately half of the women write for leisure purposes;

- All use technology;

- All engage in vernacular literacies.

All of the participants read for academic purposes. All read for leisure when time permits, but they read to varying degrees. Almost half of the participants might be considered avid readers as they read between two and five books a month for leisure even while classes are in session. Some actually set goals of reading a book a week during the summer, while others describe themselves as a "selective reader," someone who reads on a "random basis," and as reading more when they were younger without so many responsibilities. They read Black literature, mystery, suspense, urban fiction, fantasy, horror, inspirational writing, autobiography, biography, and the Holy Bible. However, one-third clearly prefer popular literature, such as urban fiction, suspense, and fantasy.

About one-third of the participants read online newspapers and or news services daily. Nearly all of the participants read magazines regularly. The most frequently mentioned magazines were *Essence, Ebony,* and *People***.**

All of the participants write for academic purposes. Almost half of those consider themselves research-oriented and integrate research into academic exercises even when it is not part of the assignment. Only two participants

mentioned a dislike of writing, and one of those used to write poetry in her leisure time, so it may be that she was considering academic writing when she stated she did not like writing.

There is no direct correlation between leisure reading and leisure writing. All of the participants write text messages and/or email daily. Beyond email and text messaging, more than half of the participants write during their free time. Almost all of them write poetry, fiction, or journal entries daily. Of these, less than half consider themselves avid readers.

All of the participants who write during their free time have laptop computers; however, half of them actually keep paper notebooks or journals which they carry with them to jot down thoughts or ideas, and one indicated that she has occasionally pulled her car over to the side the road to record her thoughts. About half of those who write for leisure also note ideas on the computer either in a separate file or as a video journal.

Nearly all of the participants currently write poetry or have written poetry in the past. One-third have written or currently write short stories. Nearly half of the participants engage in collaborative writing projects during their leisure time. With the exception of one participant, who is writing a book, all of those who write for leisure prefer to write by hand. They generally feel the process is more "natural."

All of the participants use computers for academic writing, research-related projects, and emailing professors. When writing essays, more than half of them complete the writing process from prewriting through revision on the computer. The remaining participants complete some portion of the process on

paper--prewriting, outlining, writing--before typing the essay for submission. All the participants use the Internet for research. About half specifically mentioned the use of PowerPoint for presentations.

When used for non-academic activities, computers are used for a variety of purposes. All of the participants use the computer for personal email, some with greater frequency than others. One-fifth use it for email, minutes, and other matters related to church and organization affiliations. All use it for Internet browsing and research in areas of interest, such as cooking and dance. Half of the participants download and listen to music. Other activities mentioned include reading online newspapers and news service sites, watching television programs, and one participant, who is diabetic, records her blood sugar statistics, which are sent to her medical professional.

Text messaging seems to be the communication method of choice. Only two participants describe their text messaging frequency as "too much" or "a lot." All of the participants except, Amira and Zena, prefer text messaging to email. Amira likes instant messaging because it is easy to insert hyperlinks, and there are more characters which allow the writer to express emotion. Zena does texting, but is concerned with punctuating her slang. Zena also seems partial to email. She has an email buddy or pen pal she met on Yahoo Questions, and they communicate frequently.

All of the participants seem to be technologically literate although two say they do not consider themselves computer literate despite their functional knowledge of computers. Some have all of the commonly used devises:

computers, mp3 players, and cell phones.   Some have two, a cell phone and a computer, although many cell phones have the technology of all three.

Most of the participants have formal training in instrumental music or dance, and all are strongly influenced by music. They listen to various artists on their computers or mp3 players as a daily literacies practice. They listen to many genres, but particularly Black music genres such as rhythm & blues, neo-soul, soul, hip-hop, reggae, jazz, and gospel. Two participants also teach dance and are currently active in dance groups.

Most participants belong to or are affiliated with Black churches and at some point during our conversations referred to their spiritual life and or membership in a Black church either directly by noting that they were involved in church activities, such as singing in the choir, liturgical dancing, acting in plays, etc., or by reading the Bible.

4. Does double-consciousness apply to the non-academic and or academic lives of Black undergraduate women? If so, how does this affect their literacy practice?

- All of the participants experience double consciousness (DuBois 1903/ 1967) in relation to their social and academic lives. Double consciousness refers to the conflicting feelings that arise from the duality of being a person of African descent and being an American and the need to navigate the two identities.

- Double consciousness does not appear directly to affect their literacy practice.

As noted in the sections on discursive identity, code switching is a common feature of the participants' style. The movement back and forth between "Standardized English" and AAL is representative of two world views or identities, that of the mainstream, broader culture and that of people of African descent (Gee, 2001; Richardson, 2003). All of the participants recognize double consciousness as a factor of life for people of African ancestry living in the United States. In fact, most of the participants recognize multiple consciousness in that culture, gender, class and national origin or place of birth for those who immigrated to the United States also are factors contributing to their world views. All of the women experience these conflicting notions of identity, double consciousness or multiple consciousness, and most have experienced some racial bias; nevertheless, it seems only to have heightened their resolve to achieve their goals.   "I don't let it get to me or deter me from all I want to do" (Zalika). These young women are, in fact, displaying agency in not allowing these conflicting levels of consciousness or racism to define them adversely (Banks, 2009; Richardson, 2002; Winkle-Wagner, 2009).

The majority of participants identifying with Black culture over womanhood is significant; however, identity is dynamic, fluid, and shifting based upon acts of performance (Bucholtz, 1999; Kucer, 2005; Mahiri & Godley, 1998; McCarthey & Moje, 2002). This divergence by two participants in privileging gender over culture and one participant's inability to respond may be explained by Henderson's argument in "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman's Writer's Literary Tradition," which discusses the intersection of

race and gender or "racial difference within gender identity and gender

difference within racial identity" (1990, p. 117). She addresses the complexity of

being a woman of African descent in that we are not only the "Other of the Same,

but also the other of the other(s)" (p. 118). Thus our lived social, historical, and

cultural realities create a complex Black female subjectivity.

What then is significant about the participants' self-identification is that all

the women strongly identify with Black culture as evidenced by their affinities for

culturally-related reading material, music, and group affiliations, which suggests

the significance of culture in their literacy development. They read books by

Black authors and or magazines and websites written for Black audiences; have

artifacts in their homes and or have shared artifacts that depict Black culture,

such as books, photographs, posters, masks, drawings, original stories, etc.

(Berg, 2007; Hodder, 2000). Their voluntary participation in this study is evidence

that they self-identify as people of African ancestry as well as their commentary

on double consciousness.

Implications

Broadly, the implications for this study relate to society and how the

dominant power structures of society view the less powerful. The fundamental

tenets of American institutions, including its educational system, are based on

the values and beliefs of the dominant society. This research in part adds to the

many voices which clamor for educational and social equity.

The essence of these narratives of women of African descent is relevant

to all people, especially to those in education. In 2011, we are at a moment in

time when society in general has a greater sensitivity to the needs and cultures of various groups. Thus, it is important to understand the culture, language, and beliefs of a group which has been historically marginalized. This is a group who currently make up 16% of the higher education undergraduate population (U. S. Department of Education, 2009) and whose members often face challenges pursuing a higher education because of inequities in school resources, academic preparation, and socio-economic status. These factors are often compounded if attending predominantly white colleges and universities, where race and gender may contribute to social and cultural alienation (Banks, 2009; Winker-Wagner, 2009; and Wolf-Wendell, 1998).

Two recent studies related to Black women in college corroborate or supplement research on undergraduate women of African descent. The women's descriptions of themselves (in this study) as intelligent and strong are consistent with those studies which address the negotiation skills that Black women must hone to be succeed in higher education. They suggest that if serious change is to take place in higher education in addressing what Ladson-Billings calls the "education debt," it has to occur on all levels of society as well as educational policy and administration. *Black Women Undergraduates, Cultural Capital, and College Success,* by Cerri A. Banks (2009), is a qualitative study which focuses on Black women's social and academic success in higher education even as they come to college with varied forms of "cultural capital[29]." She argues that their use of "sociological imagination" (Mills, 1959) as the intersection of history, biography, and society, enables the women to make connections between

themselves, their culture, and societal and historical situations which affect them

individually and collectively. Consequently, it facilitates their understanding of

their place in society and the world. This knowledge of power relationships

informs the lived experiences of these Black women. It enables them to

recognize the cultural capital (negotiation skills, persistence, resilience, and a

desire to succeed) they bring with them to higher education, and consequently

enhances their abilities to develop strategies for academic success. Banks

concludes with a need for institutional policy change; faculty, staff, and student

training; and classroom practice change in a move toward educational equity.

The Unchosen Me: Race, Gender, and Identity among Black Women in

College, by Rachelle Winkle-Wagner (2009), is a sociological, theory-based

study examining the college experience of Black women and the ways in which

their triplex identity is consistently challenged in the predominantly white

university setting. Winkle-Wagner's theory of The Unchosen Me recognizes

DuBois' theory of double consciousness discussed and experienced by the

participants in this study. The Unchosen Me theory provides an alternative model

to address social inequities outside the academy and how they influence the

experience of Black women in the academy. It deals with the process of

accepting various identities. Essentially, Winkle-Wagner's research suggests

that, in accepting ways of thinking, acting, writing, and speaking to navigate the

institution of higher education successfully, women of African descent on some

level must disassociate from their past and their culture. Consequently, full

assimilation into the culture of the academy means giving up some part of one's

self. She concludes with suggestions not only for institutional support structures, but town support which creates "a welcoming environment for underrepresented groups" to help lessen the "culture shock" on and off campus (p. 163); and state and national support structures to continue to provide early intervention programs (starting in middle school), mentoring programs, supplemental academic programs, and need-based financial aid programs.

While these studies consider Black women undergraduates on college campuses and navigation of the higher education system to achieve academic success, my research differs in that it specifically examines the off-campus or out-of-school literacy/literacies practices of undergraduate Black women. The former place an emphasis on changing administrative policy and general academic and social support, while my research emphasizes enhancing pedagogy in the English Studies classroom. However, based on the participants' narratives and my own experiences as a undergraduate and graduate student, as previously noted, the conclusions of both studies suggest some commonality with this study.

In literacy studies scholarship, multiple literacies and the connections between out-of-school literacy practices and in-school literacy practices have been acknowledged since the 1980s. Courage observes that non-academic literacies can prepare students to make easier transitions into acquiring academic literacy (1993). He specifically mentions the Black church as a context where literacy practices involving language usage, attitudes, and conceptions about reading, writing and communication are translatable to the English Studies

classroom. This is no surprise as the Black church has always been a sponsor of literacy and literacy learning (Jones, 1974; Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990). Brandt also notes the influence of the Black church in providing "links among faith, moral uplift, educational improvement, and self-determination" (2001, p. 123) for African American participants in her study of literacy (also see Appendix D, Lou's Literacy Journal, 8/5/08 and 3/15/10). This is significant as most of the women participating in this study were connected with a church and engaged in church-sponsored literacy/literacies practices. They mentioned various activities, i.e., reading scripture, public speaking, singing, acting, dancing, signing, writing, and sharing poetry. As discussed later, English Studies faculty should consider designing assignments which allow students the opportunity to draw on literacies and skills developed outside the classroom.

It is vital that teaching faculty recognize that 21st century women of African descent, even those born in the United States, do not necessarily see themselves as a part of mainstream American culture. Without regard to socio-economic status or level of academic attainment, repeatedly the participants made reference to an outsider status: "I don't think I have ever considered myself … in the American culture," "yeah, still an outsider within," "I can hang out with them. I have fun with them, but I don't really feel like I belong with them." The question then becomes what kind of pedagogies we should, must develop in teaching literacy, language, and discourse. When a student is the only person or one of a few persons of color in a classroom, what strategies do we develop to keep her from feeling like an outsider? How do we help her negotiate a safe

space where her presence, ideas, and experiences are valued? Moje and Lewis

(2007) argue an important construct in literacy learning is:

> that one's subjectivity and the identities one enacts be recognized and
>
> accepted as valid and worthwhile, even when they conflict with those
>
> subjectivities and identities typically built into the learning space.
>
> Opportunity to learn also requires that participants have space and
>
> support for agentic action, that is, that learners have opportunities to make
>
> and remake themselves, their identities, their discursive toolkits, and their
>
> relationships on the basis of the new ideas, practices, or discourse
>
> learned through their participation in a learning activity. (p. 20)

Further, the participants' perception of themselves as outsiders corroborates that

diverse demographics do not necessarily ensure diverse classroom spaces. As

Kynard and Eddy (2009) suggest, despite their diversity, many higher education

institutions still function as "white spaces … forcing students [in particular Black

women] to continually negotiate their college education—reading, writing, and

connecting to communities on and off campus—as a relationship to uninterrupted

whiteness" (p. 41).

To mitigate this condition, the first step, then, is that English Studies

faculty must accept and value the diverse experiences of young Black women as

valid frames of reference for the students' lived experiences. We must be

cognizant of the interaction between our individually culturally-shaped literacy

practices and those of our students (Irvine, 2006). We must break down the

practice of privileging certain kinds of experiences which are consistent with the

dominant culture or lifestyle as valid, while denigrating those which are not compatible as invalid. Heath's classic study, *Ways with Words,* distinguishes students who come from middle-class environments and have been socialized in ways which help them better integrate into the school setting and culture, while students from working-class environments are socialized in ways that bring greater challenges. The former may be better prepared based on the values and social prescriptions of the dominant community, but its lived experiences are simply different, not better. The teachers of the children from the working-class backgrounds had to be open and innovative to find ways to facilitate the transition of these students into the structured classroom setting.

In higher education, we should have a similar mission. We must expand our concept of cultural capital beyond the readily accepted academic codes that highlight a combination of strong educational resources, academic skills, linguistic and cultural knowledge bases (Banks, 2009), and accept vernacular literacies, such as music, spoken word, or African American discourse, as a frame of reference which can be used as a conduit or link to academic literacy. Writing or other related literacies that take place outside the classroom during a student's free time also should be considered valuable and be incorporated into the classroom experience whenever possible. I subscribe to a critical literacy pedagogy that is student-centered and encourages students to question and critique disparities in various social contexts. Other English Studies faculty may have a different approach. However, generally I believe that "a pedagogy is successful only if it makes knowledge or skill achievement while at the same time

allowing students to maintain their own sense of identity" (Gilyard, 1991).

Consequently, I am less interested in dictating that all faculty should teach a

particular model than in advocating that students need to be able to learn in an

"oppression-free" space that allows them to maintain some sense of self.

One way in which I attempt to do this is to validate the life experience of

my students by developing an assignment that allows them to self-identify. The

assignment is intentionally vague to allow students as much latitude as possible

to be creative. So, for example, in my literature classes and higher level

composition classes which are taught as writing about literature classes, I include

an activity called the literary cultural exchange. The parameters change

depending on the course content, so for my Women in Literature course, it must

be a work by a woman; in my Black Literature course, it must be a work by a

person of African ancestry; in my International Literature course, it must be a

work by a person of the student's ethnic background; and in the upper level

composition class, it can be a work by anyone as long as it represents the

student's culture, however, she chooses to define "culture." It may be ethnic,

linguistic, generational, etc. If students write, they may share their own work.

Generally I do not approve presentation topics in advance although I answer

questions if students raise them. My only requirements are a time limit, a short

written statement, a translation if the work is in a language other than English,

and no explicit language or profanity (see Appendix C). It is during these

presentations that I often see an attribute of a student that does not appear

during regular class discussions. An extremely shy student opens up, as was the

case with Jamila when she did a video presentation on Lauryn Hill; a Senegalese student who is "not very comfortable with English" exuberantly reads a poem about the love of her country in her native language; a student shares a poem she wrote on Blackness dedicated to Michael Jackson and other recently deceased entertainers accompanied by a photographic PowerPoint; a student does a presentation on gospel music and ends with a riveting solo.

The literary cultural exchange not only allows self-definition to occur but facilitates knowledge making as well. It expands the learning experience for the presenter, for her classmates, and for me, the instructor, as part of the community of learners. It expands the learning experience for the presenter on a personal level as well as on an academic level. It expands the learning experience for her classmates as they are exposed to different points of view and come to enhanced understandings of the identity and literacy/literacies practice of the presenter as spontaneous discussions ensue. Often authors or works are introduced with which I am not familiar or am unable to include on the course schedule due to time restraints. This assignment allows the class community exposure to a more diverse learning experience than I alone can provide as the presentations are made throughout the semester, usually at least one presentation a class period. It contributes to an open atmosphere in which critical inquiry as well as self-affirmation takes place.

This idea of being counter-hegemonic also applies in research and scholarship. Ball and Lardner suggest that English Studies faculty committed to changing or transforming pedagogy "must challenge themselves to critically

reflect on, analyze, and change the communication patterns through which literacy is practiced." They contend that the vision contained the 1974 National Council of Teachers of English/Conference on College Composition and Communication resolution, "Students' Rights to Their Own Language" has not been realized as a basic pedagogical practice. "Indeed efforts to incorporate it stand out for this reason" (2005, p. 192). Efforts such as the literary cultural exchange and Courage's study connecting non-academic literacies with academic literacies (1993) mentioned above which allow students to identify culturally and linguistically move toward fulfilling this vision. Research also should include figurative and physical "alternative" learning spaces, such as an Afrocentric writing course (Richardson, 2003), an autobiographical/photography course (Wissman, 2005) and community–based organizations (Ball and Lardner, 2005).

Further, English Studies academics must monitor their attitudes about language and language use and be ever cognizant of cultural attitudes and the mother tongue concept (Richardson, 2003). That is why I made a decision early in my research to transcribe the recorded interviews verbatim, hoping to preserve the essence of our conversations as closely as possible and to allow the women to speak for themselves in their own voices. This seemed a natural choice as orality and the oral tradition are significant features of African American culture. There is no need to "translate slang and vernacular into standard English in order to highlight the content rather than the style of respondents' speech" (Devault, 2004, p. 240) as style is a meaningful expression of language and identity in

Black America (Smitherman, 1977/1985, Spears, 2007, Troutman, 2002).

Additionally, as a researcher/participant in the process, I felt the need clearly to

distinguish between the participants' voices and mine and to avoid exerting too

much authority as a "translator" or "interpreter" of their speech. Since this is a

study about language, culture, power, and out-of-school literacies practices, it

seemed logical to portray the speech of the participants, who have no trouble

articulating their ideas, as naturally and accurately as possible without regard for

the dominant ideology of academia, which dictates "Standard English" as the

speech of choice and generally devalues other language varieties.

Although the pre-eminence of Standard English is widely contested

among linguists, people of African descent, and other people of color, it is,

nevertheless, the perceived marker of credibility and achievement by the

dominant culture, and many people of African descent have recognized it as

such since the period of American enslavement when freed slaves took on the

language of the oppressor as proof of status. This study does not negate that

status, but rather it is a recognition that "a switch in language style or code does

not presume a Black woman is incompetent in Standard English but … in the

course of everyday talk, may choose not to speak Standard English as a means

of marking and asserting identity across cultural worlds" (K. D. Scott, 2002, p.

54). Consequently, to enrich the area of English Studies further, research must

remain sensitive to the portrayal of authentic Black women's speech as a marker

of identity (Gee, 2001; Lanehart, 2002, Richardson, 2002; Smitherman, 1977).

To Be Black, Female, and Literate: Literacy Identity among Undergraduate Black Women is a little literacy narrative. This narrative examines literacy practices in local settings and theorizes about those practices. However, it does not make claims "to be valid for literate [women of African descent] in general or [African American] culture in general. Rather, it assumes that literacy is multiple, contextual, and ideological…. [*To Be Black, Female and Literate*] presents many truths about literacy, no one Truth about it…" (Daniell, 1999, p. 403). Implicit in this description and positioning is the expectation of more little narratives of literacy on undergraduate women of African descent. This study's depiction of the literacy identity of undergraduate Black women raises particular questions of interest. Perhaps, future studies will focus on a specific literacy practice, such as language use, non-academic writing, or technology and the use of multiple texts types and media, areas of interest to many 21st century English Studies academicians.

Here I Am: Reflections

The dissertation process has been a journey for me. My travel route has not been linear or on an express highway. Rather, I have taken the scenic or local route with many of life's distractions and stops along the way. This study from the outset has been personal. It has obliged me look at myself as an African American woman who is also an academic and a doctoral candidate and to negotiate the tensions among these various positions. Thus, at least two voices emerge clearly in this study: the researcher (objective) and the participant/ researcher (subjective). I continue to acknowledge these competing roles which

have given voice to the Black female undergraduate participants as well as to myself.

I end with an excerpt from a journal entry that I dedicate to the men in my early life, my father and my brother, Eugene and Eugene Arthur, who impacted my literacies practices in ways I had not previously considered before this research project. They, along with my mother, were my first models and sponsors of literacies.

I don't ever remember not having books. Although I clearly didn't come out of my mother's womb holding one, they just seem to always have been there. Maybe my older brother had books--I sensed them. But in my house, there were always newspapers, magazines, the Bible, a set of the classics, and we must have had encyclopedias, although I don't clearly remember [at least I can't visualize] a set before the *World Book Encyclopedia,* which we got when I was in third or fourth grade. We had encyclopedias when I was in preschool or kindergarten, [probably before I was born.] I think, though, that they were the same color and texture, a burgundy rough texture, as other books, and they just seemed to blend in with all the other books that sat on my father's bookshelves above his desk. [My father's grandfather had been a teacher in a one-room school house in North Carolina, and the love of books and learning had been instilled in Daddy from childhood.]   Actually, it was a dark wood desk with a panel that flipped down to write on and book hutch with glass doors above it. Now it would be called an antique secretary desk. Then it was

just Daddy's desk, which I didn't touch. My brother, on the other hand, was four years older and taller than I. [Here is the reason I remember we had encyclopedias.]

One day when my mother had gone out to the store or the unemployment office,.… in his usual teasing manner and storytelling mode, my loving brother made up a story that I was adopted. "I am not," I cried. "I don't believe you." "You are. I'll prove it to you." Then he proceeded go to the encyclopedia and show me pictures of where I came from in Africa, including the tribe. Unfortunately, my brother is no longer alive to confirm these recollections. But they seemed to be pictures of the Ubangi tribe, African women and men with their lips stretched around disks, a fearful sight for an impressionable four-or five year old girl... What is the point, oh yeah, we had encyclopedias in my house, [and from my brother's point of view, they were put to good use.]

Legacies, that is where I was going. For me, the legacy of education [formal and vernacular] was always there. There were always role models, influences, sponsors. There was never a point when I didn't want to learn, never a point when I didn't want to be educated, although I'm not certain I always knew what that meant. Although my parents were working-class, as were all my family members,… we were told that education was the key to success. My mother never told me I had to attend college. She just said, "soon you will need a high school diploma to

scrub toilet bowls." She knew my aversion to too much domestic work

and certainly to monotony; I knew I needed something more.

So… [what] I want to say about legacy [is]… I think the key is that

women, be they mothers, sisters, aunts, friends, feel that need to pass on

something that … no one can take away from you, but not just literacy, but

the ability to think critically, to make meaning of the world. It is what has

been passed on to us by the generations of women before us and what

we innately feel the need to pass on to others. (Lou's Literacy Journal,

7/30/10, Appendix D)

This idea of legacy is central to the literacy views of the participants. We

are models for our siblings, children, nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, and

younger members of the community. We are the conveyors of the literacy

legacy. Just as our foremothers and sisters passed on the tradition to us, we--

Amira, Amy, Kara, Kendra, Khalida, Jamila, Lou, Michelle, Sade, Zalika, and

Zena--pass it on to present and future generations.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

- What is your name? Age? City of residence?
- How long have you lived there?
- How many people reside in your household?
- What is your marital status? Are you single, engaged, married?
- Tell me about your current education. What school do you attend? How long have you been a student there?
- What courses are you currently taking? What courses did you take last semester?
- What are your favorite courses? What are your least favorite courses? Why?
- How do you view yourself as a reader?
- How do you view yourself as a writer?
- Tell me about your early education. When do you remember first learning to read and write?
- Who taught you? How do you recall feeling about those early experiences?
- As a young child, did your parents, guardians, or older siblings read to you? Buy you books? Take you to the library?
- Do you or your parents have any mementoes of your early learning-- story books, report cards, note books, pictures, videos, etc.?
- Tell me about your current reading and writing practices. What kind of reading and writing do you do in school?
- What kind of reading and writing do you do outside of school?
- How does the computer or other technology contribute to your job/home/community (church, social organizations, community groups) reading practices?
- How does the computer or other technology contribute to your job/home/community (church, social organizations, community groups) writing practices?
- Do you prefer writing by hand, using a typewriter, or computer? Why?
- How are your literacy practices different from those of other members of your household?
- How are your literacy practices different from those of your friends?
- How are your literacy practices different from those of other members of your community?
- How do you feel about your academic accomplishments?
- What do your family members think of your academic accomplishments?
- What do your friends think of your academic accomplishments?
- Tell me about skills or talents you may have in other areas related to reading and writing, such as music, spoken word, computer technology, etc.
- Describe yourself. How does literacy relate to your identity?
- Are you familiar with W.E.B. DuBois' *Souls of Black Folk?*
- Do you understand DuBois' concept of double consciousness?
- Do you think it still exists?
- Have you had any experience that exemplifies double consciousness?
- If so, how did it affect you or the situation?
- How do you consider yourself? As Black first or as a woman?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

African American Female Literacy Identity: Language, Culture and Power

You are invited to participate in this study. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

My name is Lou Ethel Roliston, and I am a doctoral student in the English Department at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I would like you to take part in my dissertation research on literacy development and self-identity among college-age African-American women, 18-24 years old. I want to find out how college women view themselves as literate beings.

Participation in this study includes at least one in-depth "conversation" in which I will ask questions about how you practice literacy at home and in the community as well as in school. The interview will take place in your home or other agreed upon place at a mutually acceptable time. It will be audio recorded and should take approximately 90 minutes; a second follow-up interview may be necessary. I will ask you to share any materials, pictures, or mementoes related to literacy and to share two pieces of writing. One will be your earliest memories of learning to read and write, say from pre-school (including home) to the point when you began formal training in elementary school. The other will be on the value of literacy.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study, and you may find the interview reflective and enjoyable. In addition, your participation in the study is expected to help provide a better understanding of the challenges facing young African American women during the 21st century and to suggest ways to better meet their needs in the English Studies classroom.

Any and all information obtained is completely confidential. After the research data is collected, I will save the audio recordings and all notes. In reporting the results of the study, real names will not be used. If this data is used in future studies, your right to privacy will be maintained.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw for any reason. If you participate and later decide to withdraw, contact me or the project director using the information below. Upon your withdrawal, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below.

Researcher:	Project Director:
Lou Ethel Roliston, Doctoral Candidate	Dr. Ben Rafoth,
English Department	Director of Composition/ TESOL
Indiana University of Pennsylvania	English Department
Leonard Hall, Room 111	Leonard Hall, Room 111
421 North Walk	421 North Walk
Indiana, PA 15705-1094	Indiana, PA 15705-1094
201-493-3609	724-357-2263

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (phone: 724-357-7730).

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time.   I have received an unsigned copy of this Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name _____

(Please Print)

Signature _____

Date _____   Phone Number _____

Email _____

Best days and times to reach you

_____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and any possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions and that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

_____   _____

Date   Researcher's Signature

Appendix C

Prof. L. Roliston
LIT 215- Voices in Black America

CULTURAL LITERARY EXCHANGE

On a designated day, you will share a literary selection by a person of African descent. It may be a poem, lyrics, or an excerpt from a short story, novel, or play. You may recite or read the work, or it may be a recording or clip from a film. It may be set to music and may be recited or sung in your native dialect/language. If the work is in a language other than English, please be prepared to translate it. Please avoid using material that contains profanity or explicit language.

You may use original work if you write poetry, fiction or drama. Submit in writing to me and be prepared to explain to your classmates why the work you have chosen is important, how it represents your culture and why you chosen it. (Culture is being broadly used; it may be ethnic, linguistic, generational, etc.)

The presentation should be four to seven minutes. It will receive a grade, and points will be deducted if the written material is not handed in, a translation is not available, or the material does not generally relate to literature.

If you have any questions or special equipment is required, such as a CD player, tape recorder, or VCR, please advise me.

Prof. L. Roliston
lroliston@ncc.edu or
Engprofrollie@yahoo.net
201-123-4567, L333

Appendix D

Selected Literacy Journal Entries

6/14/07

Culture and Power

What seems to be critical for me is to write in my journal [as I said] earlier. I seem to be stuck—no that's not accurate. I am rethinking, again, my approach to the big D. Yes, it is in fact D and d because writing a diss in itself is a culture. It's a system of behavior and practice that comes with its own set of rules. And I think by not having fully immersed myself in it yet, I haven't made it to Indiana yet, I, in fact, seem to be rethinking everything. Okay that's probably an exaggeration. But if I look at all my journal ideas, in fact, I think I'm moving away from a focus on the classroom. That may be okay. It's just that I have not been able to think the whole thing through.

I did look at my latest draft [proposal] and cut out some of the education stuff. I'm mixing up the A[frican] A[merican] female thing with the female thing— of course it's double consciousness [or triple consciousness]. It's also about power. How do I view myself? I'm a part of the dominant establishment, but not a part of the establishment. When I look in the mirror, I don't see myself as a power broker, but in fact I am. At least in the classroom, my students certainly see me that way. I'm in a thorough state of confusion at the moment, certainly the various domains all have power constructs – North City [Community College], the classroom, the [English] department, home, and each has a specific culture and literacy practice. No wonder I feel like a chameleon.

8/5/08

The Black Church (1)

There is something about the Black church experience that is real and clearly cultural. New City Gospel Fellowship [church] is multicultural and I suppose contemporary. I find their services generally spiritually fulfilling, but every once and a while I need the music, the familiarity of the Black church.

In both there is reading of scripture and a sermon. In both there is music. But in First Baptist, the music is that which I grew up on. There are hymnals, but most of the songs sung are songs which I know by heart. In New City, there are no hymnals, but the words are projected on a screen. Some of the songs I'm familiar with because they have been recorded commercially, others because I've been there frequently enough that I recognize them, others I simply follow the words on the screen.

Here [at First Baptist], there is a certain type of literacy. I'm reminded of illiterate slaves who memorized passages from the Bible—not only slaves. This occurred during the 20th century I am certain. But the point is that you hear someone read something to you so frequently that you begin to remember it.

It also occurs to me that very little call and response happens at New City. That is definitely cultural. But worship is personal, so therefore, there must be a cultural element. I suppose I bring my culture with me. I don't think I do anything different there than I do at First Baptist.

So church literacy involves what you recognize as the culture of a particular institution. New City doesn't have any kind of litany on a regular basis and no set ritual or order of service. But there are the basic elements—prayer,

music and singing, sermon, announcements. I've never taken communion there; it's a separate service.

There definitely seems to be more of a communal feeling in the service at First Baptist. I wonder what accounts for this. Is it my own personal affinity or comfort zone, or is it real?

9/23/08

Advanced Training for Womanhood

Eugene, my older brother was special. I believe, next to my mother and father, he had the largest influence on my very early literacies practices. Four years my senior, until I got to be around 5 years old, whatever he did, I wanted to do. If he read, I wanted to read. If he practiced writing or was drawing, I wanted to do so as well. At age six, he taught me to play Black jack during our biweekly outings to visit our uncle who lived out of state. I had not yet mastered addition and subtraction, so in addition to learning the card symbols and their values, I enhanced my mathematical skills.   That same year, I learned to play checkers. He was so bright, and often I think what a difference he could have made in the world because he was so much brighter than me, and look what I have achieved.

He was both my love and my nemesis. We fought, as my father used to say "like cats and dogs." Often it was because as my older brother he felt he had the authority to tell me what to do. But I being independent at a very early age, I had a mind of my own, and did not always go along with his program. I don't recall who struck the first blow. I like to think it was him; at least I'm 90% certain it was him, but there is no one to confirm that since and he and my parents are

all deceased. Nevertheless, I managed to be his somersault partner when we were doing acrobats on my parents' bed, his blackjack opponent on the way to visit Uncle Sam, his checker opponent when there was nothing else to do and eventually his monopoly and bid swish opponent as well as purchaser of his favorite music when I saved money from my allowance.

3/15/10

The Black Church (2)

I wonder why I don't write in the journal when things are fresh in my mind. The evening of the occurrence or the day after would have made this a more effective entry I think.

The revival during Women's Week at Abyssinian brought back memories. As I sat in the balcony pews observing the people around me I noted young children, no, young toddlers, some sleeping and one who had to be taken out because she became restless. There were also older children maybe 8 to teenagers, 15, or 16. The whole experience brought back memories of what I recall as my first visit to Abyssinian. Although it feels as though I was younger, may be around 6, I think I was probably at least 7 because I was there singing with the children's choir of Friendship Baptist Church. It was an evening service, and although I don't clearly remember the message I remember the pastor of the church, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.

I remember asking my mother about him at the end of the service because I thought he was white and it struck me as odd that a white man would be participating in a Black church service. She explained to me that he was just

very light, but that he was a Black man. I understood that clearly because my

great aunt Lula was extremely light with long, straight hair, and I guess could

have passed if she so desired. So what does all of this have to do with literacy?

We are in the service and the program suggests some level of literacy

required to participate fully in the order of service. There is the Call to Worship

and alternate readings by the leader and the people. Then there is the Lord's

Prayer which is recited by all from memory, then the congregational hymn

"Leaning on the Everlasting Arm," #435, and then the litany entitled "Revival." It

is then that I am struck by the cultural flavor, it is clear in the music and the ritual

of the service, but the litany from the *African American Heritage Hymnal*

specifically reads: The pathway to the burning fire and refreshing springs of

revival is faith. We remember that in the antebellum South, American slaves of

African ancestry stole away in the darkness of night to celebrate salvation in

Jesus!

It is then that I begin to take notice of everyone and everything around me.

It is then that I begin to reminiscence. And so the service continues, and during

the scripture reading we are again called upon to read. This time it is to read

along with the sister reading the scripture. And then the revivalist Carolyn Knight

gets up to speak. From her introduction, we know she has 2 masters and a

doctorate. Her sermon is "Built for the Road Ahead." She is a commercial

watcher and is making reference to the Ford commercial. Her message is one of

inspiration and analogous to Christians always being ready for what comes

because God will bring us through. I watch a young boy, maybe ten years old.

He is up on his feet with the rest of the congregation, caught up in the spiritual moment, seemingly understanding the full impact of the message as well as the rhetoric. I think about myself at that age. Yes, his response is real, there is no reason to think that he doesn't understand. I think about Fred, who at age 10 came to the conclusion that pledging alliance to the flag meant putting the country before God. We talked about it. He wanted to write a composition about it for a school essay contest. I encouraged him to do so, but his 5th grade teacher discouraged him saying it was too controversial. I did not challenge her because Fred didn't seem to consider the matter much as she poo pooed on it. I wonder in retrospect if I should have challenged her comment. I don't know. Hindsight is an interesting thing.

6/13/10

Who I Am

I was struck while reading a study about young Black women being the only Black person in class and how that affected their college experience in predominantly white university settings.

While we lived in the south Bronx, I was in a predominantly Black and Latino neighborhood, although I mostly remember Black folks, but the point is that I was living in a "minority" area, but I understood what discrimination was because our church was involved in the civil rights movement. So at PS 23, I was one of many [people of color], and I distinctly remember having a Black teacher in the 2nd grade, Mrs. Anthonasen. She is the only Black teacher I had in grades K-12.

When we moved uptown to the northeast Bronx, we were in a predominantly white area, Jewish and Italian, and Blacks were definitely the minority. I don't clearly remember my third grade class, but I think Selimah was in that class. I was one of a few. I do remember the 4th grade class because that was the class where our teacher, I don't remember her name, asked us to trace our ancestors back as far as we could go. There may have been four or five Black students in the class, and all of us reluctantly, but eventually agreed that our ancestors were African. All except this one boy. He was new in the class. I can see him, but I don't' remember his name. Of all of us, I think he had the most Negroid features. He was from the South. He refused to say that his ancestors were African. It was painstaking, even for nine-year olds. Eventually, I think the teacher gave up because of his adamant refusal. I think his name was Eugene, my brother's name. Any way this was a school where less than 10% of the [student] population was Black.

Eventually I went to JHS 135, Whalen Junior High School, in the school I remained, one of a few, but in my class, I was the only one. All three years in 135, I was the only Black student in my class. I had been placed in a music class. Most of us played string instruments. It was similar to learning communities as they exist now. All of the members of the class stayed together until graduation. It was in this class where I generally got along with everyone but I discovered there was at least one person who did not like Black people, and although he, I assume it was a he, never said anything to me verbally, he was not afraid to express his dislike for Blacks on paper. I have written about this in

another journal. But 135 was a different experience. It was here that all the

Black kids hung out with each other whenever possible. We walked to school

together, ate lunch together if possible, and congregated together after school. It

was here at Whalen where a substitute math teacher used to refer to me as

Smiley. I thought he was poking fun at me because I didn't smile, but years later

found out that Smiley was a demeaning term used to refer to Black folks. It was

in the category with Little Black Sambo.

When I left Whalen, I went to Central Commercial High School which was

well integrated. Here I felt I was one of many as there were a number of Blacks

and Latinos in the school.

When I left CCHS, I went to Baruch College. At the time, it was the

business school of City College. I was one of a few in the college, and the only

one in all of my classes, This eventually changed a little when more Blacks

entered the school, but we were still the minority no matter how you looked at it.

Then to NYU. I was the only one in most of [my] classes. Occasionally,

there might be two of us depending on the class, but usually just me.

The same at Rutgers. And yes, the same at IUP.

I think I didn't feel uncomfortable being the only Black because that had

been my history for most of my academic career. Until IUP, I didn't feel any need

to speak for the race, and even there that was not always the case except to say

we are not a homogenous group.

I accepted the prescriptive curriculum of the dominant group because that

was all I had ever known in the academic setting. I knew to find out about my

history and culture, I had to read and research on my own.   I remember doing a

paper on Langston Hughes' and "A Dream Deferred" in freshman composition.

My professor was not familiar with Langston Hughes. I was not surprised. Black

writers were not a part of the canon, and although I might have been a better

student if I could relate to the content in many of my classes, particularly English

classes, it never crossed my mind that I was not being served because being the

only Black in my classes for such a long length of time suggested to me that

education was not about me, it was about the dominant group in the class. I

simply benefitted because I could not be taught differently than everyone in the

class.

7/30/10

Legacies

Jessica and I sit in King Buffet talking. The conversation moves from her

dissertation defense to my analysis to what each of us will be doing in the fall.

She will be teaching in China, and I will be back at North City teaching 3 lit

courses and 2 comp classes. She inquiries as to what I do in my lit courses. In

responding I talk about the literary cultural exchange which I do in all my classes.

It's a way for students to identify with the course subject, women, African

Americans, etc. though prose, poetry, song, film, however they choose. The

identity does not have to be ethnic; it could cultural as well.

Identity moves us into this discussion about legacy and heritage and who we are.

I relay a comment Obama made on "The View" when asked why he doesn't

describe himself as multi- racial. He says he came to grips with his African

heritage long ago and decided to embrace it. He sees no reason to use the multi-racial label because in fact America is a mongrel nation. We are all multi-racial; it is just that Black Americans are more in touch with those feelings than white Americans. Jessica relays that she recently discovered that she has a Jewish background on her mother's side. She said she always knew that she was Native American. Her paternal grandmother made certain all her grandchildren knew of their Native American background. However, this was not the case on her mother's side. Based on her sister's research, their great grandmother or maybe great great grandmother was Jewish. So technically since the ethnicity is passed down through the mother, Jessica is Jewish. Interestingly, she has no idea where this will take her. We talked a little bit about how easy it would have been for a Jew to pass. It was simply a new name and disregard for cultural heritage. Somehow we came to the idea of heritage and legacy. Jessica spoke about Emmet Smith and how affected he had been [at] finding that that his great grandparents were slaves.

Why is heritage important? What legacy do we have to pass down? The ideas are connected. People have a natural desire to know from whence they have come, to know their ancestors. People also have a natural instinct to want to pass something on to future generations, be it in the form of money, material possessions, ideas, or culture. For many Blacks, and particularly for Black women, it has been knowledge and the desire to learn.

I don't ever remember not having books. Although I clearly didn't come out of my mother's womb holding one, they just seem to always be there. Maybe

my older brother had books, I sensed them. But in my house, there were always

newspapers, magazines, the Bible, a set of the classics, and we must have had

encyclopedias although I don't' clearly remember a set before the World Book

Encyclopedia which we got when in was in 3rd or 4th grade. We had

encyclopedias when I was in preschool or kindergarten. I think though that they

were the same color and texture, a burgundy leather texture, and they just

seemed to blend in with all the other books that sat on my father's bookshelf

above his desk. Actually it was a dark wood desk that with a panel that flipped

down to write on and book hutch with glass doors above it. Now it would be

could an antique secretary desk. Then it was just daddy's desk, which I didn't

touch. May brother on the other hand was four years older and taller than me.

One day when my mother had gone out to the store or the unemployment office,

I was generally only left with my brother, if my mother would be back in a

relatively short period of time. And of course, my next door neighbor had her ears

and eyes open in case there was too much noise. In his usual story telling mode

and effort to control me, my loving brother made up a story that I was adopted. "I

am not" I cried. "I don't believe you." You are I'll prove it to you." Then he

proceeded go to the encyclopedia and show me pictures where I came from in

Africa, including the tribe. Unfortunately, my brother is no longer alive to confirm

these recollections. But they seemed to pictures of the Ubangi tribe, African

women and men with their lips stretched around disks, a fearful sight for a 4 or 5

year old impressionable girl...   What is the point, oh yeah, we had encyclopedias

in my house.

Legacies, that is where I was going. For me the legacy of education was always there. There were always role models, influences, sponsors. There was never a point when I didn't want to learn, never a point when I didn't want to be educated although I'm not certain I always knew what that meant. Although my parents were working class as were all my family members, the first generation to attend college was my generation, we were told that education was the key to success. My mother never told me I had to attend college; she just said "soon you will need a high school diploma to scrub toilet bowls." She knew my aversion to too much domestic work and certainly to monotony; I knew I needed something more.

So, I'm sure there is something more I want to say about legacy, but I think the key is that women, be they mothers, sisters, aunts, friends, we feel that need to pass on something that as I think I said, no one can take away from you, but not just literacy, but the ability to think critically.

[1] DuBois outlines his theory in the 1903 classic *Souls of Black Folks* that Black Americans experience a "double-consciousness…always looking at one's self through the eyes of others…one ever feels [this] two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals… (p. 3).

[2] Historically, the traditional college student is generally identified as 18-23 or in some cases 18-25; however, in the past two decades there has been much discussion regarding age being the sole factor to consider in determining if a student is a traditional student or non-traditional student. This study is not concerned with that debate, and for purposes of this study I will look at African American women, ages 18-24.

[3] "Standard English" appears in quotation marks as recognition of the "standard English myth" which empowers certain individuals and institutions through the use of language while labeling all other usage as non-standard or substandard. There is no standard spoken English, for language cannot be geographically neutral. The term, in effect, is an oxymoron: based on accents and regionalisms there are varieties of "Standard English" (Lippi Green, 1995: also see Farr, Seloni and Song, 2009).

[4] Dream books were used to help individuals interpret their dreams into three-digit numbers so that they could play "the numbers," an illicit form of gambling popular in urban Black communities from the 1920s – 1960s. From the 1920s – late 1930s before it was taken over by organized crime, the numbers was one of

America's few Black-owned businesses, turning over tens of millions of dollars

every year. A small wager of a dime or less could bring big rewards in a payoff of

600- to -1. Typically, the books provided numbers for everyday occurrences such

as holidays, birthdates, funerals, weddings, anniversaries, etc. See White,

Garton, Robertson, and White's *Playing the Numbers: Gambling in Harlem*

between the Wars, or http://digitalharlemblog. wordpress.com/playing-the-

numbers-the-book/resources/policy-petes-dream-book-1933/ for more

information.

[5] Walker, free-born man of African descent was widely regarded as a

revolutionary during the period. His *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the*

World, modeled the Declaration of Independence, and advocates the right to

armed resistance to slavery. His rhetoric is a precursor to that of Malcolm X in

the 20th century.

[6] Historian Nell Painter suggests that Truth seemed to disdain the print-based

culture and while many fugitive slaves and Black abolitionists, including Fredrick

Douglass, were attempting to master it, Truth resisted. "She did not need to read

in order to know" (1994/1999, p. 104).

[7] This adaptation on some level included the dominant society's acceptance of

the apostle Paul's message "wives submit to our husbands; slaves obey your

master," and the implication of women should be silent in the church (Lincoln and

Mamiya, 1990, p. 276). However, this acceptance did not negate the fact that

Africans had been socialized in a society where women played primary roles in

religious traditions. In African traditional religion, women were priestesses,

queens, midwives, diviners, and herbalists as well as female deities. See *The Black Church in the African American Experience* by C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya for a comprehensive discussion.

[8] Three major slave rebellions were led by enslaved preachers—Gabriel Prossner in 1800, Denmark Vesey in 1822, and Nat Turner in 1831.

[9] Nunley maintains that the concept continues today in "spatialities [such as beauty salons and barbershops] where Black folks go to affirm, negotiate, and reproduce culture, epistemology, and resistance and to find sacred and secular grace" (2007, 229). These are safe spaces which allow Blacks to engage freely in discourse not meant for a public forum, African American hush harbor rhetoric.

[10] See Hildred Roach's *Black American Music* for a discussion of the impact of the oral tradition on music and language rhythms, particularly among Southern Blacks.

[11] Plackin (1982) and Tucker (2006) point out that many canonized male jazz soloists, such as Louis Armstrong, Coleman Hawkins, Sidney Bechet, and Fletcher Henderson accompanied these pioneer blues women, and they helped to make the early recordings of the male jazz greats possible.

[12] Freeman notes that quilting is primarily a woman's world; however, his study indicates there are male quilters. Some learned to quilt from their mothers and others picked up the art on their own.

[13] They discovered that among the Vai people who practice three types of literacy, that each literacy fostered specific enhanced skills. Those who had a

formal education did not display a higher order of thinking, but rather performed better at verbal tasks; those who had formal religious training in Islam performed better on memory-related tasks; and those who wrote in Vai script had greater phonological discrimination.

[14] He uses the term Discourse to distinguish it from language which is often greatly associated with grammar. Discourse with an upper case "D" is language use and all of its cultural and environmental knowledge. His Discourse model projects the idea of an "'identity kit'... complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write" which establishes our "ways of being in the world" (p. 526). Discourses are not taught, they are acquired through social practices or enculturation. We all engage in various types of Discourse which are manifested in performances that integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities… gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. Our home discourse, our first language and early socialization is our initial or primary Discourse. It is the way in which we initially establish a sense of being in the world. As we grow and move beyond the home, we acquire additional or secondary Discourses in the community, church, school, etc.

[15] Note that *The American Heritage College Dictionary* lists sixteen definitions for the word power, of which seven could be applied to language and language use/policy.

[16] In the last decade, this has become particularly evident with the enactment of "The No Child Left Behind Act."

[17] Some researchers, most notably Brandt and Clinton (2002), have expressed concern over too much emphasis being placed on local literacy practices, thereby neglecting the global perspective or impact of literacy as material or "capital" which travels and that its impact lives on beyond localized event.

[18] There are "institutionally sanctioned" A-identities created by businesses, schools, or other institutions which seek to organize groups for specific reasons, i.e., Expressions Black Book Club, learning communities where student cohorts take all their classes together and group collaboration is stressed, or women's fellowship group in a religious setting.

[19] Because of miscegenation, people of African descent are imbued with many hues and varied skin tones. Being of mixed ancestry, some are light enough to "pass" as Caucasian and are able to assimilate into the dominant, mainstream society. In literature and film, there are the examples of Clare Kendry in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929/2002); Sarah Jane Kohner in "Imitation of Life (1933/1959) based on Fannie Hurst's novel *Imitation of Life* (1933); and Patricia "Pinky" Johnson in "Pinky" (1949) based on the novel *Quality* by Cid Ricketts Summer (1946).

[20] For a description of the traditional Black church see Smitherman (1998) or for an extensive discussion see Lincoln and Mamiya (1990).

[21] Among these fine studies are some, such as Harris, Kamhi, and Pollock's *Literacy in African American Communities (2001),* which are interdisciplinary collections of studies exploring aspects of African American literacy. This work, for example, includes studies on early childhood, developmental and adult

literacy by scholars in education, linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and communications sciences and disorders. The researchers examine the political, cultural and linguistic influences on literacy and education; the early literacy practices of preschoolers; contrasts between the practices of African Americans and Caribbean Americans; and the influence of the African American church on academic literacy.   Other individually published studies include Gilyard's "Voices of the Self (1991); Gadsen's "Literacy, Education and Identity Among African-Americans" (1993); Ball's "Text Design Patterns in the Writing of Urban African American Students (1995); Gadsden and Wagner's *Literacy Among African-American Youth* (1995); Lanehart's *Sista, Speak! Black Women Kinfolk (2002);* McHenry's *Forgotten Readers* (2002); Richardson's *African American Literacies (2003);* Moss' *A Community Text Arises* (2003); Belt-Beyan's *The Emergence of African American Literacy Traditions* (2004); and Ball and Lardner's *African American Literacies* Unleashed (2005).

[22] Hip hop culture has been adopted by the mainstream American culture as well.

[23] In the United States, this is a population of blue-collar workers or skilled and semi-skilled workers who differ in values but not necessarily income from the middle class.

[24] Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) were founded specifically to educate Black Americans prior to 1964. Most were founded during the Reconstruction period (1865-1877) following the Civil War.

[25] The phrase "God helps those who helps themselves" is often quoted as Bible scripture, but in fact does not appear in the Bible. It is most often attributed to Benjamin Franklin's 1757 *Poor Richard's Almanac.*

[26] As this research suggests, and based on my lived experience as a woman of African descent, I recognize that identity is shaped by a number of factors, gender and race being two of those factors. The intent of asking the participants to "privilege" one aspect of their identity above another was to verify their responses to the question on double consciousness and to provide opportunities to revisit the question or refocus the conversation if necessary. As noted in Chapter 4, "Pilot Study," this question was added because the responses to the question regarding double consciousness seemed evasive.

[27] The Fisk Jubilee Singers are a world renowned ensemble of vocal artists who are students at Fisk University in Nashville, TN. Founded in 1866, Fisk was the first liberal arts college established for Blacks after the Civil War. In a fund-raising effort for the financially distressed college the original Jubilee Singers introduced "Negro spirituals" to the world during their first tour in 1871.

[28] Zane is a *New York Times* bestselling author of Black romance/erotic novels. She has written 26 books; is the publisher of Strebor Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster; has a television series on cable TV; and has a book which has been adapted for a motion picture. She is popular among the 20 something generation, and as one participant told me, "Zane is everywhere."

[29] Banks notes Bourdieu's discussion of cultural capital as "tied to power and privilege…in the possession of resources, financial and intellectual, that are not

equally distributed among all members of society, but rather are socially

inherited. Individuals and families most endowed with cultural capital represent

the most powerful societal classes" (2009, p. 15). Thus, many women of African

descent are likely to come to institutions of higher education with non-traditional

cultural capital, such as a lived knowledge of the impact of race, gender and

class resulting in resiliency, and strategy and negotiating skills.