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Unnormal Sisterhood: Girls Of Color Writing, Reading, Resisting, And Being Together

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Abstract

This practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) study explores how a multiracial inquiry group of girls of color mobilized their literacies in service of building solidarity with one another across nondominant differences (Lorde, 2007). The stories and theories of the eight girls in the group, which they named the Unnormal Sisterhood, are centralized in this dissertation in service of adding nuance to conversations about the needs, desires, and brilliance of girls of color. Informed by feminist of color epistemologies (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1983; Collins, 2000; Lorde, 2007), postpositive realist perspectives (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000), sociocultural perspectives of literacy (e.g. Street, 1984), and culturally sustaining/responsive literacy pedagogies (e.g. Ladson Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017), this study inquires into how the writing practices of girls of color and the pedagogies that center them might provide a platform for the development of what I've theorized as "unnormal sisterhood," a new form of sociality produced as girls of color work towards self and group definitions that honor their simultaneous differences and connectedness. Using ethnographic methods, I gathered data including fieldnotes, interviews, focus groups, and artifacts, and utilized in Vivo and thematic coding and analytic memos to unearth findings.

The first finding from this study is that the centralization of girls' narratives, theories, and understandings in literacy curriculum can help girls of color establish important notions of resistant self-love. Their narratives resist dominant and deficitizing discourses and, instead, illustrate their complexity, artistry, and brilliance. The second finding is that as girls of color engage literate activities that allow them to engage in one an others' stories and theories, they can progress towards conceptions and enactments of solidarity that honor difference, thereby allowing them to better understand not only how to fight for their own, but also their sisters' rights and humanity. The third finding is that as girls of color engage in literate activities that center their stories, theories, and ways of knowing, they are able to name and build incisive critiques of systemic oppression.

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UNNORMAL SISTERHOOD: GIRLS OF COLOR WRITING, READING,

RESISTING, AND BEING TOGETHER

Grace D. Player

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the girls and women of color who have filled my life with so much love, so much light, so much power. It is, most especially, dedicated to the girls of Unnormal Sisterhood, who are the creators of this work, the holders of my heart, the inspiration for my fight. This work is in celebration and in love and in care of you.

brilliance and dedication to expanding your mind is inspiring. You are such a model of scholarship. I'm so very thankful that I know you. To O.S., your commitment to justice is one I hope to embody always. I know your words are going to change the world (just plz stop watching Logan Paul). To B.K., my goodness! You inspire me so much to be better, to do better, to learn more, to grow. I cannot wait to see all you do across this lifetime. To E.P., you have been such a gift. Your thoughtfulness, gentle spirit, and subtle humor are such sources of joy for me. I am grateful for all the work you already do in this world and all the work I know is yet to come. M.K., your strength and willingness to be vulnerable make you such a special human being. You have taught me so much about what it means to advocate for peace, to speak up for what's right, and to love your community. F.H., thank you so much for your humor and your ideas. Your commitment to justice is important and I knew it'll take you to great places. J.H., you are truly a unique individual. You have taught me so much about being oneself and staying curious and kind always. J.L., thank you for your spirit. I adore you and am so impressed by your poise, thoughtfulness, and courage. Thank you for the laughter and the brilliance. F.G. (the smaller), our time getting to know each other has been brief, but impactful. You are so full of life, creativity, and thoughtfulness. Thank you for always being present, engaging, and full of life! J.K. you are such an impressive young person. Your ability to articulate and mull over deep ideas is incredible. Your ability to communicate and share is otherworldly! Thank you for always making me think. J.L. (the elder), I miss you and love you, and hold you in my heart always. Your humor and audaciousness are qualities I need more of in my life and I'm so grateful for the time we did get to spend together. A.T., thank you for being a fighter and a caretaker unlike any I've known. I am so inspired by the work you are doing in the world and I am so excited to see what change you impact. A.T. for Prez, 2032?? Daria, thank you for being my Philly mom. You taught me so much about activism, love, and community. And I promise I'll stop cursing so much!! Daby, thank you for your eternal kindness, brilliance, and tenderness. Your advocacy for your family and community are incredible and inspiring. Thank you for all you've taught me and shared with me. Maria K., you are such a joy! I'm so grateful to know you and to learn from the ways you fight for your family and community, never forgetting to remain joyful and full of humor and energy! Maria H., you are truly my hero. Your commitment to justice is so powerful, so meaningful, so important. Thank you for being the mother, warrior, and woman that you are. To all the families and youth at St. Frances, I am grateful beyond belief. You are so much a part of my heart, my soul, my mind, my everything.

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on this academic life, but you stuck with me nonetheless. Thank you for being so much more than I ever dreamed possible in a partner. Thank you for holding me when I needed it, pushing me when I needed it, respecting me, dealing with my messes, making me laugh, feeding me, and giving me a home. Thank you for being my home.

ABSTRACT

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This practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) study explores how

a multiracial inquiry group of girls of color mobilized their literacies in service of

building solidarity with one another across nondominant differences (Lorde, 2007).

The stories and theories of the eight girls in the group, which they named the

Unnormal Sisterhood, are centralized in this dissertation in service of adding nuance

to conversations about the needs, desires, and brilliance of girls of color. Informed

by feminist of color epistemologies (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1983; Collins, 2000; Lorde, 2007),

postpositive realist perspectives (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000), sociocultural

perspectives of literacy (e.g. Street, 1984), and culturally sustaining/responsive

literacy pedagogies (e.g. Ladson Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017), this study

inquires into how the writing practices of girls of color and the pedagogies that

center them might provide a platform for the development of what I've theorized as

"unnormal sisterhood," a new form of sociality produced as girls of color work

towards self and group definitions that honor their simultaneous differences and

connectedness. Using ethnographic methods, I gathered data including fieldnotes,

interviews, focus groups, and artifacts, and utilized in Vivo and thematic coding and

analytic memos to unearth findings.

The first finding from this study is that the centralization of girls' narratives, theories, and understandings in literacy curriculum can help girls of color establish important notions of resistant self-love. Their narratives resist dominant and deficitizing discourses and, instead, illustrate their complexity, artistry, and brilliance. The second finding is that as girls of color engage literate activities that allow them to engage in one an others' stories and theories, they can progress towards conceptions and enactments of solidarity that honor difference, thereby allowing them to better understand not only how to fight for their own, but also their sisters' rights and humanity. The third finding is that as girls of color engage in literate activities that center their stories, theories, and ways of knowing, they are able to name and build incisive critiques of systemic oppression.

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COLOR PEDAGOGY

Introduction

We are the Unnormal Sisterhood: an inquiry group, a coalition, a sisterhood

of Black and Asian girls (and myself, an Asian woman) who gathered together in a

space at the edges of schooling—a space dedicated to us, our flourishing, our

brilliance, our beauty—to write, to play, to laugh, to learn, to dance, to sing, to

grieve, to celebrate, to exist. The Unnormal Sisterhood was the name chosen by the

girls to describe us. It is a name that captures our uniqueness, our sisterly power,

our spirit.

The Unnormal Sisterhood formed in response to a call I put out to girls of

color[1] at their Catholic middle school, St. Frances Cabrini, inviting them to join an

afterschool writing club where their knowledge, stories, and interests would be

centered as we wrote, read, talked, and engaged in social media together (See

Appendix A for recruitment flyer). The girls who opted in were Black and Asian,

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[1] I choose to utilize the terminology "girls of color" despite critiques of it's
limitations as a flattening or over-generalizing term that does not speak to the
specificities of the multitude of ethnic, racial, and cultural identifications that are
lumped together by a term like "girls of color. I will follow the lead of my
foremothers who identify as "women of color," utilizing it as not simply an ethnic or
racial identification, but also a political identification. Aurora Levins Morales (2001)
claims, "This tribe called 'women of color' is not an ethnicity. It is one of the
inventions of solidarity, an alliance, a political necessity that is not the given name of
every female with dark skin and a colonized tongue, but rather a choice about how
to resist and with whom" (pp. 102-103). This term, for me, connotes the
possibilities of solidarity that attends to notions of difference amongst women and
girls of color as politically important.

fairly representative of the overall school population, whose largest population was Black students, followed by Asian, and then Latinx[2] students.

We gathered in the school library under florescent lights that bounced off the bright yellow walls and colorful literacy-themed posters. Around a long wooden table, we congregated—eating, laughing, dancing, singing, talking, arguing, questioning, crying, yelling, whispering, reading, and writing. For an hour and a half after school two times a week, we, The Unnormal Sisterhood, manifested a girl of color space. No boys or men, no white people entered the room without permission once our meetings officially started, standards I set with the principal when I initiated the club. The poems we studied, the art we observed, the videos we watched were all written by girls and women of color. The words, images, songs, laughter, and tears that filled the space were distinctly those of girls and women of color. And, in that space, girls of color were celebrated for their complicated beauty.

A Day in the Unnormal Sisterhood: Acknowledging Emotions, Centering Joy

Let me offer you with a glimpse into the way we were in the Unnormal Sisterhood. In the middle of May, a friend of mine—a Black woman, writer, vlogger, and fellow PhD candidate—came to visit the girls, learn from them, and share some

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[2] I am choosing to describe students with roots in South and Central America as "Latinx" for this paper. Because I did not directly work with students with South and/or Central American heritage for this study, I do not have availability to the terms that they use to describe themselves. Thus, for the instances where this identity does come up, I've chosen the more inclusive "Latinx," following in the footsteps of my colleague, Alicia Rusoja (2017) who worked with activist communities located in the same neighborhood as my research. The community with whom she worked utilized the term "Latinx" to speak back to the masculine dominant "Latino" or the cis-normative "Latina/o," making the term more inclusive to a stratification of intersecting identities.

of her own experiences living as a Black woman in the world, formerly a Black girl in the world. She came prepared to share her experiences as a Black woman writing, vlogging, and studying and theorizing Beyoncé, a point of great intrigue for the girls, particularly Ciara. I invited her as I felt she was such a powerful example of a woman of color who moved through the world engaging deep and important critiques, accomplishing incredible intellectual feats, and centering what she loved in her writing and academic life. She was someone who represented one of many possible futures for the girls.

That day, as she pulled up a poem on her phone to read with the girls, a poem about self-love she had encountered on social media, the principal poked his head in and asked for Ciara to come speak to him. About ten minutes later, she returned. A passage from my fieldnotes reads:

> Ciara had tears in her eyes, she sat down in her seat hard and looking defeated. She said, "He's making it seem like it's my fault!" Her lower lip quivered and her brow wrinkled and she avoided eye contact. I reached out and touched her arm. I asked her what happened. She said it was about [a girl in her class] threatening her. She said she tried to explain to him what happened, but he was treating her like it was her fault, so he wouldn't listen. She said she had explained the story to Ms. X[3] and she didn't really listen, but said she would try to help. She said Mr. Y was the only one who really listened.
> Diamond stood up and walked over to Ciara's end of the table and stood behind her.... Diamond spoke in anger about the whole situation and mentioned that Ms. X wasn't listening to the real story. Ciara's tears broke,

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[3] To further anonymize teachers, who are not part of the direct focus of this study, I will henceforth conflate all the teachers into Ms. X, unless in an anecdote there are more than one teachers involved, in which case I will refer to them as Ms. Y, Mr. Z, and so on. An additional message conveyed by this blinding of teacher identity is that this isn't just about targeting one teacher or another, but implying the importance of the systemic issues of oppression in schools that are embodied by most, if not all teachers, in one way or another.

> one tear from each eye dripping slowly down her face and into her mouth. I
> rubbed Ciara's arm and told her that I would advocate for her in any way that
> I could. I told her that I wanted to be there for her as much as possible. She
> cried, saying that her father was going to get her in big trouble and she didn't
> want that to happen. She talked about the fact that it wasn't fair that
> someone else did this stuff to her and now she was going to suffer. I told her I
> was there to support her and would speak to anyone she needed me to speak
> to support her. I asked her if she wanted to go wash her face and drink some
> water she said yes. Diamond asked if she could go with her. I said of course
> and thanked Diamond. (Fieldnotes, May 10, 2016)

My friend and I sat in contemplation amongst the girls, allowed some of their stories

to pour forth, and shared some of our own. The girls lamented the ways teachers

refused to listen to them.

> [My friend] suggested we do something to energize. She asked if they wanted
> to do yoga or something. Diamond insisted that she share a poem before they
> did. She shared her "Come thanks with me" poem[4]. We then got up and
> started doing a few Yoga poses, all of us laughing as we did silly stretches.
> The girls wanted to dance, so we put on some music. My friend requested the
> Cupid Shuffle. We listened to it and they started to teach me it. The girls
> laughed at us as we goofily danced around the room. We all were doing the
> Cupid Shuffle, but the girls kept on falling into fits of giggles and standing
> aside just leaning into each other and laughing at us, especially Diamond and
> Ciara. Seraphina sat down and watched us, laughing. (Fieldnotes, May 10,
> 2016)

This day in the Unnormal Sisterhood represents so much about how we functioned:

the intergenerational sharing; the exchange of poetry; the validation of emotions;

the vulnerability; the listening; the critiques based in stories; the celebration and

laughter. While we did not dismiss the emotions, the stories, the sometimes painful

truths that the girls shared during the group, we also made sure to make space for

joy, for poetics, for love to burst through the pain, creating a space that helped the

Unnormal Sisterhood understand that their troubles were valid and that their joy

was powerful, healing, and welcome.

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[4] This poem, inspired by Lucille Clifton's "Won't You Celebrate With Me," will be
shared in Chapter 4.

My Autobiographical Connections to This Work

At the root of my desire to create a space like the Unnormal Sisterhood are my own life experiences. I was once a girl of color who lived in a world shaped by white supremacist heteropatriarchy. I am now a woman of color living in a world shaped by white supremacist heteropatriarchy. For me, this work is, in part, the manifestation of many of the passions, struggles, and questions that have arisen from my life experiences. Of particular importance in my research is my identification as a mixed race Asian American woman—the daughter of an ethnically Japanese mother born and raised in Brazil and a white father born and raised in the United States. An examination of both the privileges and the burdens that result from my intersectional identity has shaped my understanding of why I am compelled to do this research.

Analyzing My Solidarity with Other Women and People of Color

Ally Ang (2015), in an essay on the blog *Black Girl Dangerous*, titled "Asian Americans Benefit from Black Struggle and We Need to Start Shouldering the Burden," mirrors some of my own ponderings about my Asian American identity as it connects to my work in the world. This article is an activist call to Asian Americans to realize how many of both their privileges and problems are intimately linked to anti-Blackness. This call is important as it is not uncommon in Asian American communities for members to be complicit in and directly perpetuate anti-Blackness. By acknowledging the ways that Asian Americans are both benefitted by and hurt by anti-Blackness, Asian Americans might more effectively engage in activist work in *true* solidarity with other people of color. Ang defines *true* solidarity

as the involvement in movements of sisterhood and antiracism, especially attuned

to issues of anti-Blackness, as women like Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs did

in the past. Ang ends the article with these words:

> This is my call to action, my plea for us as a community to follow in the
> footsteps of our activist foremothers and to start practicing true solidarity.
> As a light-skinned, mixed race Asian American woman, I am very privileged
> in a lot of ways. One example of my privilege is that when I read about the
> deaths of Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott, or any of the other
> horrifying instances of police brutality against black people, I am outraged
> instead of terrified. I am able to voice my anger, to show up to protests, to
> loudly condemn the racist criminal justice system *because I will not be its next
> victim.* That's why when I see non-black Asian Americans preaching
> solidarity for people of color, I am immediately skeptical. More often than
> not, the term "people of color" is used to silence black voices and to mask the
> specific issues that they face. We have gained so much from the struggles of
> black people; now, it is our turn to help shoulder that burden. (Ang, 2015)

I take this call to action seriously within my own work. I have used my

understanding of the linkages between anti-Blackness and the Asian American

experience as a motivation to form solidarity—solidarity that does not silence or

erase the specificities of experiences across different identities—with the girls of

color involved in the Unnormal Sisterhood and, further, to help them to form

solidarity with one another across their differences.

The Privileges and Burdens of My Transnational Family History

My transnational family history has also played a key role in the

development of my interests. I am born of an immigrant who was born of Japanese

immigrants in her home country of Brazil. My grandmother was pregnant with my

mother on the boat that she, my grandfather, and my mother's two older siblings

took to Brazil from Japan in 1942 to escape the building violence of World War II

and to pursue the rumor of available farmland. She grew up facing rampant racism

and classism, as a poor ethnic and linguistic minority in Brazil. She moved to the United States in her late twenties to pursue what might be considered the "American Dream." There, she met my father, a white, middle class PhD student at NYU, while working the door at a singles' club in New York City. As my father tells it, he found her beautiful, but couldn't identify where she was from. So, he asked if she was Korean, and then gave her his number. As she tells it, "he was fat, but he was white, so I thought he must have money," and, so, she accepted his number.

Underlying this relationship was my father's consistent exoticism of all things and people non-white and non-American coupled with his tight grip on his identity as a WASP. This was a relationship that produced two Asian daughters who were forbidden to learn Portuguese because my father claimed that he feared their mother's tongue would lead to the destruction of his attempts, driven by his obsession with Mexico, to learn Spanish. This was a relationship where my father, with his power as white and as male, was always right, and my mother defended him to her frequently hurt daughters. This was a relationship where my father left my mother as a seventy-year-old woman because she refused to leave the comfort and familiarity of her life in the United States when he wanted to move to a small Mexican town largely inhabited by American expats. It was a relationship where my mother often did what she felt she had to do to survive, what she *thought* she had to do to help her daughters survive, in a home lead by a white patriarch, in a country that seemed to bend to the will of white patriarchs. To me, their relationship and my mother's struggle within it represent a sort of microcosm of systemic racism, sexism, and colonization and the complex ways nonwhite women have been forced

to navigate them. This has influenced my interest in studying how girls of color navigate their complex identities in a world that is so dominated by whiteness and masculinity. I frame my work, in part, as a route toward rejecting these oppressive forces as girls of color see their identities as powerful, dynamic, and counterhegemonic.

My Woman of Color Friendships

This work is also a response to the ways I've found solace and strength in my relationships with girls and women of color over the years. Almost my entire life, I have attended or taught at schools shaped by hegemonic structures and whose student populations are predominantly white. However, I have been incredibly lucky that, within these spaces, I have been able to create havens of my own to be with other women and girls of color to survive, to thrive, to grow.

But it wasn't until high school that I found the magic of such a space, when for the first time, I deeply bonded with a small circle of girls of color in my predominantly white private school. The three of us, Mili, Maria, and I—an Indian daughter of immigrants, an Argentinian immigrant, and a mixed daughter of a Brazilian Japanese immigrant—formed community. I'm not sure to what depth I understood why the intermingling of our racial and gendered identities was so important to me at that point. But now, in retrospect, it has become much clearer.

The three of us understood what it meant to be subject to hyper-sexualization laced with racism—to be seen by boys in our class as a breakable Asian, a spicy Latina, an exotic Indian—while at the same time being held to beauty standards we were too dark, too hairy, or too "slant eyed" to ever meet. We all

understood what it meant to hear conversations amongst our "friends" that were laced or punctuated with xenophobic jokes and racist slurs that attacked our families, We all understood what it meant to hear our mothers' accents being mocked, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. We all understood that we'd likely never read books about or learn histories of women who looked like us or our mothers or our grandmothers. It was not that we always experienced racism and sexism in the exact same ways, but we did experience them in connected ways and this mattered. Of course, we all also benefitted from our middle class status, our attendance at a private school, our ability to navigate and succeed in schooling, our able-bodiedness, and so on. However, as much as the proximity to whiteness, capital, and heteronormativity may have privileged us, our distances from what had been constructed as "normal" in our school necessitated that we protect one another, whether consciously or not. So, together we found love for one another, supported one another, survived, and even thrived, with one another.

Figure 1.1. Iterations of my own Unnormal Sisterhood(s) Across the Years

In most times in my life since high school, I have been able to carve out these spaces with other women of color and, at times, white women who make genuine efforts to understand us and to be in true solidarity with us. These are my spaces of joy, of learning, of growth, of strength, of thriving. The pictures featured in Figure 1.1 capture the joy found in these spaces, joy that sustained me as I faced various intersecting violences from the white heteropatriarchal spaces I so frequently occupied. These loves have carried me, sustained me, empowered me. Thus, I wanted to do work with younger girls of color that both made these types of sisterhoods possibilities for girls who might not already see their beauty, and also to create a space that framed them as sources of strength and cites of knowledge production. It is in the spirit of these friendships, these joyful, productive, protective bonds, that this dissertation, in so many ways, took shape as I wondered what efforts could be made to center the potential of sisterhood amongst girls of color in schools.

Drawing Inspiration from Girls of Color

This work, perhaps most importantly, arises from the inspiration and motivation I draw from girls of color who are constantly working to understand the world, to revise their thinking, and to fight for themselves and one another. I am inspired that, in the face of a white supremacist and sexist culture, girls of color are working in sisterhood across their similarities and differences (Keating, 2013) that arise from their intersectional identities, as they are related to systems of power both contemporarily and historically (Crenshaw, 1993; Lugones, 2014). I am inspired by their rebellions against harmful ideologies aimed at tearing down

communities of color, and, in particular, the women and girls in those communities. I am inspired by the knowledge and strength that girls build every day as a product of living in this world. I am inspired that they continue the work, despite the hardships, despite the imperfections, despite the frustrations, despite the confusions.

Thus, in resistance to a history of silence around the brilliance, resilience, and vulnerabilities of girls of color, I hope to highlight girl of color knowledges and strengths. I hope to add my voice to expand the scope of an already growing body of scholarship, policy, and activist efforts that support and celebrate girls of color. My research was also designed as a corrective to what members of the community, in which I had worked for two and a half years before starting this project, had reported as racism, sexism, and a lack of criticality and creativity in their curriculum. This work is aimed at providing a complicated view of girls of color, their literacies, their desires, and their concerns by exploring what happened within the Unnormal Sisterhood as the girls critically produced and consumed texts together. It is meant to celebrate what hooks (1990) might describe as "marginality as a site of resistance" (p. 341). With this view of marginality, it can be seen as a source of strength, nourishment, and knowledge.

Context

To truly understand how and why my research took shape in the way that it did, it is necessary to examine the contexts within which the Unnormal Sisterhood grew. A close look at the multilayeredness of these contexts exposes the intersecting ways that the girls' needs and desires were often neglected and sometimes fulfilled

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by various systems and communities that shape their lives. Woven together, the many layers of their lives and herstories expose the ways that girls of color have lives that are complicated and identities that are mediated by their social locations (Mohanty, 2000).

In reference to Black girls, specifically, scholar Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz (2016) claims, "If English educators are to teach Black girls in the most excellent of ways, they must understand the liminal space in which society positions Black girls." (p. 291). I would venture to say that this is true of girls of color generally, although the specificity of those liminal spaces vary according to girls' intersecting identities. This section, then, will unpack various levels of the girls' social locations, including the herstories of women and girls of color writers, the current political and research context, the Philadelphia educational system, the girls' neighborhood and families, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the club itself, in order to illuminate those liminal spaces in which the girls in the Unnormal Sisterhood were positioned.

Herstories of Women and Girls of Color as Readers, Writers, and Activists

To understand the current contexts, it is important to first take a historical view of women of color writer activist coalitions across time. Of course, across history, the particularities of how these systems manifested themselves and how women of color responded to them have shifted and changed. In the face of the erasure of women of color in scholarly, activist, and artistic work, it seems necessary to first acknowledge them as the foremothers of this scholarship. This tracing of the historical influences of this work serves as an effort to, as Kimberlé Crenshaw has called on us to do, "say her name." I offer this list of influencers as a meditation,

meant to provoke you to savor their names, remember them, engage or re-engage with them, acknowledge their resistance in the face of white supremacist heteropatriarchy.

Sojourner Truth

Ida B. Wells

Grace Lee Boggs

Shirley Chisholm

Harriet Tubman

Audre Lorde

Sonia Sanchez

Yuri Kochiyama

Fannie Lou Hamer

Alice Walker

Sylvia Rivera

Barbara Smith

Gloria Hull

Cherrie Moraga

Marsha P. Johnson

Gloria Anzaldúa

June Jordan

Kazu Iijima

Toni Cade Bambara

bell hooks

Assata Shakur

Kathleen Cleaver

Angela Davis

I read this list, lingering on each name, allowing myself to savor moments of remembrance for all who came before me and imaginings of all who will come with and after me. It is a very incomplete list—there are too many women of color who have fought for justice over time, so many whose names we don't even know—but it is my hope that by reading it and ruminating on these names and the histories and stories they carry, we might come closer to truly honoring and sensing the legacies that women of color have offered to so much of the work that social justice minded educators are able to do. I hope it invites a conscious practice of recentering and remembering the celebrations we owe to women of color for the work they have done and will continue to do with or without mainstream recognition.

Turning to herstories of women of color and their transformative work puts into relief how women and girls of color have been resilient and agentive in their resistance to systems of oppression across time. Women of color occupy a unique space where they are attacked because of their locations at the intersections of race and gender, as well as a variety of other identity categories, including class, sexuality, and colorism (Crenshaw, 1993). However, they have also found many ways to work against those oppressions, cultivating their power as women of color toward change. Contemporary girls and women of color are heiresses to a long herstory of intellectual traditions of their women of color ancestors who have centered around coming together in collaboration, sharing, and critique; claiming

literate identities; reading and writing texts; developing authority over language; publishing and disseminating ideas produced within these spaces (Muhammad, 2015b). Radical women of color have united, listened, written, spoken, and acted against oppression, culling their intellect, love, and power to make change. As Muhammad (2015a) suggests, a focus on these herstories offers potential fodder for the creation of curriculum that centers the brilliance of girls of color.

Black women's literary societies are one example of how Black women have found spaces to cultivate their agency through literate coalition. As early as 1790, there is record of these groups. Many of these societies, most active during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were initiated as auxiliaries to church groups, founded on ideas of benevolence and outreach, but adding a component of more traditionally conceived intellectual pursuits for Black women (Royster, 2000). The groups became havens for Black women to come together and work simultaneously on self-improvement and on campaigns for change for the entire Black community (Knupfer, 1996). In group meetings, women would read and critique the work of other writers and orators; work on their own writing and oration skills, receiving feedback and critique from other group members; and organize against various injustices they perceived (Royster, 2000; Belt-Beyan, 2004). Importantly, the pursuit of their own intellectual betterment was often motivated by the desire to increase their political voice against injustice. Indeed, these groups were motivated by a desire to "lift as we climb."

These groups demonstrate that despite the intersecting oppressions that Black women faced, those based on race, gender, class, and many other factors, they

were able to pool their collective power and fight, not just for themselves or even only for Black women, but against injustice broadly. Their marginalized power, power motivated by care and concern for marginalized people (Collins, 2000), surmounted the challenges posed by the racist and sexist structures erected by the mainstream. Further, the women were able to harness the dominant discourse of political speech and writing and use it against the dominators themselves, a pattern bell hooks (1994) sites across history amongst marginalized people. "We take the oppressor's language and turn it against itself. We make our words a counter-hegemonic speech, liberating ourselves in language" (p. 227).

About one hundred years after the heyday of the Black women's literary societies, much had changed in regards to the racial and gender dynamics in the United States. However, many systems of oppression lived on in new manifestations, and anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles by women of color continued. Intersecting oppressions continued to place women of color in a unique position of exclusion from mainstream civil rights movements. While the U.S. women's movement made great strides during the 1960s and 70s, women of color remained largely invisible or targets of racism in these groups, despite their prolific action. In anti-racist movements, women of color also remained silenced and even targets of vehement sexism. Thus, women of color began carving out their own spaces and making their own statements against intersectional oppression.

One example of such a group was the Combahee River Collective, a group of radical Black lesbian feminists, including Barbara and Beverly Smith, Audre Lorde, Gloria Hull, and Cheryl Clarke, founded in 1974. Named after the Combahee River

Uprising, one of the largest, successful slave uprisings in the United States, a

rebellion lead by Harriet Tubman, the collective was founded on ideas of Black

female leadership and the fight for justice of all people (Gumbs, 2014). According to

Barbara Smith (2017), the Black feminists who came to identify as the Combahee

River Collective came together in order to explore with one another their political

commitments to change and resistance. This work was done between 1974 and

1977, during which they came together at retreats, usually held in a home of a

member, where they would share culture and story, dance, break bread and cook,

read, write, discuss spirituality, and work on establishing their shared politics.

> It was really about—first of all—to get Black feminists together so we could talk about what it was we were trying to do. It was to address isolation that we faced as Black feminists. So it was to get us all together in one place. It was to have serious political discussions. It was to have cultural and social opportunities and outlets. It was everything. It was multipurpose, three days of everything. (Smith, 2017, p. 55)

The retreats were resistant acts of critical celebration, of "healing and spirituality"

(Smith, 2017, p. 59), of the women involved. Smith goes on to explain that not only

were the retreats themselves important, but the networks of relationships that were

established there helped sustain and push forward the political work of Black

feminists of the time. It is significant to note that not only was this work done in the

context of relationship building and sharing, it was also done slowly and

deliberately. The relatively short document was developed over the course of years.

It seems, then, that when writing is not simply the output of a physical text, but

instead, is a dynamic coming together that is slow and focused on the humans

involved—their health, the relationships between them, their intellectual growth,

their development of agency and advocacy, their critical engagement, their

politics—that powerful change can be enacted. What resulted from the Combahee
River Collective was not only a foundational piece of writing for Black and other
women of color feminists, but a political movement that affected both the women
most directly involved, and those touched by their political commitments. The
Combahee River Collective composed not only a powerful statement of their politics,
but also, a community and a movement committed to enacting and inspiring change.

Another example of women of color coming together and acting toward
change through literate action is the creation of the book *This Bridge Called My Back.*
The book arose from the action originated by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga
(Moraga, 2015). Like the Combahee River Collective, they felt it necessary to
respond to the marginalization, tokenization, and silencing they felt in western
feminism. Anzaldúa and Moraga put out a call to radical women of color writers to
submit pieces that explicated their experience and that called attention to the
multiple and different oppressions faced by all women of color. The book came
together quickly over the course of two years as a response to the urgent need for
such a text (Moraga, 2015). What resulted was a vast and varied volume of works
that included poetry, theoretical essay, stream of consciousness meanderings, and
narrative that illustrated and theorized the experience of women of color. To
paraphrase AnaLouise Keating (2013), the book pointed out the importance of
connection through difference; radical interrelatedness; and listening with raw
openness. Now in its 4th edition, the book continues to influence those seeking to
fight coalitionally against intersecting oppressions. In the most current edition,
Moraga (2015) states her ongoing commitment to fighting against all oppression

and her hopes that the new iteration of the book will continue to reach those also engaged in the fight. Texts like *This Bridge Called My Back* and Combahee River Collective Statement and the coalitional resistant efforts of women of color to create them provide influence and fodder to current iterations of woman of color feminisms that seek movements that center nondominant theories, strategies, and more flexible visions of womanhood. Although the current context has shifted since the time these texts were produced, they are still meaningful as women and girls of color learn from, critique, and move forward both in response to the current manifestations of intersecting oppressions as well as with the hopes that current tools such as social media offers to their movements.

Current Political Context

Although these woman of color feminists have certainly been central in the shifts toward justice in our political landscape, we still have so far to go before the United States can be considered safe and fair for girls of color. Over time, girls and women of color have been positioned by systems of inequity often set up by policies that do not work for and with girls of color. A look at the current United States political context in regards to girls of color reveals the ways that the needs of girls of color are largely ignored in policy and, in turn, how inequities are kept in place. Simultaneously, though, the ways that many women of color activists and scholars continually fight for and with girls of color reveals potential for movements toward more equitable systems (African American Policy Forum & Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, 2015). A look at both the failures of the system as well as the successes helps to frame the work of the Unnormal Sisterhood.

Too often, policy is created to address either race or gender, but rarely does it work to combat intersecting oppressions. Rather, policy is focused on either Black and Brown boys or on girls with little or no attention to race. Thus, girls of color are left at the margins, their particular needs ignored (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). This historical discounting of women and girls of color was, more than 35 years ago, explicated by the title of the heralded volume, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave,* edited by Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (1982)*.* What happens, then, is that the "various factors that direct girls of color down one ways streets while obscuring their vulnerabilities" (African American Policy Forum & Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, 2015) are left unattended and support systems for girls of color remain unavailable.

A well known example of this erasure is the roll out of President Obama's initiative, My Brother's Keeper (MBK), which provided the important call for the U.S. to combat inequities that children face today by addressing the "persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color" (White House, 2015b). While this was a monumental and necessary project, girls of color and the inequities they face were left excluded. Despite MBK's aims of addressing racial injustice, a whole population of Brown and Black youth—namely, girls and non-binary identified youth—was left unmentioned and unattended to within the scope of the initiative. As questioned by the two hundred fifty plus Black and Brown men who cosigned an African American Policy Forum's (2014a) open letter to President Obama, "In lifting up only the challenges that face males of color, MBK—in the

absence of any comparable initiative for females—forces us to ask where the complex lives of Black women and Black girls fit into the White House's vision of racial justice?" This question is a reflection of a persistent absence of an intersectional lens, an absence that denies girls of color a place in visions of anti-racist policies.

This ongoing desire for an intersectional lens in political initiatives also makes itself present in policies around gender. The White House initiatives focused on girls and education too often fail to recognize the specificities of the experiences of girls *of color* in the United States. As another African American Policy Forum (2014b) letter, this one put forth by women of color in support of policy and research shifts for girls of color, points out, the lack of an intersectional understanding of race and gender has been to the detriment of girls of color. In an effort to urge the White House to include girls in the My Brother's Keeper initiative, the letter states, "To those who would urge use to take up our concerns with the White House Council on Women and Girls, we note that the Council, like many gender-focused initiatives on women, lacks an intersectional frame that would address the race-based challenges faced by young women of color in a racially-stratified society."

This lack of attention on girls of color in the United States is demonstrated in the "Let Girls Learn" initiative, launched by President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama in 2015. This initiative was only focused girls outside of the United States (Let Girls Learn, n.d.). The development of programing focused on girls outside of the United States paired with the absence of direct programs in the

United States for girls of color signals that the issues that girls of color face living within our nation have not been a policy priority.

Despite these erasures, in more recent years, a magnificent fight for the rights of girls of color has started to take hold. With concerted efforts by organizations like the African American Policy Forum led by Kimberlé Crenshaw, in November of 2015 a $118 million initiative was initiated to address the needs of girls and women of color (McClain, 2015). This initiative directs $100 million dollars provided by Prosperity Together to a five-year effort to impact the economic conditions of low-income women. $18 million provided by the Collaborative to Advance Equity through Research toward research efforts about women and girls of color. (White House, 2015a) The funding will be directed at five areas of focus:

- Fostering school success and reducing unnecessary exclusionary school discipline
- Meeting the needs of vulnerable and striving youth
- Inclusive STEM education
- Sustaining reduced rates of teen pregnancy and building on success
- Economic prosperity (White House, 2015a)

These are huge steps forward for girls of color and testament to the hard work that women of color and others have done in the fight for their rights.

Additionally, and of concern to this dissertation, is the sparseness of the policies that directly address the needs of Asian American girls and considers the nuances of the rather monolithic term "girls of color." The work on Asian girls often does not disaggregate data and thus, the very different experiences across Asian ethnicities is not explored. Instead, too often, the East Asian experience is forwarded, and the myth of the model minority remains a persistent stereotype. The

model minority myth portrays "Asian Americans as exemplary minorities who gain success through sheer effort and determination" (Lee, 2005, p. 7). Although a surface and uncritical look at date seems to confirm this myth of Asian American success, disaggregated metrics on Asian Americans reveal the ways that many Asian American youth are failed. For instance, while approximately 44% of Asian Americans, as compared to 24% of the overall American population, hold bachelor degrees, 60% of Hmong Americans and 50% of Laotians and Cambodians held less than a high school degree. Hmong Americans have the lowest rates of college graduation, with only 4% of Hmong Americans holding Bachelors degree (Goodwin, 2010). Because the aggregated data obscures these populations, little in terms of policy and practice is done to support Asian American youth, particularly Asian American girls, who do not easily fit into the model minority myths and continually face issues of racism and sexism in their educational experiences (Lee, 2005).

Of course, it cannot go unstated that during the time of data collection, the violent and racist presidential campaign of Donald Trump was moving forward. The candidate's constant and virulent messages of hatred towards communities of color and women surrounded the Unnormal Sisterhood and influenced our conversations and girls' perspectives on the world. The girls, simultaneously felt some hopefulness about the potential to have a woman president, gazing towards Hilary Clinton as a symbol of advancing gender equity—although they also certainly had critiques of her attitudes toward Black communities and, indeed, the lack of an intersectional lens to her campaign—and a fear, disgust, and confoundment at the potential for a Trump presidency, a person they regularly heard spewing hatred toward their

communities and neighborhoods. Now, as Trump has taken the presidency, the work of this dissertation takes on continued importance as so many girls of color know that the elected president is shameless in his racism and sexism and this will likely unfold to affect them in dangerous ways, especially following what meager progress was made under President Obama in regards to policies that address the needs and hopes of girls of color.

Despite this new presidency, what remains hopeful is that youth are entering a phase of political activism unseen in recent memory. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement, a force led by young Black women, has significantly shaped the political conversation and motivated so many youth of color to action. The girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood are fortunate to have these models of action to inspire them and to give them hope beyond the violence of the Trump presidency.

The Philadelphia School System

Of course educational policy issues impact districts and schools across the country. The Philadelphia school system is marked by a lack of funding and a thrust toward charterization. Despite a strong teachers' union and a worthy fight put forth by many teachers, school leaders, families, and students, the current state of Philadelphia education is unstable and falling short of meeting the needs of the city's students. The past few years have seen huge deficits in school system budget, producing schools without nurses, councilors, assistant principles, and new books, among other problems (Popp, 2014). Thus, families are forced to look to affordable alternatives to public schools such as charters and Catholic schools. In the 2014 school year, 128,000 students were enrolled in K-12 Philadelphia School District

schools. Charter schools served about 63,5000 students and Catholic schools served approximately 57,500 students (McCorry, 2014). These numbers indicate the ways that public schooling is being disintegrated in the city and how families are too often required to find alternatives.

The Neighborhood

There is a tendency in the American imagination to flatten the idea of an "urban neighborhood" in potentially problematic ways, contributing to the perceived and real risks facing the families, youth, and children living there (Gadsden & Dixon-Román, 2017). Thus, to avoid reinscribing negative stereotypes about "urban neighborhoods" in this work, it is necessary to understand the make up of the neighborhood, acknowledging who lives there, the struggles they face, as well as the community and cultural resources that exist amongst its members.

The area that surrounds St. Frances has long been a neighborhood of minoritized people. The 1960s marked a significant increase in the African American population. As a product of many imperialist projects in their home countries, many Asian immigrants, including large Filipinx, Indonesian, and Vietnamese populations arrived in the neighborhood. The effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement rippled through South America, and caused a wave of immigration from countries including Mexico, Guatemala, and Ecuador to the neighborhood (LeBlanc, 2017).

The families that populate South Philadelphia are often maligned in discourses around class and race (Campano, et al., 2016). The year during which this club took place was marked by very angry discourse around immigration and Black

Lives, conversations that have always existed, but were made more obvious by the campaign of Donald Trump. His campaign incited more vocalizations of ideologies that criminalized immigrants and reified negative stereotypes about the danger, dysfunction, and poverty of Brown and Black neighborhoods. In the second presidential debate, for instance, Trump proclaimed,

> African Americans, the inner cities. Devastating what's happening to our inner cities…. Same with the Latino Americans, the Hispanic Americans. The same exact thing. They talk, they don't get it done. You go into the inner cities and — you see it's 45 percent poverty. African-Americans now 45 percent poverty in the inner cities. The education is a disaster. Jobs are essentially nonexistent. (as quoted by Estrada, 2016)

But it is very clear from my sustained work in South Philadelphia that this discourse does not reflect the realities of the mostly Asian, Latinx, and Black community. The collectives of families with whom I've worked are deeply committed to the educational advancement of their students and have engaged in many varieties of activism for the rights of young people (Campano, et al., 2016). South Philadelphia is a neighborhood rich with art, history, and hubs of social activism. Groups like Juntos, 1Love, the New Sanctuary Movement, the Concerned Black Catholics, and others are woven into the fabric of South Philadelphia and are responsible for much political and social progression, particularly around immigrant rights. Families and other collectives are fighting for their humanity, harnessing their existing strength against the inequities they experience from day to day.

This is not to say that their communities were not without some of the hegemonic belief systems rooted in dominant sexist, racist, and homophobic ideologies. For instance, girls reported their experiences moving through their neighborhoods and being sexually harassed by men more than twice their age. Some

also reported homophobic and gender normative comments their families had made to them as they grappled with their own ideas about sexuality and gender. These biases and prejudices with which the girls were forced to contend point to the importance of an intersectional lens that sees both the ways that the girls were supported in their neighborhoods, as well as the various lacks of support they faced, even from members of their own communities.

St. Frances Cabrini

One example of a hub of social activism and collective effort towards educational justice was the St. Frances Cabrini community center, which was attached to a Catholic church and the school where my research for my dissertation took place and where I had participated in research under the leadership of Drs. Gerald Campano and María Paula Ghiso. The St. Frances parish was established in 1885 in South Philadelphia. The mission of the parish reads, "Through our cultural diversity, united in our expressions of faith, lives the Gospel message in our neighborhood through worship, education, service, and advocacy." Adjacent to the church is the St. Frances Community Center, which aims to "build unity in diversity, supports learning, and inspires thoughtful action. Hospitality, solidarity, responsiveness, and transformation are the four core values that animate and advance this mission." The parish and the community center both claim to embody an ethos of radical hospitality, providing a place of homecoming to community members, new and old.

The school opened its original building doors to over 1000 children in 1895. The parish and school largely reflected the demographic makeup of the

neighborhood, becoming a cornerstone of many members of immigrant and African American communities across time. It is currently run by Independence Mission Schools, a network of Catholic schools. The school's website describes Independence Mission Schools as "beacons of hope to their communities; they provide a high-quality, low-cost education to more than 4,100 children of all faiths from many of the City's most underserved neighborhoods, delivering opportunity to these children and their families." It further boasts a commitment to teaching students "21st century skills" to prepare them for high school, college, and beyond, emphasizing academic, social, and spiritual growth.

Despite these goals, the school does not always fulfill the needs and desires of the girls. In fact, the students are at times subject to racist and sexist structures that leave them feeling unsafe and neglected in schools. As will be explore in more depth through the body of this dissertation, the systems of racism and sexism that persist in the United States generally, are also persistent within the school. This played out, for instance, in the contrast between the racial demographics of the students and that of the faculty. The students at St. Frances are nearly all students of color while almost the entire faculty was white. Every middle school teacher at the school was white. Thus, the majority of interactions students had with adults in the buildings were with white adults. In turn, students were almost never in environments that consisted completely of people of color. What's more, in the spaces they did occupy, those with the most power, because they were adults and teachers, were almost always white. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, this lack of representation was a

concern for some of the girls who felt they were often misunderstood by their teachers because they did not share common cultural knowledge.

Prior to working with the girls in the club, I had worked, along side another PhD student, Emily Schwab, with the fifth and sixth graders in an afterschool program focused on interweaving literacy, particularly creative writing, and robotics. During this club, I got to know students at St. Frances, including some of the girls who would eventually join the Unnormal Sisterhood. During the course of the Robotics Club, I found that students brought with them an excitement for creative work, imaginative intellectuality, and a wealth of linguistic and cultural knowledge. Additionally, I noted the ways that they thrived in an environment that butt up against the school norms of control. Students stated a desire to do writing across genre, rather than simply the essay based writing they were most commonly summoned to do during their school days. This information helped me shape the course of the Unnormal Sisterhood, as I tried to create a space that would fulfill the needs and desires of students in the school.

The Unnormal Sisterhood

The Unnormal Sisterhood became a space within the school for girls to express their needs and desires. Every Tuesday and Wednesday in the school library, we would meet around a long wooden table to read, write, talk, laugh, listen, watch, look, dance, sing, and so on. For one and a half hours, we would gather with the objective of reading a variety of texts by women and girls of color, write and create our own, and engage in conversations about the topics that seemed to matter the most to them. This was a space that sought to engage and cultivate girls'

creativity, spirit, and ideas. Through the body of this dissertation, the stories of this space will be explored, revealing the success and complications of a girls of color space nested in a multilayered context that was not always as safe for or celebratory of girl of color genius.

Unnormal Sisterhood: A Theoretical Framing

As I engaged in research in this context, I leaned on my firm belief in girls of color as powerful, as genius, as beautiful, as complex, as knowing (Brown, 2009, 2013) to make meaning of what I observed. Through this study, I center theories that highlight the strength of women and girls of color in the face of multiple and intersecting oppressions. In an effort to incorporate the voices of the girls involved in the study, I use the girls' self-identification as the Unnormal Sisterhood to frame my discussion of my theoretical underpinnings.

As displayed in Figure 1.2, I organized the major theoretical threads as they align with the concepts of "unnormal" and "sisterhood." Importantly, these two concepts intersect, indicating the ways girls occupy a particular social position, as both outsiders from the norm, and also radically connected to one another through sisterhood. "Unnormal Sisterhood" implies a new sort of sociality, marked by the coming together of different marginalized positionalities and identities, meeting on the edges of dominant structures, in the service of resistance and change. Further, this framework centers writing as a tool of resistance. The following sections will outline the specificities of these theories and how they relate to one another.
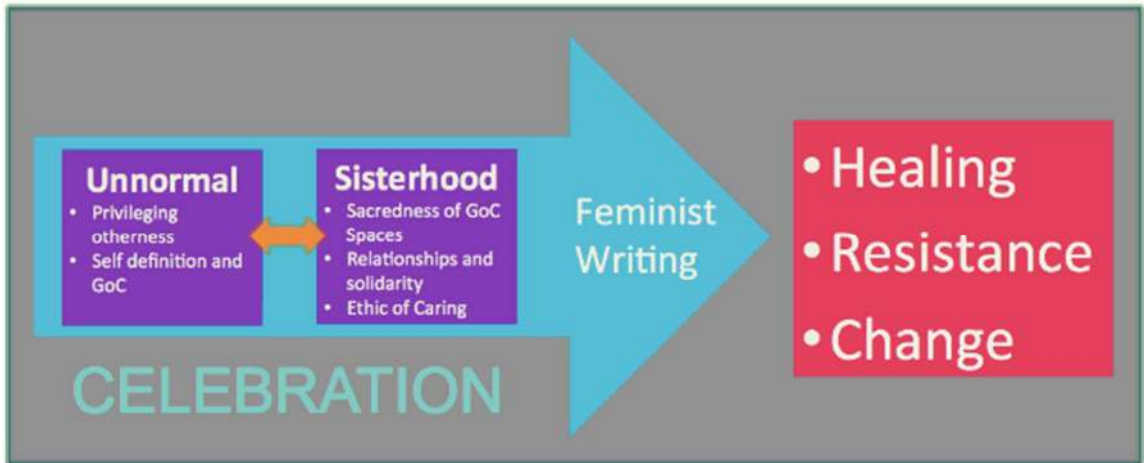
Figure 1.2. An Envisioning of the Unnormal Sisterhood Theoretical Framework

Honoring the "Unnormal"

There is a playful ingenuity with the language the girls use to name themselves as "unnormal." The girls use language conventions in an unconventional way by attaching the prefix "un" to "normal", distancing themselves from the identification as "normal" while avoiding the pejorative connotations of the conventionally correct "abnormal." By pointing to a concept of "normal" in which they do not feel they belong, the girls highlight the problematic nature of a "normal" which is too often equated with whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality. This naming signals their acknowledgement of both the ways they've been marginalized as girls of color by whiteness and patriarchy and how their marginalization is a site of resistance (hooks, 1994), beauty, and genius. Rather than attempting assimilation, the girls privilege their identities as beyond normal, transcending the typical, challenging the concept that "normal" is desirable or that it even exists.

Critical celebration is a notion I hope to centralize in this work. I attach the word "critical" to "celebration" in order to highlight that celebration, in this case,

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isn't simply about naïve appreciation, but rather, it requires conscious and critical work. Critical celebration opens up the possibility for change for girls of color. It is an opportunity to understand that they are in flux, and that, while there is much to be celebrated about them in their current state, there are potential futures and directions to go that will build on their strengths as they move past ideologies and actions impeding upon true solidarity. Critical celebration is a celebration, not only of the present, but of possibility—of not only what is, but what could be.

Critical celebration invites girls of color to critically engage questions of what is impeding the potentiality to girls of color as individuals and as coalitions. It is an invitation to help us better understand the ways that white supremacist and sexist notions fed to us by mainstream ideologies have been internalized and enacted, even by those with the best intentions. And a large part of this growing comprehension is a result of dialectical humanism (Boggs, 1998; brown, 2017), communal listening and knowledge building that relies on critical and caring listening, sharing, and the adjustment of ideologies based on this shared knowledge. Especially when considering movement toward solidarity, it is necessary for critical celebration is engaged so that difference, a concept that will be further discussed later in this theoretical framing, is honored and that understanding through critical listening is engaged.

Privileging otherness. Naming themselves "unnormal" establishes outsider status. This naming can be read as a celebration of outsiderness—an understanding that their outsiderness is what privileges them to be uniquely insightful and critical. Influenced by Kelly Wissman (2011), I conceptualize the Unnormal Sisterhood as a

heterotopia, a term developed by Michel Foucault (1984). Lauren Berlant describe Foucault's (1984) concept of heterotopia as a "fold within the normative world where one can encounter the positivity of being otherwise" (Berlant & Prosser, 2011, p. 181). According to Foucault (1984), there is an importance to spaces that subvert conventions. He conceptualizes heterotopias as spaces in relation to dominant structures, but removed enough from those structures so that things can be done differently and so that the dominant structures can be critiqued and subverted. The Unnormal Sister existed as a space just outside of the normative world, a world built to uphold the power of whiteness and masculinity through various systems like schools and media. This location provided girls a space where they could critique dominant structures that too often failed them, celebrate their "being otherwise", and choose to rebel against how things were done in their days at school, which it seems according to the girls' reports, relied on rigid, assessment-based curriculum, Eurocentric texts and content, and rules that seemed to operate unbending control over their bodies.

I conceptualize the girls' unnormality as a position from which knowledge was produced. Imani Perry (2004) refers to the frequent reverence of outsider status in Hip Hop culture, using the example of the rap duo, Outkast. She explains bye naming themselves as "outcasts", the duo is "centralizing the position of otherness as a site of privileged knowledge and potential" (p.107). I postulate that "unnormal" accomplishes similar goals for the girls. Like Perry's reading of Outkast, I see the girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood as occupying a unique status, one that is aware and critical of the racist and sexist structures at the root of their

marginalization. By pointing to this otherness, they acknowledge their ability to critique and, perhaps, dismantle those structures. Some scholars have theorized this sort of unique vantage point as the "epistemic privilege" of minoritized identities (Campano, 2007; Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000). Epistemic privilege describes the knowledge and insights into the world, and, specifically, systems of inequality, that minoritized people have as a product of their social locations. By pointing to their unnormality, the girls highlight that their knowledge defies mainstream assumptions about their minoritized identities.

  Self-definition of girls of color. The concept of "unnormal" points to girls' ability to self-define beyond the often monolithic characterizations of "girls of color." As discussed by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), self-definition is a feminist act. "Unnormal" opens up opportunities to inquire into theories of intersectional or intermeshing (Lugones, 2014) identities that reveal the strengths and vulnerabilities that are products of the interaction between the girls' multiple identity categories. I draw largely from feminist of color theory that takes into account the interaction between identity categories to create a more nuanced understanding of identity and oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) famously theorized intersectionality, a theory that takes into account how different systems of oppressions, for example racism and sexism, intersect with and impact one another. This body of theory proclaims that oppressions cannot be understood in isolation, but, rather, forms of oppression must be understood as shaped by one another. Scholars have since built on intersectional theory to focus more on identity, rather than oppression. Such scholars include Michael Hames-Garcia (2011), who uses the

term "multiplicity" describing it "as a theory of identity rather than a theory of oppression. A theory of multiplicity that understands social identities as mutually constitutive rather than discrete and separable" (p. xi). María Lugones (2014) uses the term "intermeshing" to describe a related theory of identity. In her theorization of intermeshing, she points to the inseparability of identity categories, indicating women of color's wholeness, rather than fragmentability. Like Hames-Garcia, she also proposes that a product of intermeshing identities is unique strength. By taking into account the interactions amongst identity categories, girls and women of color are more accurately able to self-define and rebel in the face of often deficitizing, shallow, or one-note definitions of women and girls of color. By moving beyond "normal," dominant conceptions of race and gender, the girls assert that they are unique, powerful, and stereotype-defying.

Centering Sisterhood

Sisterhood has been at the core of this dissertation from its conception. Coalition and radical love are central to the ways that I attempted to cultivate sisterhood through this project. I conceived of the sisterhood building in the group as an upward spiral. I suggest that the desire to learn, strengthen critiques, and enact change amongst girls of color can be inspired by a desire to do right by one's sisters. In turn, as sisters come to understand one another more, their bonds are strengthened, and their sisterhoods are fortified.

Sacredness of all girl of color spaces. Alice Walker (1983) defines a "womanist" as "not a separatist, except periodically, for health" (p. xi). This definition highlights the necessity for periodic separation to recuperate from the

struggle of women and girls of color living in a heteronormative, patriarchal society. Because so many of the structures of their daily lives, in particular, schooling, are designed to uphold whiteness and masculinity as a premium, spaces where girls of color can temporarily remove themselves in order to heal, critique, and plan for ways to survive and resist in dominant society can play a critical role.

To create a space that is safer for girls of color, I conceptualize the club as critically celebratory. While I acknowledged the trauma and vulnerability that girls of color face as a product of the intersecting injustices of American life, I did not center trauma narratives as the ultimate defining factor of girls of color (Brown, 2009, 2012; Tuck, 2009). Rather, I sought to focus on girls' genius, joy, and strength as resistant. Thus, I facilitated the construction of a space with the girls that would support their healing as they developed more accurate understandings of themselves, each other, and the world around them and, in turn, strengthened their ability to resist silencing and oppression for and with one another.

Relationships and solidarity. At the core of genuine sisterhoods is solidarity. The solidarity that I envisioned for this group was based on connecting through difference, radical interconnectedness, and listening with raw openness (paraphrased from Keating, 2013). This vision of solidarity is not simply based on proximity—it cannot be assumed that solidarity will arise simply because a group shares a space, a neighborhood, a school. Rather, solidarity is a project that requires sustained work. Further, it requires opt-in. The rigor of the work for solidarity to arise is such that it cannot be forced on any individual or group, but rather, those involved must all agree to engage in in the work.

It is my belief that to enact change, women of color must come together, learning from one another about both their shared experiences and strengths as minoritized women, but also learning from their differences. I note solidarity, in this case, as a project amongst women of color, rather than all women. This is not because I don't believe that white women can never be in solidarity with women of color. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I am conceptualizes solidarity in a way that transcends the color avoidant versions of feminism that has been overly popularized by mainstream feminist movements. Like Gloría Anzaldúa (1983), Cherrie Moraga (1983), Barbara Smith (2017), Audre Lorde (2007) and so many other feminists of color who have sought alternatives, I hope this dissertation will help elucidate the power of working outside of whiteness, an entity too often normalized when speaking of women's rights. Instead, this work will seek to centralize the coalitional power that occurs when women of color needn't contend with issues of whiteness, and instead, work amongst one another to find power amongst and between them, through their differences (Lorde, 2007).

It is necessary, in these enactments of solidarity, that women investigate their power in relationship to other women of color and understand how their experiences with intersecting oppressions manifest in different, yet connected ways. When this occurs, women of color can work with, rather than against, each other against forms of oppression, supporting one another at their most vulnerable and envisioning futures that function for everyone. As Lorde (2007) claims, "Within the interdependence of mutual (non-dominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of

our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being" (p. 99). She describes that in seeing differences as "a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic," women of color can create interdependencies. By viewing difference as strength, rather than something to be ignored, as in color-evasive feminism, women can fight together against their shared and individual oppressions, pooling shared and individual strengths.

Lorde also points to the potential harm of ignoring or merely tolerating differences. When the importance of difference is ignored, it signals a failure of understanding of the ways power has operated across history and contemporarily. This ignorance of difference can only lead to a short-sighted fight against white supremacy. As Jasbir Puar (2012) has pointed out, in the current era, concepts such as intersectionality have been "mainstreamed," and too often Feminist of Color ideologies around the importance of difference mimic "liberal multiculturalism." It invites what Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) would describe as "single axis" frameworks. Taking an authentically intersectional lens helps us understand that differences between and within groups exist and that these differences are related to histories and contemporary manifestations of power and oppression.

It is necessary that as we conceptualize what coalitions amongst women and girls of color might look like, we attend specifically to anti-Blackness that so often exists in communities of non-Black people of color, despite the ways they have benefitted from the Black struggle for civil rights across the ages. For instance, along side the model minority myth came efforts by many Asian Americans, particularly

those of East Asian decent, to dissociate themselves from Blackness, in order to gain social prosperity in the United States. What's more, racist projects used the successes of Asian Americans to further anti-Black agendas. The result of the perpetuation of the model minority myth and its correlation to anti-Blackness is that the white supremacist constructions of racial hierarchies that position Black people at the bottom, and white people at the top remain intact, and, further, the ongoing struggles of Asian Americans are obscured (Wu, 2014). In this example, we can see the ways oppressions are connected, and that attending to the differences in our experiences within notions of solidarity will allow us to move toward liberation for minoritized people as a whole.

However, conceptualizations of solidarity that take into account difference, and especially anti-Blackness, are uncommon. Jared Sexton (2010) discusses the ways that problematic notions of multiracial coalition arise because of the failure to directly address the power relations involved in coalition. He calls for a more accurate understanding of racial analyses and multiracial alliance-building. He claims that too often in multiracial alliances, efforts are made to decentralize anti-Blackness and to "disavow the historical centrality and uniqueness of anti-blackness for the operations of 'global white supremacy'" (p.90). He also points to the erasure and silencing of Black intellectual and political contribution too common in the formation of multiracial coalition. I do believe that multiracial coalition is possible, but not without taking these ideas to heart. An honest and deep analysis of anti-Blackness is necessary when coalition building is approached by non-Black women of color.

The centralization of anti-Blackness in understandings of white supremacy helps to illuminate the complex ways that different marginalized people experience white supremacy differently. The Combahee River Collective Statement (2017) documents the importance of this understanding as it puts forth the idea that to destroy all forms of oppression, those who are most oppressed must be made free. This is not to suggest a sort of "oppression Olympics" where everyone scrambles to represent themselves as the most oppressed. Rather, it should involve a conscious intersectional lens that exposes the different and multifaceted experiences of people of color with white supremacy. With this intersectional lens, those involved in the fight for freedom can, in coalition with each other, fight white supremacy from all of its angles.

Part of this acknowledgement of difference is the understanding that in many ways our differences are somewhat opaque (Glissant, 1990). The expectation in this discussion of solidarity through difference is not that we will ever completely understand one another, that we'll ever be able to live one another's experiences, crawl into another's skin. Rather it is rooted in the knowledge that here will always be limits to our understandings of one another's experiences. As a result, we will inevitably cause harm either individually or systemically, as adrienne maree brown (2017) points out in her philosophy of "emergent strategy." So, when we think of difference as political, we come to appreciate how much work coalition building requires and how much trust and listening it demands as we come to understand our perspectives alone will not bring about justice. Because individuals will never fully understand the multiple manifestations of white supremacy, we must be

humbled to rely on one another to collectively theorize oppression and change and, in turn, engage in a fight against it. It is in the plurality where change can arise.

This, of course isn't easy work. As Cherie Moraga (1983) has claimed,

It is not a given between us… to come to see each other as sisters. This is not a given. I keep wanting to repeat over and over and over again, the pain and shock of difference, the joy of commonness, the exhilaration of meeting through incredible odds against it. But the passage is *through*, not over, not by, not around, but through. (p. xiv)

As we move toward solidarity and sisterhood, we must do the sometimes uncomfortable work of struggling to listen through difference. We must understand the ways we have been complicit in our sisters' oppression and learn to be better, to resist the temptation to retain our own power at the detriment of our sisters. Instead, we must reimagine power and recreate it in the synergy of sisterhood.

I conceptualized the Unnormal Sisterhood as a space where this work could occur, not assuming that it would always be a "safe" space or that relationships or understanding would come without struggle, but instead, a space in which we could deliberately move together toward stronger and more well-formed alliances, built on ever growing and shifting understandings. I attempted to create a space that would allow for iterative work, where we would all learn about one another, our struggles, our joys, our strengths, in service of fighting the biases and internalized racist and sexist ideas that may remain invisible to us.

An ethic of caring. The solidarity I envision as foundational to true sisterhood is born of radical love and care. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) proposes the

idea of an ethic of caring, which frames caring and relationships as sites of knowledge building and strength. Relationships are fundamental not only to healing in the face of oppression, but also to enabling truly revolutionary forward movement. Women of color have long enacted resistance to intersecting oppressions through their daily acts of caring. One path toward envisioning and enacting a revolution against systems that has served to devalue, violate, and control women, especially women of color, is to value and learn from those radically loving acts of resistance. We must, therefore, define what we mean by radical love.

A clear definition of love will help delve into the pernicious ways that the word "love" has been misused. Judith Butler (as cited by Sara Ahmed, 2012) discusses the "non-performative," or the "'reiterative and citational practices by which discourse' *does not produce* 'the effects that it names'" (p. 117). Many have used the word "love" in order to silence and control those speaking against oppression, quite opposite of what I'll unpack as a definition of radical love. Psychoanalyst R.D. Laing (1967) claims, "We are effectively destroying ourselves by violence masquerading as love" (p. 58). We must resist this masquerade and develop love in a truer form, a form of love that involves a movement toward justice.

To counteract the non-performative uses of the word love, it is critical to better define radical love and, in turn, engage in it. This requires us first to see love not simply as a notion. Rather, we must understand that it is concerted action. bell hooks (2000) imports that "by always thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling is one way in which anyone using the word in this manner automatically assumes accountability and responsibility" (p. 13). She defines love "as the will to

nurture our own and another's spiritual growth" (p. 6). Freire (1997) adds to this concept of radical love as action based when he speaks of the "*courage to love,*" explaining that this courage is "far from being accommodation to an unjust world, is rather the transformation of that world on behalf of the increasing liberation of humankind" (p. 157). Radical love is rooted is accountable action with the aim of freedom for both the self and others.

Love among people of color in a society that structurally tells people of color both directly and symbolically that they don't deserve love, is radical and political. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) proclaims that it is necessary that "African-American women learn to see expressing love for one another as fundamental to resisting oppression" (p. 170). I think there is possibility for women of color across differences to also engage in this resistant expression of love. Finding love for one another across differences may help to resist many oppressive actions are built around the message that certain people do not deserve love. Saying, "I love myself. I deserve love" is deeply political. Looking to other people of color and saying, "I love you. You deserve love" is deeply political. This inward and outward love requires one to act against structural violence that has worked to marginalize, dominate, and control. Thus, the Unnormal Sisterhood was established as a space for all of its members to attempt to reach toward one another in an effort to better understand how to care for one another.

Writing in Unnormal Sisterhood

The concepts of unnormal and sisterhood have the potential to be manifested through writing. I frame writing as a political and socially situated mechanism that

has potential to be used by girls of color to express and explore their identities and experience-based knowledge, to learn about one another in coalitional literacy practices, and to develop critiques of intersecting oppressions. Although I resist the notion that writing for every girl of color will serve the same purpose, I have built this dissertation to explore its potential using primarily women of color literary theorists. Many feminist of color literary scholars propose that writing can be a mechanism to enact radical self-care, love, and social action. By investigating writing in this way, several feminist of color scholars have postulated that there is a life saving quality of writing and reading (Anzaldúa, 1983; Bambara, 1992; Christian, 1988; Lorde, 2007). Anzaldúa (1983) asks and responds to the question, "Why am I compelled to write?" She claims:

> Because the writing saves me from this complacency I fear. Because I have no choice. Because I must keep the spirit of my revolt and myself alive. Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself. To reserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit. To show that I *can* and that I *will* write, never mind their admonitions to the contrary. And I will write about the unmentionables, never mind the outraged grasp of the censor and the audience. Finally I write because I'm scared of writing but I'm more scared of not writing. (pp. 168-169)

In this statement, Anzaldúa expresses that writing can be a form of self-care in its ability to allow marginalized women to speak their truths in the face of fictions and erasures created by dominant discourses. Further, it is a way of sharing stories and ideas across time and space, so that women might coalesce as they come to better

understandings of one another and share their self-definitions and counternarratives with others. As women of color engage in the struggle against oppression, writing their own stories and reading those of others is a political and revolutionary act.

        The radical use of writing across genre. Both educational scholars and literary theorists have explored the ways that women and girls of color have used writing radically. Women of color have, both in structure and content used writing to push back against dominant ideologies. It seems that certain genre have been used radically by women, and often, these genre are those most maligned or understudied in dominant classrooms.

        One such genre is poetry. Poetry has been used by radical women of color for its metaphoric, self-reflective, artistic, political, and performative potential (Brown, 2009, 2012; McCormick, 2000; Wissman, 2007, 2009, 2011; Muhammad, 2015b, 2015c). As Audre Lorde's (2007) explains, for women of color, poetry can be a life giving force that puts hopes and dreams into action.

> For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of daily lives. (p. 37)

Further, poetry is a unique genre in that is both economical, able to be written and read in short bursts—in between jobs or care taking (Lorde, 2007), and layered with meanings not often captured in other genre. Its emotional, aesthetic, and metaphoric potential are heightened and it is relatively unconstricted by rules. Thus,

it can allow girls of color to explore issues central to their lives, utilizing resources

that are often ignored in dominant educational spaces that put primacy on more

formal and regulated genre like informational and argument essay.

Women of color have also used playwriting for their radical expression.

Through playwriting, girls of color can fictionalize their real life experiences as well

as to gaze into and write futures. Particularly significant are the collaborative and

performative qualities of the playwriting genre. Drawing largely from Brazilian

revolutionary theater director and writer, Agusto Boal (1979), feminists have

latched on to the idea "Theatre is a weapon of the oppressed" (as quoted by Fine,

2011, p. 145) and, further, it is rehearsal for the revolution. Jeanne-Marie Miller

(1982) discusses the history of theater written by Black women in a bibliography of

Black women playwrights. She cites the ways in which playwriting was used to

express Black humanity, exploring Black experience from a Black point of view.

Citing playwrights like Sonia Sanchez, Lorraine Hansberry, Ntozake Shange and

slews more, Miller demonstrates the way that Black women have used theater as

affirmative, revolutionary, idea-laden, and fantasy driven.

> In contrast to white-authored dramas, where Black women have usually
> appeared as devoted servants to white families, as matriarchs or as dumb,
> incompetent people, Black women playwright have told the Black woman's
> story—from slavery to freedom—from her point of view. The plays have
> focused on her tragedies; her struggles; her dreams for herself, her family,
> and her race. Their images of Black women are usually positive, and their
> female characters, for the most part, have great moral strength. (p. 289)

Miller concludes her chapter mentioning the contribution of these playwrights to

the "moral growth of society" (pp. 289-290). Her bibliography demonstrates that

these Black women playwrights were not writing in isolation, for themselves, but for

each other. Playwriting, then, can simultaneously work toward self-definition and coalition.

A final genre of often utilized by women of color for radical purposes is autobiography and personal narratives. Latina and Chicana feminist traditions have especially spoken of the importance of testimonio and Nepantla traditions (Villenas, et al., 2006; Prieto & Villenas, 2012; Anzaldúa, 2007) as a way that women draw on their experience based and cultural knowledge. The power of testimonio is in "self-construction and contestation of power" (Prieto & Villenas, 2012). This is a written form that allows women to name their experiences, claim their identities, and push back against dominant narratives. Additionally, it is collaborative, coalitional work in that it often requires a witness. Narrative and autobiography are powerful modes of truth naming amongst women of color.

Theories of sociocultural and critical literacy and writing pedagogy. The feminist of color literary theory discussed above is well positioned to nuance the work of those who take a sociocultural stance to literacy as well as critical literacy theorists. I build off of work that situates literacies as social practices that are politically situated and imbued with power (Street, 2005). I further look to critical literacy scholars who have investigated the interconnections between literacy, identity, power, access, and design (Janks, 2013). By acknowledging the ways that literacy are situated within social contexts and how they are related to power, pedagogical spaces can open up opportunities for students to utilize multiple forms of literacies, some of which are relegated to the margins of mainstream educational spaces. This stance allows for more generous readings of students who,

through this lens, can be seen as skilled in multiple discourses and literacies they are practicing beyond mainstream, power-laden forms. The role of the pedagogue, then, becomes to cultivate, build on, and expand the rich literacies and discourses they bring to the classroom.

> I also turn to theories of critical literacy that build on the Freirian notion that:

> To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named the world in turn reappears to its namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Men [sic] are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection… It is in speaking their word that men [sic] transform the world by naming it, dialogue imposes itself as the way in which men achieve significance as men [sic]. (Freire, 1997, p. 69)

In other words, when people develop their skills to read the word and their worlds, to name their power as well as their oppressions, they are better equipped to suggest and enact change. Theories of critical literacy builds on concepts of critical pedagogy by providing a framework through which to study the "technologies of print and other communication to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices of the social fields of everyday life (Luke, 2012). As Janks (2010) has explored, literacy pedagogy should help cultivate students' awareness of how texts operate to advance particular values and to develop agency to both critically read and produce texts. I, like Ted Hall (2011), build on Janks's work, but further suggests that students should be given opportunities to develop "culturally specific forms of agency" (p. 9) to challenge dominant ideologies. Thus, in my work, I attempted to create opportunities for students to utilize their own experiences, discourses, and strengths in order to interpret and resist the world and texts that they encountered.

I am further inspired by traditions of writing pedagogy that seek to access story, criticality, and expression. The traditions of writing pedagogy with which I am interested take seriously relationships of identity, both individual and communal, to writing. Based on my history as a elementary school teacher and as a staff developer for the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, headed by Lucy Calkins, I am influenced by workshop based teaching that honors students' stories and strengths and that places a focus on process, rather than simply product (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1975; Murray, 1972).

I depart from these workshop model theorists as I believe in a concept of voice as complicated, fluid, and occurring in a political context. I want to make the critical intervention, as scholars like María Paula Ghiso (2011; 2016), Christina Passos DeNicolo and Mónica Gónzalez (2015), and Cinthya Saavedra (2011) have done, in order to layer in the potential for theories of critical literacies and feminist of color perspectives to meld with workshop models, providing consideration for youth's racial, gendered, and linguistic identities in relationship to the power structures in which they exist. I also wish to complicate the notion of voice by adding the ideas of Barbara Kamler (2001), who, although in many ways aligns with Lensmire, rather than voice, uses story as a metaphor to describe the self in text. She does so in order to establish a more "textual orientation" to pedagogy, stating, "Metaphors of textuality… are more productive for a critical writing pedagogy because they foreground practices of *representation, labour and analysis*" (p. 177). This allows for the recognition of the socially mediated work of writing and points to the idea that writing creates a representation of an experience, not the experience

itself. Further, this conceptualization pushes back against the notion of an essential

and static self that can be discovered and fully expressed through writing. Rather, it

suggests that we are in a constant state of becoming, continually revising ourselves.

Critical writing pedagogy, then, can be an opportunity to revise one's ideas, one's

story, and work toward new levels of criticality and understanding of the self,

others, and the world.

Research Questions and Summary of Chapters

Using my theoretical framework, I created my dissertation project around

the following questions:

- What happens when girls of color are invited to think deeply about their identities, their relationships, and the issues that matter most to them using multimodal means of expression and exploration within a feminist writing pedagogy?
- What does a feminist pedagogy that is celebratory of girls look like and what is my role as the teacher-learner in this space?

This dissertation will explore these questions through a close examination of data

that arose from the genius girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood. The chapters will

unfold to reveal the ways the girls and I embarked on this study.

Chapter 2 will delve into the literature off of which this dissertation builds. It

will explore the ways that other scholars before me have created writing curriculum

that is culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally sustaining (Paris

& Alim, 2014, 2017), centering the knowledge, critiques, and fluid cultures of youth

of color. Further, I'll address the ways that writing pedagogy has been studied with

girls of color, specifically looking at how the literacies of girls of color, and the

affordances of literacy curriculum, specifically writing curriculum, have been investigated as a social justice project.

Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology and methods of the project. Through this chapter, I will discuss the ways that my feminist of color framework shapes the way I collected and analyzed data as well as how I created the curriculum for the Unnormal Sisterhood. This chapter will expound upon the ways I conceptualized ethical and humanizing research for and with girls of color and how feminist of color ideologies and epistemologies were centralized in my research and teaching.

Chapter 4 will discuss findings about how the girls within the Unnormal Sisterhood were invited to engage in critical celebration of themselves. The chapter will explicate the theoretical importance of feminist acts of self-love and self-care as resistant and revolutionary by narrating the ways that the girls engaged in literate acts of self-love. Importantly, it will expose the critical practices that arise through celebration, as the Unnormal Sisters poke holes in stereotypical narratives about girls of color with counternarrative and push back against false notions of normal produced by dominant culture that serve to other and degrade them.

Chapter 5 will build on Chapter 4 as it elucidates the ways that sharing knowledge about oneself and listening to other girls provided the basis for creating both affective bonds and political affiliations with one another as steps toward formulations of solidarity. Building on feminist of color principals of sisterhood and solidarity, the chapter will navigate the ways that literate activities provided tools for girls to both share and listen to one another. Further, it will highlight the importance of breaking from traditional notions of literacy pedagogy that are over

focused on product, rather than the processes that are directly tied to writing as well as those that run adjacent to writing. This chapter will suggest a break from hegemonic notions of writing, and instead focus on the intellectual, political, and relational work—work that can lead to the formation of solidarity across differences for multiracial girls of color—that can occur as a byproduct of writing in feminist writing pedagogy.

Chapter 6 will explore the ways that girls voiced their critiques of schooling as they engaged multiple ways of knowing. Taking on a feminist of color perspective that values emotional and embodied knowledge, the chapter will navigate the ways that girls theorized injustices in schools by weaving together personal, political, emotional, academic, and relational knowledge. This chapter invites conversation about how we might engage girls' emotional responses to schooling to push toward schools that are more justice oriented and abandon structures of heteropatriarchy that so confine them. This chapter is meant to illicit understandings of the ways that we as educators are implicated in damaging hegemonic structures and must be held accountable for breaking these patterns if we are truly dedicated to anti-racist and anti-sexist education.

Chapter 7, the conclusion, will provide a discussion of implications of the findings from Unnormal Sisterhood. The importance of creating celebratory feminist of color literacy curriculum in schools and in out of school spaces will be discussed, along side suggestions for how this pedagogy might take form. Additionally, implications for educational, and specifically literacy, research with and for girls of color will be discussed. Suggestions for future directions in research will be made.

Finally, I will close with my own reflections on the work, addressing my own hopes and desires to continue working as an advocate with and for girls of color as a practitioner and as a researcher.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW: STANDING WITH AND EXTENDING RESEARCH PERTAINING TO GIRL OF COLOR LITERACIES AND WRITING

Introduction

The work of this dissertation builds off of existing scholarly work aimed at better understanding literacy pedagogies for youth of color and, specifically, girls of color. For this literature review, I sought out the work of scholars who have already used culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1995) or sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017) pedagogies and feminist of color frameworks to understand writing pedagogy with youth of color, and where it exists, girls of color. In this literature review, I will explore the ways that writing has been used in culturally relevant or sustaining pedagogies with youth of color, and how researchers have taken up writing with girls of color by building on feminist of color ideologies. Because the Unnormal Sisterhood was made up of middle school students, I have chosen to look specifically at writing pedagogy for youth in upper elementary through high school, to best address the needs of the girls with whom I worked.

Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Writing Pedagogies

To best approach my work with the Unnormal Sisterhood, I chose to look carefully at research that centralizes cultural and community knowledge as necessary components of literacy pedagogy. Theories of culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017) pedagogies are just two terms that have helped to provided language around how we might refer to visions of pedagogies that honor students' knowledge, theories, and ways of knowing in academic spaces, creating new possibilities for learning, developing

critical analyses, generating knowledge, and engaging in social action for students of color. Literacy scholars concerned with equity have taken up and extended these terminologies to describe the ways literacy pedagogies can be reimagined beyond the confines of mandated and formalized curriculums that too often rely on Eurocentric texts, ideologies, histories, and ways of knowing. The scholars explored in this section look to the ways that writing pedagogy can transcend these confines and, instead, frame youth's community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) as necessary to writing pedagogy that truly allows the stories, knowledge, critiques, and theories of students of color to flourish. These are all pedagogies that challenge deficit ideologies and envision new possibilities for youth of color flourishing in writing curriculum.

Through his book, *Immigrant Students and Literacy*, which focused on his practitioner research study into his own fifth grade classroom, Gerald Campano (2007) invites literacy educators to think beyond the confines of mandated curriculum to invite immigrant students to pool their linguistic, cultural, affective, and experiential resources into literacy practices. He theorizes a "second classroom" in which this work can be done within and against the confining structures of schooling. In this space, immigrant youth take charge of their narratives and resist dominant deficitizing categories imposed on them. Instead, they put into use the "theories they themselves developed by reflecting on the concrete realities of their own lives" (p. 59). This work is a call for educators to look beyond the institutional and cultural boundaries that too often dominate the ways we conceive classrooms and literacies, and to instead listen to students in order to develop their critiques

and reimaginings of schooling and literacy pedagogy. These new visions of schooling and literacy pedagogy would honor the many resources students bring with them as a product of their culture, their identities, their histories, and their relationships.

Through her qualitative study of middle school youth, Limarys Caraballo (2017) critiques the tendency for mainstream literacy curriculum to be over focused on reading literature and writing essays. She highlights these tendencies as they are related to the standardization of literacy curriculum, tied to claimed efforts toward maintaining rigor. Her findings indicate that students enact resistance and critique of ELA curriculum, self-identifying as writers, even as their teachers do not see them as such. Thus, she suggests that to dismantle systems that are barriers to educational justice, youth's complex identities and literacies should be centralized in pedagogies, research, policy, and theories in literacy studies.

Valerie Kinloch (2012) also addresses the uses of culturally responsive literacy pedagogy with African American and Latinx high school youth in Harlem. Rejecting deficit narratives about youth of color that define their literacies as inadequate in school settings, she instead advocates for literacy pedagogy that is relational and that frames teaching and learning as multidirectional between teachers and students. This approach highlights the importance of culturally responsive pedagogies to include critical perspectives on power structures in students' lives and further suggests that students come to school with knowledge that, in collaborations with teachers and each other, can be used to problem-pose and problem-solve. By centering culturally relevant pedagogy, cultural modeling, and critical race theory in her work with youth, she suggests that not only will

opportunities to investigate identity, place, race, and counter-storytelling arise, but

also, these frameworks help youth and teachers to view Black and Brown people as

intellectual, political, innovative, and creative leaders. Importantly, these pedagogies

rely on what she and San Pedro (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017) define as "Projects in

Humanization" that are "enacted through the development of relationships, the

process of listening and storying, and the dialogic engagements that occur during

the telling and receiving of stories that have the potential to effect change" (p. 374).

In all, Kinloch's work provides a lens of how writing pedagogy that takes on critical

and cultural perspectives can be both rigorous and humanizing for youth of color.

Adding to conversations about youth of color literacies, David Kirkland

(2013) voices the importance for educators to "search past silences" around the

complex literacies and social worlds of Black male youth. Through his in depth

portraits of six Black male youth, he highlights the importance of listening with the

purpose of bringing to light and demystify their complex narratives. His work

highlights the tendency for Black males' literacies to be evaluated only by way of

standardized tests and the correlated narrative that the blame for their failures in

mainstream settings belongs on Black males themselves. Through Kirkland's

critique, it becomes apparent that traditional conceptualizations of literacy

reproduce oppression and reify hierarchies, placing Black males at a disadvantage.

He suggests, instead, we remove constraining definitions of literacy and to

reimagine what it means to be literate, looking past "basic definitions of literacy—

how people read and write or act with signs and symbols" (p. 13) and instead

recreating the study of literacy as one that "folds together the doing and the being, the struggle and the sacrifice" (p. 13).

In recent years, Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (2014, 2017) have taken up the term "culturally sustaining pedagogies" to describe what they view as a necessary intervention in educational studies that decenters and problematizes whiteness in schools. They claim:

> CSP seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation. CSP positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good, and sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits. Culturally sustaining pedagogy exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling. (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1)

Their 2017 edited collection engages scholarship addressing research on, conceptualizations of, and utilizations of culturally sustaining pedagogies. This scholarship provides examples of how youth and educators can collaborate to create more justice oriented writing pedagogies. For instance, Kinloch (2017) examines the ways that youth enact resistances to dominant pedagogies through writing and suggest that teachers inquire with students into their resistances in order to work toward co-constructing classrooms that honor multiple literacies and perspectives, rooted in students' racial, ethnic, linguistic, intellectual, and political identities. These efforts are humanizing and rely on caring and trusting relationships between teachers and students that give way to the generation of new co-constructed knowledge.

In Pars and Alim's volume, Wong and Peña's (2017) study of "The Courageous Writers of Bay Grove High School" examines the ways culturally

sustaining pedagogies offer opportunities to meaningfully consider the complexity

of youth of color as they work toward liberation through writing. By practicing

writing and other expressive and artistic genre rooted in students' cultures and the

cultures of other marginalized people, youth were able to move toward fuller

representations of themselves, which included the ways they were both agentive

and complicit, joyful and in pain. They were able to both celebrate their cultures

and, at times, critique it, providing youth with opportunities to collaborate in the

constructions of dynamic counternarratives and thoughtful movement toward

freedom.

Tim San Pedro (2017) uses the concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy to

describe youth in a high school Native American Literature classroom. In this

classroom, the students and teacher developed what he calls a "sacred truth space,"

or a "dialogic space to share our truths *and* to listen and learn with the truths of

others" (p. 103). This space took into account the multiplicity of non-dominant

voices that students of color bring to learning spaces and the potential for meaning

to be made in the synergy of students' stories. The classroom he studied is one in

which both students and teacher shared their stories rooted in their own

relationship to their communities, cultures, tribes, celebrations, and burdens,

through writing and art, identifying that storytelling can inspire trusting and caring

relationships. As students shared their writing and art, San Pedro demonstrates that

"hearing, seeing, and feeling the visual and verbal stories of others—and having

their stories valued and validated by another—fosters a classroom community in

which future discussions of race, colonization, and oppression can be discussed

meaningfully and dialogically" (p. 112). This challenges narrow notions of success too often heralded in schools and instead provides an a reimagining of curriculum centered on relationships that give way to the dialogic construction of knowledge, theories, and critique of those most marginalized by dominant schooling.

Collectively, these studies suggest that a break from traditional modes of understanding literacies in pedagogy and research would be an important move toward justice-oriented writing pedagogies. The trend toward standardized curriculum and over testing obscures the rich cultural, linguistic, and identity-based knowledges that students bring with them and, in turn, simultaneously deficitizes students of color and builds barriers to justice oriented curriculum that develops and builds on what students bring to the classroom. Culturally sustaining literacy pedagogy offers an alternative route by insisting that youth knowledge and ways of knowing are necessary to curriculum that allows them to flourish, to critique, and to resist by putting into play the multiple literacies and deep funds of knowledge they bring and can develop in the classroom.

Standing With and Adding to Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Writing Pedagogies

This body of research provides an important intervention to the proliferation of Eurocentric curricula that fails to acknowledge the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) of all of our students. I wish to stand with these scholars and extend this intervention with my own research by adding an explicitly intersectional lens to the work. Like many of the scholars listed in this section, my research is conducted with a multicultural group of students, but what is not explicitly discussed in this

body of literature is specifically how the intersections of gender and race play into culturally responsive pedagogies with multicultural girls of color. In the next section, I will address the ways that gender and race are being discussed in regards to girl of color literacies, and then further explicate the critical intervention that this dissertation hopes to make in regards to how we theorize and enact writing pedagogies for multicultural groups of girls of color.

Girls of Color and Literacies

My research builds off of the valuable scholarship with girls of color that some educational researchers have already begun. It extends the small but growing field on writing pedagogy that centers girls of color and which I identify as critically celebratory. The literature covered in this section brings light to the ways that scholars are already exploring the complexities of girls of color and their literacies, for, as Muhammad and Haddix (2016) explain, "literacy educators must understand a more complete vision of the identities girls create for themselves, and the literacies and practices needed to best teach them" (p. 301). This work acknowledges the vulnerabilities girls of color face while also centering their genius, agency, and the literacy practices in which they are constantly engaging. I will discuss the ways that my work will add to the existing conversation about girls of color and their literacies by expanding the scope of the current research to address groups of multiracial groups of girls and placing more focus on Asian girls within these conversations. This literature review owes a debt to Gholnecsar Muhammad and Marcelle Haddix (2016), off of whose very thorough literature review on Black girl literacies, this literature review builds.

Writing with girls of color

As discussed in the theoretical framework, there is a long history of women of color using writing for resistant and radical purposes. Although there is a rich theoretical foundation that speaks to the ways that writing has served women of color, far less empirical data about the literacies of girls of color exists. The literature reviewed here offers a view of what does exist in regards to empirical examples of how girls of color have used writing as a counterhegemonic route toward self-definition, coalition building, and social action.

A first example of this is Maisha Winn's (2012) ethnographic inquiry into the ways incarcerated and formerly incarcerated girls created and performed texts in a playwriting group called Girl Time. She found that the writing that occurred in the playwriting group allowed girls to explore and express their experiences, identities, and desires. The playwriting, itself, was, at its core, resistant work. Writing was a route toward self-definition as it allowed girls to explore the intersecting oppressions and identities as they inquired into the numerous structural inequities they faced and wrote visions of their futures with hope and creativity. Girls were able to fictionalize and perform some of their own experiences and therefore analyze their lives, their sense of deservingness, and hopes. Winn's research offers a powerful glimpse into the ways that the writing centered group was not simply empty programming for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated girls of color, but, rather, that the writing the girls did served as a mechanism for them to utilize their power and resist oppressive narratives.

In addition to being a tool for self-definition and counternarrative, writing

can also serve as a vehicle toward social justice action. In Muhammad's (2015b)

work with Black Muslim girls, she found that girls used writing as a sociopolitical

tool. Muhammad researched and facilitated a three week writing course based on

Qur'anic principals. The group focused on an Islamic definition of literacy, "the

purpose of the pen," and the ways Muslims respond to oppression. What she found

was that the girls, when invited to write about social issues, they most frequently

wrote about war, abuse, violence, and mistreatment of women and girls. What's

more, their written exploration of these topics reflected their multiple identities.

Muhammad claims,

> To write about these particular issues, they had to consider the human
> condition and how their pens could shed light on a social issue or improve
> the conditions of others… I found that when writing was framed in this way,
> it led girls to write across broader contexts and purposes, which implies that
> this type of writing needs to be the *urgent compulsion* in schools and
> classrooms, as instruction must be framed around students' desires to
> improve the world. (p. 27)

Her work suggests that writing was useful for girls both in exploring social justice

issues and for giving girls a sense of agency in resisting and speaking out against

abuses against women and girls. Muhammad's work provides a powerful start to a

conversation about how girls might, over more extended periods of time, utilize

writing to engage in critique and resistance.

Tracey Flores (2018) uses Gutiérrez's (2008) concept of a "third space" to

frame her work with Latina adolescent girls and her parents. She describes the

importance of creating a collaborative space in which the girls and their parents

were able to "disrupt the oppressive apolitical contexts and the silencing and

controlling of bodies and narratives through the act of speaking one's truth orally, in writing, and through drawing" (p. 23). In this space, she found that writing was a tool through which girls were able to speak truths, narrating their experiences and pushing back against oppression. Further, she describes this writing as being motivated from the experiences of struggling through oppression. Her findings suggest the importance of creating spaces with and for girls of color, in order to create spaces where girls can not only develop their voice and craft, but also put these to use as they critical examine their worlds.

Multiple Literacies of Girls of Color

Studies of writing that involve more than traditional pen and paper literacies illuminate the ways girls of color are engaging in literate activity beyond the classroom context. A newer area of inquiry into how girls of color are using multiple literacies has emerged in more recent years. An overarching theme that has been explored through this body of literature is that multiple literacies can provide routes toward "culturally specific forms of agency" (Hall, 2011, p. 9). As Detra Price-Dennis (2016) discusses, mainstream conversations about Black girls often label them as deficient or struggling and also fail to recognize the multiple ways girls are, in fact, literate. Turning attention to multimodal literacies can illuminate the layered ways that girls of color are literate. This is not to ignore how girls of color can and do use traditional literacy practices, but instead, to create a fuller picture of the multiple ways they consume and create texts.

Ted Hall (2011) explored how African American girls engaged in literacy work through digital story telling. Hall builds on traditions of critical literacy by

incorporating a multicultural lens and highlighting the importance of the intersectional identities of the Black girls with whom he worked. The girls in his study first interacted with African American literature, responded to it in writing, and then created their own digital stories in response. What he found was that the girls built on culturally specific and historical forms of resistance, healing, and coalition as they created their digital texts. Through their co-written texts, they told their stories, engaged in issues important to them, and processed and transformed their pain in coalition with one another. In these stories, the girls not only engaged in critical literacies, but also engaged in the resistant act of ensuring the continuation of their culture and traditions through multimodal texts. This work brings to light the need for further inquiry into how girls of color are now using culturally specific modes of communication, such as social media, which has been, in recent years, so effectively used by women of color for social justice and critical purposes. As educators, we would do well to better understand, for example, "Black Twitter" and movements like Black Lives Matter as culturally specific digital literacies with which girls of color could critically engage.

Gholnecsar Muhammad and Erica Womack (2016) investigated the ways that Black girls use both traditionally written texts and non-print texts to work against dominant representations of Black girls and how they choose represent themselves. Using both pen and paper and digital platforms like Prezzi and Pintrest, the girls resisted stereotypes and created alternative representations of Black girlhood, especially addressing issues like beauty and hair, the oversexualization of Black women and girls, and stereotypes about their intellectual inferiority and lack of

ambition. Their texts resisted negative representations as girls produced texts centered on self-love, esteem, and confidence. With some of the girls, interacting with multimodal texts gave them means to engage in a "continual redesigning of self" (p.34). By working with multiple modalities, girls manipulated print, sound, and image to reframe perceptions of Black girlhood and to push back against pathologizing discourses so often used against them. Again, this work brings up questions of how youth might be invited in classrooms to use popular social media outlets to engage in this critical and resistant work, so that their everyday literate social media activity is more directly cultivated.

Detra Price-Dennis (2016) worked with a group of Black girls to better understand how they are using digital tools to advance their literacies. She frames her study around Elaine Richardson's (2007) work on Black women's literacies, defining them as "the development of skills and vernacular arts and crafts that help females advance and protect themselves and their loved ones in society" (p. 329). Price-Dennis turns to digital literacies as a contemporary form of Black girls' literacies, one that they are more and more frequently utilizing as a way to produce and consume knowledge. For this study, Price-Dennis worked with a fifth grade teacher and class engaged in a curriculum that engages digital tools to explore a variety of social justice topics. Her findings first point to the importance of building curriculum that raises issues that affect Black girls' lives. By using multimodal texts such as advertisements, students were able to explore the ways that stereotypes along racial and gender lines play out and subsequently engage in conversations about representation, a topic that so deeply impacts the lives of Black girls. Price-

Dennis also found that digital tools were available for girls to become agents of change. Girls were first exposed to a variety of information and perspectives that were not readily available in school sanctioned textbooks. Further, they were also able to engage as public intellectuals via social media platforms, utilizing the "political, collaborative and intellectual nature of Black girls' literacies" (p. 353). A final finding was that by using digital media, girls were able to embody a variety of ways of being learners and knowledge producers beyond print based text. In these ways, Black girls were able to take up social justice issues in a deep and multilayered manner, both consuming multiple sources of information, and producing agentive and collaborative texts.

The studies here all suggest the importance of creating spaces where girls are harnessing multiple modes of literacy, both to give them opportunities to utilize multiple platforms to express and explore their voices and stories, and also because such pedagogy acknowledges the ways that girls are multiply literate. These conversations about multiliteracies highlight that youth are regularly and deeply engaged in digital literacies as a result of the proliferation of social media and portable devices. Classrooms offer potential to cultivate critical engagement with multimodal texts. Thus, not only should we continue to investigate the ways that youth use modalities like digital story telling, Prezzi, and Pintrest, but they should also, as demonstrated by Price-Dennis, be invited in classrooms to engage some of the most popular social media platforms like Twitter and YouTube, honoring the multiple real life literacy events they encounter. Further, as we engage multiple literacies in the classroom, it would be useful to better understand how students

directly utilize the literacies cultivated within the classroom in their out of classroom literate activities.

Literacy Collaborations

As scholars and educators, it is necessary that we engage girls of color not only in individual and isolated literate activity, but also to consider how we can center collaboration and coalitional literacies. Some literacy scholarship has built on how Black women have come together in writing collaboratives to not only develop reading and writing skills, but also to "engage in multiple acts of literacy (i.e. reading, writing, debating, lecturing, publication critique) in efforts to make sense of their identities, improve their intellectual development to incite new thought, and gain print authority or the ability to use language as a tool to exert their voices and ideas" (Muhammad, 2015a, p. 280). Contemporary scholarship on Black girls' writing collaboratives reflects the ways that they are continuing to come together to achieve similar goals.

A pattern that emerges across the literature is that girls of color name their collectives in ways that marked their cultural and gendered identities—for example, "The Sistahs" (Wissman, 2007), "The Sister Authors" (Muhammad, 2012); and "Homegirls" (Brown, 2009, 2013). Ruth Nicole Brown (2009, 2013) speaks of the need for spaces that center and celebrate the cultural and gendered identities of women and girls of color. Through Brown's prolonged engagement with SOLHOT (Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths), a Black girl and woman collective that she founded, she sought to affirm Black girls, celebrating their freedom, lives, and their genius. Brown developed a Black girl centered, arts-based methodology that used

performance as a mechanism for sense-making. Brown acknowledges that her methodology is not one that is replicable or easily applicable to policy, but highlights the importance of this kind of work to illuminate marginalized stories in ways that traditional, colonialist methods cannot. By using photography, music, poetry, and performance as part of her methodology, and by viewing the girls and women in the group as collaborators in knowledge production, her project reveals the complexities of Black girlhood and narrates how the space became a site of positive transformation for both the girls and women involved.

Another example of a literacy collaborative that centered the experiences and knowledge of Black girls is the work Annette Henry (1998) did to form a literacy collaborative for African Caribbean immigrant girls to explore some of the issues and concerns through "culturally and gender-relevant curricula." In this group, girls read a shared text, *The Diary of Latoya Hunter: My First Year at Junior High*, as a means of connection to the girls lives, and wrote in their own journals. In conversations and in writing, girls were encouraged to respond from their experiences. Later, girls engaged in "problem-posing circles" to analyze social situations through the lens of their personal experiences. What Henry found was that in the group, by centering the girls and giving them opportunities to work through personal and social issues, they were able to both express themselves and learn more about the world around them. She discusses that beyond simply centering culturally relevant texts, the space itself, a specifically girl of color space that allowed for the exploration of a complex web of identities and experiences and social locations, made way for girls to voice their views through writing and

conversation. Henry nuances this finding, adding that we cannot always predict what girls of color will center as important to them. Thus, girl of color centered work must be mindful of the complex web of social locations implicated in their identities.

Daneell Edwards' (2005) study of Black girls' literacies invites us to consider what a literacy collaborative that legitimizes the cultural practices of Black girls might look like. In this group, Black girls simultaneously participated in a reading and writing workshop and doing hair. Edwards builds on theories that center the importance of Black women's hair, explaining that for African American women and girls, doing hair has deep cultural, racial, political, and gendered roots. The centering of hair in Edwards' group allowed literacy practices to be embedded in cultural practices that deeply mattered to the Black girls involved. In this space, girls brought up topics that were interesting to them, but were often excluded or even forbidden, in institutional spaces like their classrooms. By embracing the girls' cultural practices and social and personal interests into this workshop, girls felt a sense of safety and were, therefore, able to learn from each other and from Edwards in the ways they felt were important to them. Edwards' work opens questions about how we might consider what girls of color, themselves, name as significant cultural practices and how we might center these in our literacy curriculum to create spaces in which girls of color with varying interests and histories could develop senses of collectivity around literate activities. As Henry (1998) highlights, our work must be open to considering the complex social locations that shape girls' interests and

cultural values and as educators and researchers, we must be open to these complexities.

Some researchers looking into Black girls' literacies have chosen to investigate groups that are inspired by historical traditions of literacy for Black women. Kelly Wissman (2011) created an in-school course that focused on the literacy tradition of African American women. She built on these traditions and the Foucauldian notion of an "other space", framing this course as a "space created without the constraints of mandated curriculum or standardized test pressures and as a space informed by an understanding of the connections among literacies, lived experiences, and identities" (p. 407). In this group, girls were able to embark on projects to explore and express their identities, more outside of the influence of dominant, deficitizing narratives that may have been present in the mainstream classroom. In this space, girls were able to deeply listen to one another as they expressed what is often "left unsaid" (or, I'd argue, is likely said, but ignored or criticized) in mainstream school spaces (Wissman, 2007). Through these conversations, girls were able to collaboratively make meaning while reading texts, writing about their lived experiences, and responding to those texts. This work raises questions about what it means for white women to do this work with girls of color. Wissman acknowledges her privilege and limits to her understanding within the space. When power dynamics exist such that the facilitator and researcher in the group benefits from the very structures that are being critiqued by the girls in the group, it is necessary to think about patterns of oppression might, despite well-concerted efforts, still be replicated. We must continue to probe into how the power

and privilege of educators either supports or interrupts the coalitional literacies amongst girls, and indeed all youth, of color.

Gholnecsar Muhammad (2015a) also created a literary collective for Black girls, modeling the group after nineteenth century Black women's literary societies and reading rooms. The girls indicated a number of factors that influenced their writing. Most frequently cited, though were the following three: reading mentor texts by women of color writers; freely writing without fear of censorship; and uninterrupted writing time. The writing that resulted from having these structures in place produced a collectivity of multiple voices, which combat the often monolithic constructions of Black girlhood. Muhammad claims, "their writings became mediums for the girls to construct who they are for the benefit of themselves and others" (p. 296). By creating a space where Black girls were connected not only to each other, but to their histories, Muhammad created conditions where girls were motivated to and invested in literate activity. Both Wissman and Muhammad's work allow us to imagine what it means to build on traditions while also taking into consideration contemporary cultural influences for girls of color.

Maisha Winn (2010, 2011, 2012) elaborates how girl of color work together to create meaning in literacy focused collaboratives in her study of the playwriting group for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated girls, Girl Time. Her work highlights the importance of having a space that honors girls of color for their complex identities.

In the context of Girl Time, the "table' represents a space in which poor youth

> of color, and girls in particular, can become armed with a sense of worthiness
> and deservingness. At this table, girls will be able to name their needs—
> education, critical literacy, opportunities to attend colleges and universities,
> fruitful careers, safe communities, and access to quality health care for
> themselves and for their children if they have them. (Winn, 2011, p. 124)

When the girls in the group, who were subject to a slew of stereotypes due to their

race, gender, and criminal records, were treated as humans, allowed to voice their

experiences and ideas, they were more easily able to name what they needed to do

to transcend the obstacles placed in front of them. Playwriting and performing

engendered anti-oppressive coalitional work among the girls in Girl Time as they co-

produced the plays and engaged in a process of witness and testimony through the

sharing of plays.

In another playwriting program researched by Lee and De Finney (2008),

girls of color wrote and performed plays about their racialized experiences in their

mostly white city. The researchers used a transnational feminist framework to

explore how girls were experiencing race in their mostly white cities and how

educators might come to more seriously consider the complexities of girls of color,

lift their voices, and support their agency in their communities. Girls reported that

the space allowed them to overcome a feeling of aloneness that resulted from their

racialized experiences and to engage in conversations about those experiences with

others, included other girls who perhaps were experiencing similar issues. Despite

these reports, it was also evident that there were both tensions between girls of

different ethnic groups, color evasive discourses, and denials of complicity in racism

as girls used their ethnic identification as non-white to defend themselves against

accusations of racism. Lee and De Finney leave, then, a question dangling about if

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and how researchers and educators might interrupt these patterns of conflict

amongst non-dominant groups and what pedagogical considerations could be put

into place in order to help build coalition and understanding across difference.

Standing with and Adding to the Literature on Girl of Color Literacies

The work mentioned in this literature review is critical in a world that so

often silences, ignores, or inflicts physical and symbolic violence on girls of color,

particularly Black girls. The work discussed here rejects these silences and this

violence by centering Black girls, valuing them, celebrating their literacies as

powerful, and rejecting deficitizing and violent narratives about them. I hope to

stand with this work by providing more evidence that confirms the literary

brilliance of girls of color and by engaging in topics not yet fully discussed in the

girls of color literacy scholarship. What is so powerful about this existing work is

that so much of it is so deeply committed to the importance and brilliance of Black

girls.

This dissertation supports this truth, adding a different but complimentary

perspective by looking at both Black and Asian girls in shared and collaborative

spaces. It takes into account how Black and Asian girls might develop solidarity by

engaging in literacy collaboratives with one another. Additionally, as the literature

on Asian girls is rather limited, this study also serves to provide one perspective on

Asian girl literacies. Further, it offers insights into how girls of color engage

literacies both within the club and adjacent to the club as they utilized traditional

pen and paper literacies as well as digital and multimodal literacies.

Through my investigation with the Unnormal Sisterhood, I hope to

contribute important insights that help add complexity to how we understand "girls of color," resisting stereotypes like the "model minority" (Lee, 2009) or "loud Black girl" (Koonce, 2012, Morris, 2007) and adding depth to how we understand the way gender, race, and ethnicity intermesh to create unique experiences for girls of color. Further, it will add complexity to the category of "girls of color," pointing to the specificity of how individuals across this category experience the world and put into practice their cultural literacies as a product of their intermeshing identities.

Moreover, this investigation into how minoritized and marginalized girls work with one another across differences and against white supremacy and misogyny to protect themselves, each other, and their futures will help illuminate coalitional forms of resistance and change. Although theoretical work about coalitional work is plentiful in feminist of color literary theory and philosophy (i.e. Anzaldua, 1983; Lugones, 1987; Lorde, 2007; Moraga, 1983; among many others), little empirical data exists, especially with young girls. Like many of the woman of color philosophers who call attention to the importance of the resistant work of women of color, I believe there is power in interracial coalition of women and girls of color to resist hegemonic structures. I hope that this dissertation will provide empirical evidence of how young girls of color can and do enact these coalitions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS: COMPOSING ETHICAL GIRL OF

COLOR LITERACY RESEARCH

Introduction

To critically celebrate girls of color through research is counter-hegemonic, counter-heteropatricarchal (Brown, 2009, 2013). To critically celebrate someone, you must know them intimately and from many angles. To critically celebrate someone is to acknowledge their strengths and their struggles. A critically celebratory stance reflects what Eve Tuck (2009) describes as "desire-based" research. Tuck calls upon researchers to "document not only the painful elements of social realties, but also the wisdom and hope" and to "depathologize the experiences of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that people are seen as more than broken and conquered" (p. 416). I approached this project with critical celebration and desire at its core, engaging in an iterative process that centered girls' experiences, their joy, and their vulnerabilities.

My Research Roots at St. Frances Cabrini

The design of this research builds on and is shaped by the work I've done at my research site, St. Frances Cabrini, since 2013 as part of an ongoing research partnership lead by Drs. Gerald Campano and María Paula Ghiso. The significant length of time I spent with the St. Frances community allowed me to build relationships and make observations off of which to build my research. It is in the slow building of my research that permitted me time to think more deeply, read more relevant literature, and, most importantly, familiarize myself with the context, the people, and the relationships that existed at St. Frances Cabrini. Furthermore,

this extended time there allowed me to build a collaborative approach to the research (Mountz, et al, 2015) that importantly shaped this project. Understandings of a community, their needs, their desires, are cultivated with time and trust, with a sense of slowness, so allowing my research to take form in a place where these roots had already been cultivated helped to provide me with unique insights that would not engender immediately if I had chosen to do this work in a context I was less familiar with.

Over the years, I had been involved in multiple projects at St. Frances, including a Community Researcher's Project, a nonfiction reading and writing project that centered students' cultural and experiential knowledge as resources (Campano, Ngo, & Player, 2015; Player, Ngo, Campano, & Ghiso, 2016); an afterschool robotics and literacy program which attempted to meld STEM, critical literacy, and creative writing; an inquiry into college club with immigrant youth, which attended to their questions about access to higher education (Player, Gill, & Campano, 2016); and a multigenerational, multilingual, and multicultural family inquiry into educational access (Campano, Ghiso, Rusoja, Player, & Schwab, 2016). The knowledge and insights I have attained by working with these students has built the foundation for my dissertation research. My time with youth and families both at the St. Frances school and community center helped me to understand that there is a need and desire for academic spaces that center the brilliance of girls of color and that offer opportunities for them to critique and analyze the world around them. Thus, the Unnormal Sisterhood was created within the community that I

already knew so well and as a direct product of conversations and observations at St. Frances.

Research Partners

I purposefully name the girls in my study as "partners," rather than subjects or even participants. I make this move specifically to emphasize that the knowledge generated from this study is co-produced. It rises from the synergy created in the intermingling of my knowledge and the girls'. The selection of my research site and my partners adheres to what Maxwell (2013) discusses as "purposeful selection," a strategy in which "particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to [my] questions and goals, and that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 97). The students with whom I worked were all girls in 6th and 7th grade who self-selected into the group, signing up voluntarily. To recruit, I sent out flyers to the girls and families in 6th-8th grade (See Appendix A) and visited their classes to explain in person the objectives of the club. Through this process, a total of nine girls signed up, but two of those girls stopped coming after the initial meetings. In addition, one tenth grade girl, Ash, a graduate of the school, joined in. I was connected to her through Dr. Bethany Welch, the director of the adjacent community center, who mentioned Ash's proclivity toward writing as well as her desire to take on more leadership roles as part of her process of healing from some mental health issues. The chart in figure 3.1 outlines the grade and racial and ethnic identities the girls claimed.

Name	Grade	Race/Ethnic Identification
Ciara	6	Black
Diamond	6	Black/African American, Dominican, and Jamaican
Emily	6	Asian American/Vietnamese, White, Cambodian, and "a little bit Black"
Giselle	7	Asian American/Filipina
Halsey	7	Asian American/Vietnamese
Kathleen	7	Black/Mixed
Seraphina	7	Black
Ash	10	Asian American/ Indonesian

Figure 3.1. The Racial and Ethnic Identities of the Unnormal Sisterhood

The girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood are so much more than could be captured by this very simplified chart. As part of my process of meditating on them and seeking to know them well through writing, I put together memos about each of them, creating a personal biography that helped explain my readings of their personalities (see Appendix B). What I've come to know is that each girl possessed unique personal experiences, talents, knowledges, ways of being, and hearts. I hope by reading their stories through this dissertation, you will come to understand their individuality, their dynamism, their multifaceted brilliance.

Ethical and Humanizing Research

Above all, I committed to doing work that was, at its core, humanizing (Paris & Winn, 2014), building on ethical trends in educational research. I choose to do work that rebels against traditional notions of research that frame the researcher as all knowing and participants as objects of study. I choose, instead, a model of research done *with* community member. It remains my goal to delink my research

from imperialistic ideologies (Smith, 2012) to the best of my ability and to engage in research that honors community knowledge as necessary to any project that claims to be equity oriented. Like Paris and Winn (2014) and others in their volume, *Humanizing Research,* I hope to join a "trajectory toward a stance and methodology of research that acts against the histories and continuing practices, ideologies, and accompanying dehumanizing policies of discrimination and unequal treatment based on the race, ethnicity, and belief systems of Indigenous peoples, other U.S.-born people of color, and people of color who immigrate to the U.S." (p. xvi).

A common trend in research about minoritized communities that I hope to rebel against is that it is often "damage-centered," set on pathologizing and painting pictures of disenfranchised communities as unwell or broken (Tuck, 2009). Tuck suggests that scholars attempt to enact research that, instead, captures "desire." She proposes that a desire-based position would show that "even when communities are broken and conquered, they are so much more than that—so much more that this incomplete story is an act of aggression" (p. 416). As I worked with the Unnormal Sisterhood, I attempted to stay attuned to the injustices the girls perceived, but also to the ways that they rose above and imagined better worlds for themselves. To use the words of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), I strove to "celebrate survival" (p. 146), focusing on the ways that girls transcended and sought to transcend their realities. This meant, for me, getting to know the girls with whom I worked at a very personal level, centering their voices in my research, and listening to them deeply, rather than supplanting my assumptions about them before their own self-conceptions. It meant treating them as humans, with inherent genius worthy of listening to.

Ethical Norms for Working with Girls of Color

My effort to enact humanizing and desire-based scholarship grows largely out of my mentorship under Drs. Gerald Campano and María Paula Ghiso. It is largely influenced by their important "ethical and professional norms," which they articulated, along with the director of St. Frances, Bethany Welch (Campano, Ghiso, & Welch, 2016). In this piece, they state five norms of ethical research:

- **Norm One:** Equality is the starting point, not the end point

- **Norm Two:** Community members' knowledge and perspectives must be taken seriously

- **Norm Three:** Specific foci and questions are codesigned with community members

- **Norm Four:** Research with/for the community should benefit the community

- **Norm Five:** Research is made public in transparent, collaborative, and creative ways

The creation, enactment, and analysis of the Unnormal Sisterhood attempted to adhere to these norms. The norms coupled with other scholarship on ethical research methods provided guidance as I attempted to imagine and enact what could be girl of color centered ethical research.

Norm One: Equality is the starting point, not the end point. Throughout the course of this research, I was committed to seeing the girls as having equally important knowledge and insights into the content of my dissertation. However, this assumption of equality did not erase my awareness of our differences, both in what knowledge we were privy to and the power which I automatically had in the world as a product of my age, my education level, class, and my East Asian mixed race

heritage. Rather than assuming we were "all the same" or adopting a color evasive sort of mentality, I operated under the assumption that we had different knowledge and strength to share with one another, all of which were equally important. Like Anna Louise Keating (2013) and others, I operated off of the assumption that to make change for women and girls of color, we must listen with raw opening, connect through difference, and operate on an assumption of radical interconnectedness. With this acknowledgement, we were able to better create new knowledge together, harnessing a wealth of resources, rather than just my university-based and adult assumptions. It was my presumption that we could operate in symbiosis, sharing our equally valid knowledge to produce new ideas. It was important for me to create a space that contrasted their classrooms, in which they reported teachers often ignored them, silenced them, or even punished them for expressing their feelings, ideas, or critiques.

In the creation of the space, then, I made sure that we began each session seated at a table, sharing snacks and words, facing one another as equals. I modeled this after the notion of the "kitchen table," a symbol of gathering amongst women of color, aiming to do communal and resistant work (Haddix, et al, 2016). Further, during lessons, I would often let the girls take the lead in conversations, bringing up their concerns and critiques freely. Rather than assume the content I brought in was more or less important than their own, I would suggest content, but in the end, follow girls' lead in the conversations. Further, rather than attempting to control their actions, I would facilitate literacy engagements and lessons, but also allow them to make choices about whether or not they would participate, trusting their

judgment on what they needed the most in that moment (Brown, 2013). Especially in the face of their highly controlled days at school, I saw our space as welcoming of divergence and rebellion, but simultaneously infused with learning opportunities the girls did, more often than not, choose to follow. As Brown (2013) explains, much programming designed for girls of color is often with "the purpose of controlling their bodies and producing white middle-class girl subjectivities" (Kindle location 218). I chose, like Brown, to instead create an environment of respect, not control. To the best of my ability I attempted to promote an equal value on my own will and values and on those of the girls'. We decided together, day by day, what the experience in the group would be and, in turn, were able to freely and equally share our theories, desires, and stories with the aim of generating new ideas and theories.

Norm Two: Community members' knowledge and perspectives must be taken seriously. Building off of Norm One and my emphasis on considering all girls as having equally important insights, I attempted to create a space where girls' ideas were taken seriously and where all members within the space took on a listening stance. I stand with Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010) who discuss, that much educational research fails to accurately or adequately depict the needs and desires of Black girls and, thus, it is important that we reimagine research methods that centralizes their ways of knowing, their knowledge, and their theories. They posit that much research comes from white patriarchal viewpoints that layer stereotypes and assumptions of Black girlhood on them, and thus strip them of their truths. As Edwards, McArthur, and Russell Owens (2016) further contend, research about Black girls needs to take on stances that "accomplish the humanization of Black

girls, as well as foregrounding Black girls' perspectives, thoughts, and emotions"

(p.437). This highlights that it is necessary not only that Black girls are taken

seriously, but that we look at the multiple dimensions of their knowledge. As

researchers with our aims set on humanization of girls of color, we must understand

that we can learn not only from what is codified as theory by dominant perspectives,

but also from their embodied and relational knowledge. I believe this is also true of

girls of color at large, including the Black and Asian girls represented in this study.

Smith (1999) has claimed, "Communities are the ones who know the answers to

their own problems, although their ideas tend to be dismissed when suggested to

various agencies and governments" (p. 159). I want my research to be the kind of

research that refuses dismissal and, instead, trusts deeply the silenced voices of

middle school girls of color.

To accomplish this valuing of girls of color perspectives I remained vigilant in

understanding that the sisters' knowledge about contemporary Black and Asian

girlhood was far more developed than my own. Part of reaching this understanding

was challenging assumptions about the girls in the group and, instead, striving to

listen to and learn from the girls' experiences in the group. Like Delgado-Bernal

(1998), I chose to reject assumptions about overarching commonalities amongst all

women and girls, and instead, listen closely to unearth the specificity of the girls'

experiences. Importantly, I viewed this research as an opportunity to play against

white patriarchal assumptions that too often present themselves in research and,

instead, place extra value on the experiences and knowledge of girls of color. It was

important to me that not only was I seeking to gather data rooted in the experiences

of the girls, but also, to filter it through analytical lenses provided to me by the girls, who would be most effected by the research itself.

Norm Three: Specific foci and questions are codesigned with community members. It was my objective that through this research, I would co-create something new with and alongside my research partners. Inspired by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), I wanted to communally create research that invited the sisters to create new ideas, build new knowledge with each other and with me about the issues that mattered to them. I wanted to build on the creative energy they brought both as individuals and as members of various cultural groups to answer questions that mattered to them, that they felt were important and necessary. Smith discusses the way that creating ones own research questions can be a rebellion against being positioned as either "object" or "victim." In turn, the course of research can be more culturally sensitive and rooted in cultural knowledge.

As discussed in the introduction, this dissertation rises from the prolonged work I did with the community and school at St Frances. Although my initial concepts for the club arose from my observations and own interests in girls of color, it was not without conversations with community members and especially youth that this project arose. As I observed the lack of academic spaces for girls of color to be celebrated, their knowledge honored, their strengths built upon, I began to informally inquire into whether this would be a space that girls of color desired. All the girls I asked about it responded affirmatively, suggesting there would be something important to them about an all girls of color space for writing.

Further, the iterative design of the study was established so that the inquiry followed the needs and desires of the girls. The various writing projects and topics we followed were based on girls explicitly stated desires and my own ongoing reflections about the topics that arose and the events that arose both locally and nationally. Of course, it was also with the permission from the principal that I initiated the club and was sure to seek not only his approval, but any of his own concepts of how the club might best serve the school. Thus, while the initial conception of the club arose from my own interests and my own perception that it was a needed addition, it was an ongoing conversation with community members, students, and administration that truly gave the club its form.

Norm Four: Research with/for the community should benefit the community. It is my firm belief that the research should be done with and for communities, as opposed to on. I build on Smith's (1999) conceptualization of decolonizing research with indigenous people. This stance has illuminated the importance of "challeng[ing] the research community about such things as racist practices and attitudes, ethnocentric assumptions and exploitative research, sounding warning bells that research can no longer conducted with indigenous communities as if their views did not count or their lives did not matter" (p. 9). I extend this notion to apply to other minoritized and frequently exploited communities, including the girls of color in focus within this research project.

With this in mind, I conceptualized the study as done in partnership with the girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood. I view them as co-creators of knowledge and the primary beneficiaries of the work. Thus, rather than simply do research as a benign

or "neutral" observer, I created the club as a place where girls would benefit directly from the pedagogy I implemented. The work filled a need I perceived, and I built relationships purposefully with the girls in order to best serve them. Further, as girls revealed information in the group, I took it on as my responsibility to help them problem solve these issues and to take action, myself, as necessary. For instance, when the girls mentioned discomfort with a new teacher, reporting to me that he was "creepy" and made them uncomfortable with the way he would touch and look at them, rather than taking a distanced researcherly stance, I was able to discuss options with the girls about how they could advocate for themselves and also went directly to the principal myself. What I found when I spoke to the principal in the days following the conversation with the girls is that they had already expressed their concerns to the faculty at the school. Thus the principal and I were able to extend the conversation using the information we both had and action was taken by the school to further investigate and rectify the problem. In this situation, the responsibility I took to address issues head on with the girls seemed to both promote a sense of self-advocacy amongst the girls and give them an extra layer of protection as I served as a secondary advocate for their needs.

Norm Five: Research is made public in transparent, collaborative, and creative ways. Part of directly benefitting the community means sharing the information that arises from the research directly with the community. This means going beyond presenting by myself at conferences, but instead, thinking about creative ways to invite the girls into sharing the research with different audiences. By engaging the girls in presenting their theories and stories with a wider audience,

it not only gave the girls an opportunity to be civically engaged with the topics at hand (Morrell, Dueñas, Garcia, & López, 2013) by having a hand in the dissemination of research, but it also created an opportunity for others to hear the girls' brilliance without the filter of my voice and theoretical lens. As we consider the absences of the voices of girls of color in research conversations about them (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010), this can act as a counter measure.

I have set high ethical standards for myself in the execution of this work. In the year following formal data collection, the girls presented their writing and ideas to a group of women educators and scholars, a choice they made in order to spread their knowledge to an audience who they could trust to take them seriously. At this presentation, they read short essays and poems, talked about what they felt they deserved in schools, and held a question and answer session that allowed both the women to ask them questions and for them to ask the audience questions. The girls felt that the presentation was a way for their voices to be directly heard by stakeholders in education systems.

Practitioner Research

To enact my humanizing and relational view of research, I engaged in practitioner inquiry, as conceived by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009). This model was reflexive and positioned experience—my own and the experience of the girls of the sisterhood—as knowledge and theory. I blurred the lines between research and practice that are so often produced by mainstream conceptions of research, putting into practice the pedagogy I created and producing knowledge along side the girls in the club as we engaged in that pedagogy. Inspired by Cochran-Smith and Lytle

(2009), my work took on "inquiry as stance," defined as "a powerful and affirmative notion that recognizes the collective intellectual capacity of practitioners to work in alliance with others to transform teaching, learning, leading, and schooling in accordance with democratic principles and social justice goals" (p.118). I worked with the girls to produce new knowledge, viewing them as best positioned to understand the sexist, classist, and racist forces that effect their lives and to suggest ways to resist those forces (Collins, 2008).

Part of the beauty of practitioner inquiry is its improvisational quality. As I worked with the girls, the shape of my research took form. Specific lines of inquiry arose and I consistently made decisions as time passed based on what I had observed and learned. My pedagogical choices reflected my learnings so that I was able not only to observe patterns, but also to consistently make efforts to interrupt them and to create new possibilities for the girls.

Methods

Data Sources

To make sense of the Unnormal Sisterhood, I drew from a variety of sources in order to see what occurred within the group from multiple angles and to make sure that my analysis was fully fleshed out, rich with multiple perspectives. My aim was to explore not only what the girls brought with them to the club, but also to see how these brilliances manifest themselves within the pedagogy of the club. Thus, I collected data in the form of fieldnotes, semi-structured interviews and group conversations, and artifacts, including girls' writing and artwork.

Fieldnotes. A primary source of data for me was daily descriptive

observational fieldnotes. Emmerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) explain that

descriptive fieldnotes "involve *inscriptions* of social life and social discourse. Such

inscriptions inevitably *reduce* the welter and confusion of the social world to written

words that can be reviewed, studied, and thought about time and time again" (p.

12). Additionally, fieldnotes served as a way for me to process the events of each

club meeting, giving me time to slowly and as meticulously as possible, to retell, to

myself, the occurrences of the day. In this process, I was able to analyze events,

bring attention to aspects of the day that may have otherwise slipped my

recollection, and respond reflexively to the days work. Thus, fieldnote writing

served as an ongoing form of inquiry for me, helping me to move forward through

my inquiry, recording and reflecting each and every day. As discussed by

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), writing itself is a form of inquiry, and I felt as

though the act of recording, in narrative form, the occurrences of my every day (in

addition to the writing of memos, to be discussed later) served to lead me to more

deeply inquire into and process through my practice. Attempting to capture not just

the occurrences, but also probe into some of the affective moments of the day

helped me inquire into multiple aspects of daily occurrences.

Thus, I recorded the events of every meeting. Because of the practitioner

based nature of this work, I was not be able to write fully descriptive notes when I

was in the field, as I was teaching and facilitating the group. Rather, I took jottings to

keep "record of events and impressions captured in key words and phrases"

(Emmerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 29) to help jog my memory later when I write

down my descriptive, thick fieldnotes. I carved out time at the end of every meeting to write my fieldnotes, as suggested by Emmerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011). After every meeting I had with the girls, I would retreat to a coffee shop, as immediately as possible, and write in as much detail as possible my recollections, aided by my jottings from the day. In writing fieldnotes, I attempted to retain as many details as I could so that I might best hold onto moods, dialogues, relationships, and so on.

Semi-structured Interviews & Focus groups. I conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with the girls so that I could work towards uncovering the ways that they were thinking about writing, the club, themselves, and each other throughout the club. The interviews and focus groups were be based on interview/focus group protocols of 5-7 questions, which addressed topics related to the research questions and give students opportunities to discuss any other thoughts that feel prevalent to them in relationship to the club. I used focus groups in conjunction to interviews in an effort to, as Madriz (2009) has discussed, "narrow the gap between myself as researcher and the [girls] providing me with a glimpse of their social reality" (p. 116), provide a sense of togetherness, and allow for collective narratives to emerge. I conducted interviews with the girls both toward the start of the club and toward the end to see how the girls' ideas and insights evolved over time.

The interviews and focus groups were highly relational. I made efforts to maintain the conversational and familiar tone I had established with the girls in the group. Citing Bakhtin, Valerie Kinloch and Timothy San Pedro (2014) discuss the way that in humanizing research, meaning can be made by engaging the students

with whom they do research in a process of storying and listening. They use the term "dialogic spiral" to describe this process, defining the dialogic spiral as:

> the construction of a conversation between two or more people whereby the dialogic process of listening and speaking co-creates an area of trust between speakers—the space between. In this between space, the speakers' discourse reveals vulnerabilities and feelings. The conversation moves back and forth when the speaker becomes the listener and the listener becomes the speaker. In order for the conversation to continue, we must see or hear that the other is listening to what we are saying… If constructive, this dialogical spiral moves back and forth, while it also advances forward and upward by expanding prior understandings of listening and storying. (p. 30)

In interviews as well as in the way I interact with the girls during the club, I made every effort to remain fully engaged as a listener and questioner, building trust through this process by not only treating their stories with respect, but also offering my own stories even when they made me vulnerable. This, I hoped, also served as a model for girls on how to listen and share with one another, creating what Dutro (2008) calls a "circle of testimony and witness." This process was one that took place both contained in conversations, but also over time, as conversations built on one another. Co-constructed meaning emerged. Importantly, this wasn't just meaning used for the purpose of research. It was meaning that opened up deeper understandings for everyone involved in the study.

The following excerpts shows how this dialogic spiral took place through a conversation about how girls were defining and understanding "health." After

hearing conversations and reading some of the girls' writing, I realized that

fatphobia was an issue they were contending with as they were faced with fatphobic

comments and media representation from the outside world and as an internalized

value. Thus, to help girls move forward in conversations that rejected fatphobia and

make new meaning around bodies and beauty standards, I brought in texts to spur

new conversation. Through the conversation, girls watched videos that linked body

positivity, health initiatives, and race. In addition, in response to each video, girls

responded with ideas around how they conceived health. The first video

(Cosmopolitan.com, 2015), featured Black body positive yoga instructor, Jessamyn

Stanley speaking of the way she's found ways to be happiness in her own body and

through her yoga practice. After watching the video, which not only presented

Stanley's discussion of body positivity, but also images of her doing yoga, the girls

began to discuss what health meant to them.

> **G**: Alright, so what are your reactions to that video?
> **C**: I was surprised that she could do, like, all of that.
> **G**: What made that surprising?
> **C**: Because...
> **K**: Because she's a little round, a little thick.
> **S**: She's a little thick.
> **G**: Well she identifies as fat, she's like "I'm fat."
> **K**: yeah.
> **S**: She's not that fat.
> **G**: But that's a word that she's been labeled her whole life, you know. So she's kind of taken that up and saying, you know what, yeah I am. I'm a big girl. I'm fat, but   that doesn't mean I can't do anything anyone else does.
> **A**: A lot of people when they've been called fat or identify as fat, they're like, oh no, you are not fat, they are saying as if it's a bad thing, as if it's an insult, but it's not. (Group Interview, April 20, 2016)

The conversation continued, as the girls unpacked the relationship between body

image and health. The girls moved from being surprised that a fat person could be

so athletic and a hesitation around naming Stanley as "fat" toward working to

understand that "fat" is not necessarily an insult. The sisters then watched a second

video (Independent Sources, 2013) about activist Michaela Angela Davis's work

around health, food access, and Black women. After continued dialogue and time to

write, the girls reached this point in the conversation:

> **A**: I think health is basically just loving yourself. Physically and mentally stable.
> **G**: Nice.
> **A**: Having your thoughts and you are happy with yourself. Um eating enough, drinking water enough, hygiene, loving yourself, having...
> **D**: Hygiene!
> **G**: Yeah, that's an important one.
> **A**: Self esteem, self-consciousness. It's overall just taking care of yourself.
> **G**: Yeah, and I love that you bring in not just the physical component, but the emotional and mental component, because mental health...
> **A**: ...is very important.
> **G**: Is very important. It's hard to be physically healthy if you aren't mentally healthy. You know? So, having both of those things in tandem is really important, yeah.
> **A**: Most important to me is don't neglect yourself.
> **G**: Yeah, don't neglect yourself. I think that is huge. Yeah, I like that, don't neglect yourself. Kathleen, do you want to share what you have?
> **K**: Um, I think she said what she said, that mentally healthy is important because I think it's very important to be mentally healthy because, um, your brain can, you know, like, the devil can really tempt you to do a lot of things you don't want to do and you can be very unhealthy in the mind and it's just like, you can go down the wrong path and your life can be over at that point because you wasn't mentally healthy. So you should be mentally healthy. So I think you should be more mentally health cuz if you know mentally what you are doing, you can do it physically. (Group Interview, April 20, 2016)

Through this conversation and interaction with the videos, girls moved from a sense

of health being related to body type, toward a centering of mental health, an idea

originally brought up in the Jessamyn Stanley video. This process occurred as the

sisters added thoughts and ideas to one another. As we see with Kathleen, she

specifically builds on Ash's ideas of centering mental health, although she was

initially surprised that a fat person could be healthy. Further she adds cultural values to the conversation, bringing up the topic of the temptations of the devil to help shape her understandings of what mental health is. This conversation demonstrates the accumulation of knowledge from the girls, their cultural and experiential knowledge, and the introduction to new ideas from texts that reflect the voices of women of color not in the room and who they might not get exposed to in their typical academic spaces. Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, more conversations like these will be explored, as girls used the synergy of their ideas to come to more complete understandings of different topics in new and nuanced ways.

     Artifacts. The artifacts used for this study included formal and informal art and writing produced by the girls during our meeting time, group projects, Instagram site postings, and writing and other work done for school as a comparison to the writing produced as a group. The collection of artifacts served to reveal unspoken beliefs, the relationships and organization of the group (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Additionally, because of the focus on writing and text production in this study, the texts the girls produced help to establish how writing, specifically, served the girls as a mode of expression, criticality, and exploration. A final benefit of this form of data collection is that it will not interrupt the natural flow of events (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The documents and artifacts collected will offer an additional layer of insight into the lives of girls in the club in a non-obtrusive and fruitful manner.

Data Analysis Procedures

  I engaged in an iterative and reflexive process that sought to make meaning by closely analyzing the data collected, using my theoretical frameworks and political commitments to the celebration of girls of color as lenses. My meaning making process attempted to execute "a delicate balancing act between drawing on prior knowledge while keeping a fresh and open mind to new concepts as they emerge from the data. This means using the literature differently as the process evolves, getting closer to direct sources as the conceptual categories take shape and gain explanatory power" (Goulding, 2005, p. 296). I attempted to allow meaning to arise from the data, using extant literature, well-established theories, and my prior experiences to help develop meaning from my data. I do not claim neutrality in my data analysis, but am committed to allowing my data to guide my meaning making process.

  Coding. To make sense of my large data set, I used Atlas.ti software to take me through multiple rounds of coding to focus on the data closely, illuminating patterns and anomalies, preparing myself for further analysis. This initial coding had the aim of "breaking down qualitative data into discreet parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 100). Initial coding allowed me to familiarize myself with my data, noting patterns and allowing codes to emerge via in vivo and thematic coding. After my initial read of my data, I had accumulated a plethora of codes, which I was able to categorize into more over arching codes, as well as pull codes that seemed most important to the scope of my dissertation. By the end, I focused on the following

most frequent codes, which were thematic in nature and which, in some cases, used the girls own words to describe phenomenon. These codes allowed me to track both my own pedagogical moves as well as the ways the girls were speaking about themselves, each other, their relationships, and their understanding of the issues most important to them. The codes emerged in a way that helped me to shape my three data chapters, as they fell, generally, into three categories: Self-Love, Sisterhood, and Critiques of Schooling. The chart in Figure 3.2 lists the major categories, which eventually lead to chapters, and the codes that fell within these categories. Because of the interrelatedness of these categories, at times some codes fell into multiple categories, helping to shape my understanding of how self-love, sisterhood, and social critique were interrelated. Thus, I was able to observe both patterns and tensions as the codes helped me to organize my data. On the one hand, I was able to observe the ways that, for instance, race and racism coincided with girls' critiques of schooling, illuminating the ways that the girls perceived injustice as tied to issues of identity. On the other hand, I was also able to see the complexities of developing sisterhood across difference as tensions between codes arose. For instance, as I looked at codes around sisterhood, I also observed where tensions between the girls arose. With these seemingly contrasting codes, I was able to push myself as a pedagogue and researcher to consider why these tensions existed, and where I was able to move pedagogically to help move girls and myself to analyze these tensions and to consider how a better understanding of these tensions could lead toward sisterhood.

Self Love	Sisterhood	Critiques of Schooling
• Unnormal • Gender • Race/Racism • Identity • Self Love • Growth • Self Definition	• Solidarity & Sisterhood • Social Action • Tensions between girls • Unnormal • Gender • Sexism &Sexual Harassment • Race/Racism • Identity (other) • Self Love • Growth • Self Definition	• Social Action • Unnormal • Gender • Race/Racism • Identity (other) • Sexism & Sexual Harassment • Growth • Self Definition • Teachers' Treatment of Students

Figure 3.2. Categories of Codes

A final area of coding that helped shaped my understanding of my data was a category of that helped me to track my pedagogical moves as well as the ways that girls understood the pedagogy of the Unnormal Sisterhood. This further helped me to consider implications from this research. As I moved through the data, I marked when the girls talked about their experiences with teachers in school, when they talked about learning in the Unnormal Sisterhood, and when I took fieldnotes about my own pedagogical moves. These three ways of viewing pedagogy both helped me, on the one hand, to see what girls valued and disliked about different forms of pedagogy. On the other hand, I was able to also track the ways that I made pedagogical choices and what those choices heeded in terms of knowledge production in the Unnormal Sisterhood.

After coding my data, I was able to look more closely at each code individually across time. Additionally, I was able to track how the girls' conversations about issues shifted over time. For the categories that focused on the issues the addressed like schooling, sexual harassment, racism, and sexism, I created

charts to summarize the data cited and to provide a brief analytic memo with each

point marked in the data in order to note shifts in the ways the girls were

addressing issues. The shifts in conversations connoted the ways that the girls were

entering a long-term dialogic spiral (See Appendix C for example). By taking this

approach, I was able to see the ways ideologies collectively shared by all members

of the sisterhood built on one another to create new perspectives and growing

understandings. With the topic of sexual harassment, for instance, I was able to see

the ways girls moved from purely anecdotal mentionings of sexual harassment, to

more emotional and critical conversations. Additionally, their ability to have meta-

analyses of the way they were processing sexual harassment came about for some

girls. In addition, I was able to track the pedagogical moves I made myself, bringing

in my own understandings and knowledge about the topics they wanted addressed.

By looking at codes in this way, I could see the way that, in correlation with the

pedagogy of the Unnormal Sisterhood, conversations shifted and grew upon one

another, how the girls were building together new understandings of the topics at

hand.

I do want to note, though, that while creating codes and observing the

patterns that they illuminated, I did not too strictly adhere to traditional social

science analytics that were overly mechanistic and that might lead to erasures of

important moments that perhaps didn't fit as neatly into the patterns coding could

produce. As Tuck and Yang (2014) point out, an over reliance on coding can serve to

reify colonialistic ideologies. Thus, in my research, although my coding procedures

took me through a deep and detailed reading and gave me a structure to take notes

on what I was observing, there were certainly stories within the data that I do not share, although they fit some overarching patterns, because I refuse to allow these stories to be read through unfamiliar eyes that might choose to interpret the stories as reifications of damage-centered narratives (Tuck, 2009). There are moments within the data that caused me to linger, to underscore, because they seemed to tell a story that was important, that refused colonialism, racism, and sexism in a way I found necessary to highlight. In some places, I follow the girls' gazes, centering what they have seen, what they have described, to point our eyes to injustice, the harsh structures which they must navigate, through their interpretive lenses, not to detract from the story of the Unnormal Sisterhood, but to cast our eyes toward the racist and sexist structures they are forced to navigate. In this way, I hope to allow a clearer understanding of what the girls have interpreted about their world to emerge.

Textual Analysis: I draw on Bazerman's (2006) model of intertextual analysis to derive meaning from girls' writing. Bazerman views texts as "parts of actual social relations—written in specific circumstances at specific times and read in specific circumstances at specific times, thereby realizing concrete social transactions. Through inscriptions that travel between places and between time, texts mediate meanings and actions between people. In their social and psychological lives texts are parts of complex events" (p. 77-78). Rather than viewing texts in isolation from those who create them and the situations within which they are created, I analyzed texts as related to the context in which they've emerged and to the girls who produced them.

Member Checks*: Member checks were of utmost importance in this work as I sought, first, to make my work transparent, and, second, to make sure that the voices and ideas of the sisters are not filtered too strongly through my own ideas (Maxwell, 2003). In this way, I made efforts to create ideas not in isolation, but as a product of dialogue between me and the girls, my research partners (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014). It is important to me that these conversations were not taken from a traditional researcherly stance, distanced from those involved in the study, but are instead products of relationships and trust built over time. This is especially important because while I do have some insights into the girls' experiences as raced and gendered beings, I in many ways lack a "cultural intuition" (Delgado-Bernal, 1998) born of shared cultural, linguistic, and ethnic knowledge, that might help me understand, more closely, their experiences and ideas. Additionally, my perspectives and interpretations are rooted in my own understandings of the world, and it, therefore, seemed more just to refilter these through the eyes of the girls, who this research was about. Thus, through informal interviews and conversations, I asked the sisters what they make of my current interpretations of data along the way and, when possible, during writing and analysis stages.

Exiting Research Humanely

Over my time with the Unnormal Sisterhood, the girls and I built important bonds, bonds I did not want to sever suddenly and without a proper goodbye, without ensuring that I left the field responsibly, honoring the humanity of who I now considered my sisters (Figueroa, 2015). Thus, at the end of each year I worked with the girls, I made sure to hold a goodbye ceremony, during which I gave the girls

gifts, including tee shirts with our logo and name on them, we stated our learning, expressed our love and appreciation, ate, and celebrated. I was sure to do things like attend the girls' 8th grade graduation, expressing that they knew, although we would no longer meet, I supported them. Finally, I made sure to invite them to attend other research groups I was holding. Although none of them joined these new groups, as they met on Saturdays, busy days for them and their families, and were not the girl-centered groups they had told me they would have liked to continue, it was important to me that they knew they were invited to continue on with me, even if I was no longer available to continue my work with them in the same capacity. Still, every once in a while, I'll post something to the group Instagram account, which they all follow. They'll like it, or comment on it with love, and we stay, at least tangentially connected this way. I'm lucky to still be physically around, so will run into them once in a while, at which point we hug, we catch up, we reminisce.

Approaches to Pedagogy: The Curriculum

It is important that I speak of my pedagogy in conjunction with my practitioner research framework, as my research agenda and my pedagogy were so intimately connected, both responding to one another iteratively. As I made discoveries through my data collection and reflection, my pedagogy shifted. As my pedagogy developed, it gave rise to opportunities for the girls to discuss their theories and experiences and enact notions of solidarity, which was important data.

The Unnormal Sisterhood started meeting in November of 2015 and continued to meet through May 2017. The primary focus of this dissertation is the

| Unit 1: Whom Am I? | Unit 2: Who Are We? | Unit 3: What Do We Deserve? |
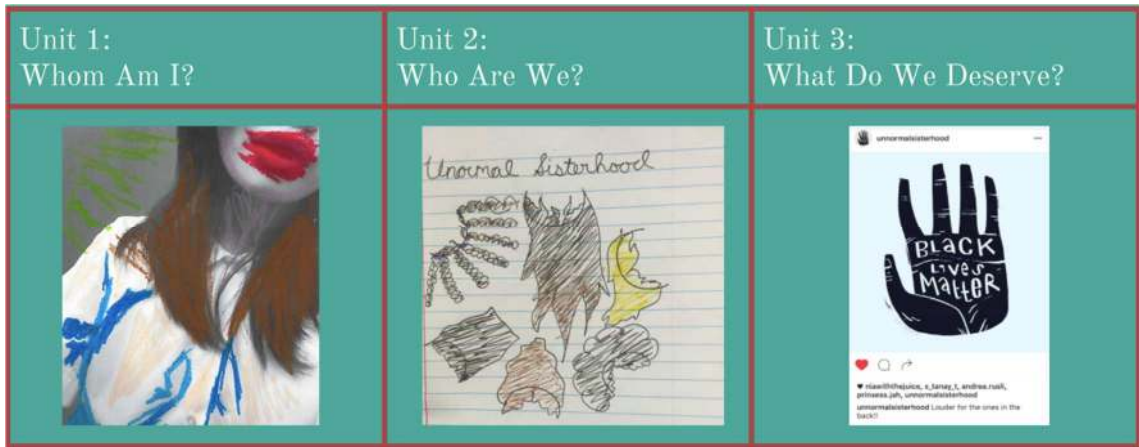
Figure 3.3. The Unnormal Sisterhood Curriculum

data collected from January 2016 to May 2016. During these months, the club met two times a week after school for one and a half hours. The design of the curriculum (see figure 3.2) was meant to be responsive to the girls' interests and desires. Although I created an overarching trajectory of study, the content of our discussions flowed and shifted in response to the issues the girls brought up during our meetings. These shifts in content, however, fell more or less within the movement between three major units, which will be further explicated through the findings chapters in this dissertation.

The first unit was focused on self-love, a unit that offered opportunities to engage in self-representation and counternarratives about themselves. This unit invited girls to reflect on their identities, their strengths, and the ways they wanted to present themselves to the world. The next unit focused on connections across difference and establishing a notion of solidarity. During this unit, the girls were invited to discover more about one another, entering into relationships of listening and thoughtful and critical engagement with one another. The final unit was focused

on critical engagement with the world and considerations of how the girls would want to change the world to better suit them. In response to the sisters' interests, these topics mostly revolved around schooling. These three units were certainly porous, and because the girls dominated the construction of the curriculum, issues of self-love, solidarity, and critiques of schooling all intertwined, flowing in and out of one another, even when the primary topic was fairly fixed. Thus, the girls' understandings of these ideas did not remain contained, but rather gave way to opportunities to think about the connections between self, each other, and the world around them.

A typical day in the club always started with conversation. We would always open with an opportunity for girls to share what was going on in their days, whether celebrations or disappointments. There were also daily opportunities for girls to interact with woman and girl of color produced texts, including poems, quotes, essays, videos, paintings, music, and so on; to engage in conversation about the texts; to discuss in depth the topics they raised as most relevant to them; and to write or otherwise produce texts either in response to or inspired by the texts and conversations we had engaged that day or in previous days. During some meetings, I would also provide writing minilessons, give feedback, and promote peer feedback. On occasion, I would also have women of color guests come to the meetings in order to share their own experiences with writing, activism, and living as women of color more generally with the girls. In addition to the actual club meetings, girls interacted via our co-owned Instagram account in between and sometimes during sisterhood meetings. The curriculum was shaped iteratively, following the leads and

interests of the girls as they brought up topics in the club and through the Instagram postings.

Conclusion

Through my research and pedagogical methodologies and methods, I endeavored to reflect a feminist of color theoretical framework in my work with the Unnormal Sisterhood. I attempted, both as a researcher and as a pedagogue, to make connections between the sisters' knowledge, their relationships, and social change (Delgado-Bernal, 1999). Through the next chapters, I will explore the ways that the pedagogy developed and how the building of self-knowledge, relationships and sisterhood, and critical explorations into their worlds evolved along that pedagogy. I believe that through the ethical stance I attempted to embody in this project, room was made for the girls to not only make sense of their worlds, but to share that sense-making with one another, with me, and with all who interact with their texts.

CHAPTER FOUR: "THE COLOR OF MY NAME": COMPOSING SELF-DEFINITION

AND SELF-LOVE IN THE UNNORMAL SISTERHOOD

Introduction

"I'm awesome" was a consistent refrain for Seraphina. The word "awesome" peppers my fieldnotes, transcripts, and the artifacts of Seraphina's writing. In a concise description of herself, Seraphina once said, "I'm an awesome 13 year old from Philadelphia. Girl. African American. Yeah, that's about it." (Interview, May 24, 2016). She puts forth her age, her city, her gender, her race, and her awesomeness as her primary descriptors, showing a linking between her self-appreciation and her intersectional identity. She speaks with such an unabashed confidence, unafraid to share her self-love with the world. This was the type of confidence, this type of love for self, that I wanted to create space for. It was not a product of the Unnormal Sisterhood that Seraphina developed self-love. She came with this from the get go, as did almost all of the girls to one degree or another. However, I attempted to establish the Unnormal Sisterhood as the type of place where this self-love could be celebrated and put to good use, where there was no shame in loving oneself, for shouting out praise for one's own beauty, brilliance, and awesomeness. Further, I worked toward creating an environment in the Unnormal Sisterhood where, when self-love wavered or struggled to make itself present, we could work toward it. And part of that work was being able to critically analyze what was impeding self love.

What occurred in the Unnormal Sisterhood was not naïve celebration, but, rather, a critical celebratory pedagogy. This critical celebration gave room to girls of color who traverse a world that is not so kind to them—a world that too often fails

to celebrate their beauty and that frequently frames their self confidence as arrogant—an opportunity to push back and create a narrative of "awesomeness." By engaging girls in critical celebration and self-love, I believe what arose was a power to better fight for oneself and others against the controlling images (Collins, 2000), the false and limited expectations that society has built up around girls and women of color in order to attempt to limit their possibilities and to uphold white supremacist heteropatriarchy. A celebratory stance helps reveal the complexity of girls of color (Brown, 2009, 2013). Critical celebration challenges both what is generally defined as "normal" and deconstructs stereotypical and one-dimensional images of girls of color. What's more, a critical celebratory stance provides a "desire-centered" lens—one that prioritizes a view of girls of color as complex and striving towards greatness, despite the traumas they experience—as opposed to "damage-centered" lens that reinscribes a one-dimensional view of girls of color (Tuck, 2009).

Of significance is the understanding that affirmation in and of itself is not a solution to oppression, but part of a process. As will be traced by this chapter, the critical celebratory pedagogy was also a crucial part of the inquiry that evolved across the course of the process. In the sisters' efforts to gain control over their representation, at times, the internalization of white heteropatriarchal understandings revealed itself. Because this was critical celebration, though, it gave me the opportunity to follow seek better understanding of where these tendencies came from and to introduce the girls to new concepts that contradicted those ideologies.

This chapter will illuminate how girls harnessed their multiple literacies in order to engage in critical self-celebration. Central to this work was the opportunity for the sisters to narrativize themselves, creating the stories, the words, and the images that would describe them outside of and counter to what dominant ideologies might project about them. It was my belief that by giving the girls space to explore and claim their unnormality in critical celebration, to tell their stories, to name their desires, to center themselves in the curriculum, they would partake in the resistant work of creating counternarratives. Critical race theory helps us understand that through counternarrative, produced by those subjected to various forms of oppression, resistance can be engendered (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). I wanted to facilitate a space where girls could take part in the feminist act of naming themselves, of projecting their beauty into the world under their own terms, of telling their stories in the face of so many stereotypes and controlling images (Collins, 2000) that attempt to mitigate their individuality, their cultural knowledge, their intersectional identities.

My Name: Introducing Ourselves in Critical Celebration

In her introduction to a collection of Audre Lorde's writing, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You: Essays and Poems,* Sarah Ahmed (2017a) named an important lesson she learned from the Black feminist writer:

> Introducing ourselves matters; naming yourself, saying who you are, making clear your values, cares, concerns, and commitments, matters. Each time you write or you speak you are putting yourself into a world that is shared…

Lorde always took the risk of naming herself and of asserting her existence in
a world that made her existence difficult. (p. v)

It was with this spirit of introduction that I invited the girls to write about
themselves and to put themselves into the world on their own terms. This sort of
introduction work seems doubly important for girls of color who do feel unnormal
and want to be in control of sharing their uniqueness in the face of structures that
praise a false notion of normal. The introductions the girls engaged were texts that
centered their marginalized voices and harnessed them to speak with and back to
worlds that too frequently pushed them to those margins. Their introductions were
in the Anzaldúan (1983) spirit of speaking truth to the lies that have been told about
them as girls of color, as unnormal.

One of our first engagements with literature was a reading of Mexican
American writer Sandra Cisnero's (1991) short story "My Name" from the collection,
The House on Mango Street. Cisneros was born in Chicago in the 1950s, the daughter
of Mexican father and a Mexican American mother. Her writing arose alongside
other Chicana women writers like Anzaldúa and Moraga during the 1980s and often
focused on the experience of Chicana girls and women's cultural hybridity (Haque,
2017). "My Name" is a lyrical narration of a young Mexican American girl's
relationship to her name, Esperanza. Through the story, she traces her name's
history, its lineage, its meaning, its effect on her self understanding and her
connection and disconnections to her family and the world. Cisnero's emotional
prose helps her readers understand the cultural and affective importance of naming,
both how we are named and how we name ourselves. The story narrates how a

young girl resists the patriarchal histories tied to her name and attempts to reclaim herself. The text seemed a perfect model of how the main character, a young girl of color, introduced herself, as unnormal, simultaneously asserting her existence, exploring her cultural ties, and resisting patriarchal values.

After reading the story and discussing it, the girls wrote short jottings about their own names in their notebooks. This was an opportunity for the girls to reflect on the essences of their own names, and share with the rest of the group what they, in that moment, distilled from their names. As they wrote, some girls went online to look up the meanings of their names, some chatted with one another in between jottings, other simply wrote. The writings that the sisters engaged in, though brief, unearthed and expressed their nuanced and colorful personalities, cultural identities, and relationships to others and the world around them.

Diamond produced the following lines to describe her understandings of her name and to introduce herself:

The name is Diamond.

I think it shows my spirit.
But I like my name because how I basically respect my religion[5].

My color of my name would

yellow/red/white/old gray.

DIAMOND
(Artifact, January 12, 2016)

Although brief, Diamond's writing reflects her dynamism. Through her six-line reflection, she, like Lorde, asserted her values, her commitments, her cares.

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[5] Diamond's real name has religious origins not reflected by her chosen pseudonym.

Economically choosing her words, she painted a rich a multilayered vision of who she is. And in this description, she provided an image of the potentiality for girls of color to be many things at once.

Diamond first addressed her spiritedness, a liveliness that is worth celebrating. In the next sentence she regarded her religion, an aspect of Diamond's identity that has provided her with some complications, yet, at that point, remained an important aspect of her self-conception. Throughout the club she often brought up her identity as Christian and held Christian values as important to her. However, she also was coming to a place where she felt challenged by them, as she developed her lesbian identity. Her complicated ties to her family's interpretation of Christianity, which included some homophobic ideologies, troubled Diamond as she was beginning to explore her sexual identity. Nevertheless, the highlighting of this aspect of her name illuminated the importance of her Christian identity, though it was a complicated one, helping us understand, like Esperanza of "My Name" cultural and familial ties are often far from simple.

In her last statement, Diamond poetically colored her name, imagining its multiplicity—her multiplicity—in vibrant yellow and red, moving to subdued white, and finally a duller, old gray. This sentence captures her beautiful complexity, highlighting her multifaceted view of herself. This colorful naming challenges the notion that she could be reduced to anything simple, to any monolith that might try to capture her. Further it highlights potential tensions in her understanding of herself. This is an important and rebellious statement in the face of too many minimizing narratives about Black girls like Diamond. Finally, at the bottom of the

page, she wrote her name in huge swirling letters. This seems to be a visual

celebration of her name, of herself.

Like Diamond, Halsey indicated her Lorde-esque ability to project herself

into the world under her own terms. She wrote:

> My name means life like the way I am happy to live. It also means something
> very important. Shows the way my parents frantic. On what to call me. On
> what to represent them. My name is important. It means life, hazelnut, a
> great philosopher, a beautiful, even a little one too. Surprises me how one
> word describe me so well. [6] (Artifact, January 12, 2016)

Similar to Diamond, Halsey reflected her cultural heritage through her name

description. She explained the importance of naming to her parents. She discussed

how, to her parents, who franticly scrambled to find a worthy moniker, her name

would not only represent her, but them as well. Halsey's description of her name

helps us understand the way that she is adopting a rhizomatic identity (Campano,

Nichols, & Player, forthcoming; Deleuze, 1994) as she develops a conception of

herself both tied to her family and heritage, as well as to her unique personality. She

simultaneously acknowledged the impact of her family on her identity, and projects

that she is her own person. This explicates the complex self-conception that

immigrant students can adopt, showing that they can be both admiring of and

respectful toward their parents, families, and cultures, and also uniquely

constructing their identities from a variety of cultural and community influences,

including friends, pop culture, their neighborhoods, and so on. For instance, in

another autobiographical text, Halsey introduces herself as liking dogs; the TV series

The Walking Dead; the group of teen internet idols, MAGcon; pop musician, Sean

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[6] Again, the meanings behind Halsey's name are not reflected by her pseudonym.
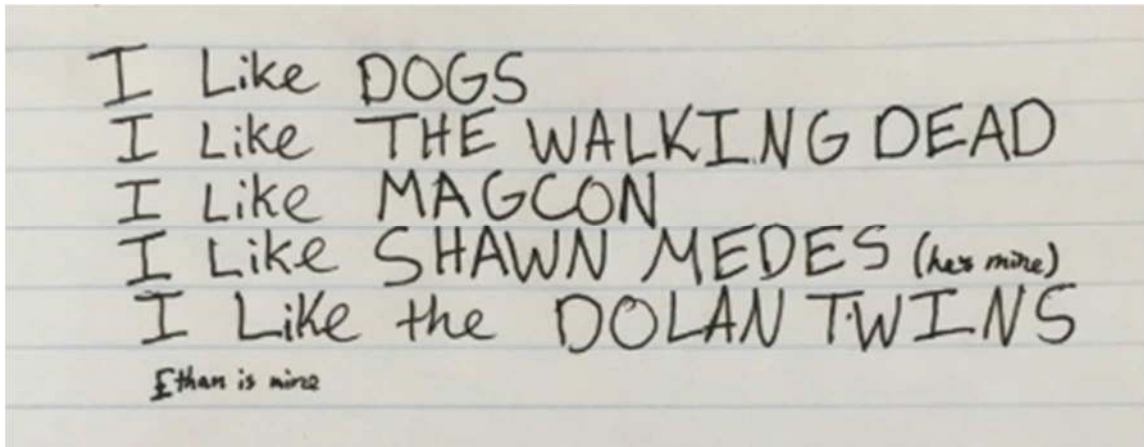
Figure 4.1. Halsey's Short Autobiographical Text

Mendes; and internet stars, the Dolan Twins (See Figure 4.1). She also taps into

celebratory language when describing herself and her name, citing that she is

beautiful, philosophical, happy, and lively. She makes the beautiful move of naming

herself as important. Through these texts, introduces herself to the world in a way

that no stereotype or monolith could capture.

The girls' introductions also projected their multifaceted and multiracial

roots. In Kathleen's case, she explores her mixed race identity. However, her jottings

start to uncover some of the ways that a privileging of Eurocentrism and other

dominant ideologies were at times embedded in the girls' self-conceptions.

Kathleen, who claimed a mixed identity, wrote very briefly, putting down her pen

only a minute after she started writing, pausing midsentence, as she drifted off into

conversation with some of the other girls. She described herself in the following

statement:

> I am an Jamaican African American, White, and Indian. I love my background
> and also I am British. So I really love that part about me because its so great
> and I love (Artifact, January 12, 2016)

Despite the brevity and incompleteness of this text, much is still revealed. In this text, she claimed to love all parts of her background, but specifically made an effort to highlight being British, claiming, "I really love that part about me because its so great." It is important to note that Kathleen, who most would read as Black or African American—she claimed in her final interview, "most people say I'm full Black" when unpacking her reasons for identifying as "mixed" (Interview, May 24, 2016)—chose to highlight her proximity to whiteness. At multiple points across my time with the Unnormal Sisterhood, the girls' writing and conversations exposed the ways that they are living in a world that centers whiteness and that the values that are embedded in whiteness could be internalized. What was important about these moments, though, was that they opened spaces to investigate topics like colorism, beauty standards, and Black pride as the curriculum of the Unnormal Sisterhood progressed. Although disheartening, these ideas did not have to remain unchallenged in the critical celebratory pedagogy of the Unnormal Sisterhood. Rather, we were able to pursue inquiries about some of these normalized dominant ideologies as girls iteratively developed their celebratory stances to themselves.

In a bit of rebellion against some master narratives that serve to devalue girls of color, some of the girls wrote texts that made reference to the negative perceptions other might hold of them, while maintaining a celebratory stance. They, as Ahmed (2017a) described, did the work of asserting their importance in a world that does not treat them kindly. These writings did the act of rejecting those external perceptions in their own constructions of themselves. Seraphina took poetic license with her jottings, writing:

114

Seraphina
Not Sarah or Sarfana[7]
I am
unique
powerful
and strong
nor will I let
Anyone
get me down
Lastly I am
me.
(Artifact, January 12, 2016)

Seraphina's poem diverges from the first three, in that she paired her confidence,

her self-love, with the conception that others may not respect her. In this way, she

confirmed the sense that came up frequently across the data that people hold

negative opinions about girls of color. Giselle shared a very similar pattern in her

jottings. She wrote:

My names unique. The way im different from others and how I be myself. My
name means strong also. To be Proud and don't let people bring me down.
Both girls specifically highlighted their uniqueness and their strength. They

highlighted these ideas, paired with convictions of being oneself. Seraphina used her

last lines to convey, "Lastly, I am/me," isolating that word "me" for emphasis. Giselle

claimed her name's meaning as "strong" and asserted that she knows "how I be

myself." We see in these examples, how both Giselle and Seraphina stressed their

unnormality as they paired their celebration of self with the idea that others might

attempt to "bring them down." Interestingly, they both not only indicated that this is

something that others have tried to do, they also claimed they did not "let" others do

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[7] Words changed slightly to reflect Seraphina's pseudonyms. The original poem
referenced mispronunciation of Seraphina's real name.

this to them. Both Giselle and Seraphina showed an awareness of the negative perceptions that others have taken toward them, a feeling confirmed by many women of color scholars who have investigated the negative stereotypes and conceptions of women and girls of color shaped by white supremacist heteropatriarchal myths (Collins, 2000; Lugones, 1987). However, by not "letting" anyone treat them this way, they were performing agency in resisting those narratives in favor of self-love. They were demonstrating the active role they take in critically celebrating themselves, aware of the negative stereotypes cast on them, but also able to take charge of positioning themselves under their own terms, rather than under the terms of those stereotypes.

Across these pieces of writing, it is evident that the girls brought strong senses of self to the table. In these brief introductions, they, as Audre Lorde, stake a claim of who they are despite any other messages the world might project about them. They introduced themselves in rebellious (and at times not so rebellious) manners that unearthed their strengths, their vulnerabilities, and, importantly, their appreciation for themselves.

"Won't You Celebrate With Me": Critical Celebration Through Poetry

During this first unit of self-exploration, it was necessary that the girls continue to both engage in texts that demonstrated self-love and to continue to produce texts that allowed them to celebrate themselves as unnormal. Poetry was a genre we frequently engaged with because of its creative, emotional, and linguistic functions. The ways of knowing that poetry makes available are often the ways of

knowing maligned or ignored in formal schooling. Audre Lorde (2007) describes

what poetry can be for women, saying:

> For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence.
> It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and
> dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea,
> then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the
> nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears
> are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily
> lives. (p.37)

Poetry has the power to allow us to feel differently, (re)see and touch our innermost

feelings in a way that prose cannot do, thereby revealing specificities of our lives,

our identities, our worlds that other genre do not. Poetry, then, is a possible path

towards the kinds of theorization that Barbara Christian (1988) describes. Christian

explains that the theorizations by people of color are often ignored or devalued by

the dominant understandings of theory because they are based in experience,

emotions, and creativity, rather than abstract logic. By tapping into these ways of

theorizing as well as providing a genre to write counter narrative, poetry can be an

significant cite of resistance for girls of color seeking to critique and resist notions of

normality that exclude and devalue their unnormality.

A further advantage of poetry is that it gives way to linguistic ingenuity and

flexibility. Korina Jocson (2005) has pointed out that poetry is a genre that gives its

writers the choice to use or abandon particular elements of grammar or language,

freeing their imaginations. June Jordan (2002) has explained that poetry, when it

breaks from standardized grammar conventions, and speaks to a poet's own

experiences, relationships, and herstories, can be freeing, can be a homecoming.

Importantly, because poetry allows its writers to make choices about what elements

of grammar and language they'll include and exclude, it freed the girls to project their voices, in their most authentic form, into the world without being tied to or made to feel inadequate when they broke school's conventions. The emotional and linguistic utility of poetry provided a path for girls of color to deeply engage in a multilayered critical self-celebration that tapped into the sisters' multiple ways of knowing.

What's more, poetry is a genre that is more "economical," an issue of importance as girls of color lead busy lives where writing for oneself does not always feel obtainable or like a priority. In her essay "Age, Race, Class, and Sex," Lorde (2007) explains that poetry has an economy to it that makes it a genre more accessible to women of color. She says:

> Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper…. As we reclaim our literature, poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class, and Colored women… A room of one's own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter, and plenty of time. (p. 116)

This economy does not make it less valuable or under-theoretical, as some masculinist frameworks might try to emphasize. Rather, it is a pathway for women and girls of color to tap into a multiplicity of knowledges in ways that fit the contours of their lives.

To accomplish the goals of the Unnormal Sisterhood, it felt necessary to find poems that were written by powerful women of color partaking in the emotional, creative, linguistic ingenuity of poetry in critical celebratory ways. Thus, "won't you celebrate with me" by Lucille Clifton (2012), was an ideal match for our curriculum.

Clifton, a Black woman poet born in 1936, wrote, published, and was awarded for

her poetry from the late 1960s through 2010 when she passed. "Her poems, forged

from experience, emotion, and a fierce, truth-telling intellect, focus on the human

struggle for dignity, justice and freedom" (Young & Glaser, 2012, p. 765). Indeed,

her deeply intellectual and critical poems respond to her experiences as a Black

woman through the latter half of the 20th century, "tell us everything we need to

know, streamlined and perfect" (Morrison, 2012, p. xxxiv).

> Clifton's poem, "won't you celebrate with me" reads:

> won't you celebrate with me
> what i have shaped into
> a kind of life? i had no model.
> born in babylon
> both nonwhite and woman
> what did i see to be except myself?
> i made it up
> here on this bridge
> between starshine and clay,
> my one hand holding tight
> my other hand; come celebrate
> with me that everyday
> something has tried to kill me
> and has failed.
> (Clifton, 2012, p. 427)

This poem, originally published in her 1992 volume of poetry, *The Book of Light,*

weaves together a critique of the intersecting oppressive forces that women of color

face as well as highlighting their resistance, their ability to thrive, and the beauty of

becoming one's unique woman of color self.

> The theme of "won't you celebrate with me" is not dissimilar from the

writings by Giselle and Seraphina in the last section. Giselle's poem in response to

the Clifton piece again reflected similar themes, addressing her life journey up to

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this point and the necessity for celebrating her accomplishments despite the ways

other might frame her. She wrote:

> won't you celebrate with me
> what I've been through
> people trying to bring me down
> not loving me for who
> I am
> But guess what
> I don't care ☺
> (Artifact, February 16, 2016)

Seraphina's poem, quite like Clifton's, traced her experiences overcoming obstacles

and maintaining greatness. In this poem, she did not directly point to other people

as being obstacles, but instead, viewed her challenges as more global. However, she

still managed to take on a truly celebratory tone in relationship to her resiliency in

the face of struggles. In a second poem written that day, she wrote:

> I've overcame all
> But the fact I'm 12 makes
> it better
> if I would let that get
> to me I'll be
> dead
> But I realize I'm awesome
> I can cook
> I can draw
> Im a hell of a package
> (Artifact, February 16, 2016)

With these words, Seraphina named specific aspects of her identity, citing that as a

12 year old, she had both faced many obstacles—challenges that she claims could

have even brought on death had she allowed them—and accomplished so much. She

celebrated her awesomeness and precisely named her talents—cooking and

drawing—to describe more specifically who she is and what she saw as her value.

These are talents not necessarily celebrated in school. Drawing and artistic talents are confined to art class, and cooking is a skill of the home, not of school. We see that this poem gave her the opportunity to explore her self worth in a multifaceted way that allowed her to assert herself into the world under her own terms.

"I'm a hell of a package" is a playful nod to the many unique components of her personality. When she shared her poem with me, she said as a side note, "please don't show my mom that poem," assuming "hell" would be an unwelcome word to some audiences. This, though, points to the ways that girls adopted a freer stance toward language in our group, feeling unconstrained by school and familial rules around language to express their identities, ideas, and selves. By shaking loose from the confines of "schooled" or "respectable" language, Seraphina was able to show her unique personality framed in a specific playfulness that mirrored her personality quite accurately.

Additionally, it seems that Clifton's words, between "starshine and clay" reiterated themselves through other pieces that Seraphina created. In a short autobiography written later in the week, Seraphina wrote:

> I'm Seraphina
> I prefer cake over pie
> I like to smile
> I'm 12ish I'll be 13 soon
> I like getting lost
>   in
> Stars and glitter
>   I'm
> basically me.
> (Artifact, February 17, 2016)

With these words, she pointed out what was important to her in that moment to share with others, her dessert preference, her joy, her age, and, importantly, a sort of magical identity, a beautiful fantasy of stars and glitter. All this, she said, was what made her, "basically" her. Through her poem, she developed her ideas of herself as an individual, as unique, as dynamic. She portrays herself simultaneously as normal as anyone else—for example, having a sweet tooth, as most of us do—and as uniquely and supremely magic—existing amongst stars and glitter.

Across Seraphina's writing, we see her engaged in critical celebration that is born out of their poetic statements of self. In these poems, she revealed her theorizations of both the ways she has been hurt by the world, as well as her resistance to those forces. Her writing challenges dominant conceptions of girls of color providing a more accurate and dynamic vision of girl of color unnormality.

Diamond's response poem to "Won't You Celebrate With Me" adds an additional theorization of her existence as a Black girl. She wrote:

> Come and thanks with me
> Enjoy our part of freedom
> Let us
> Become free but show
> That you are thankful for it
> Come and thanks with me.
> (Artifact, February 16, 2016)

Diamond remixed the Clifton's invitation to celebration to create an invitation to giving thanks. Diamond cited this poem as one of her favorite poems of the year. In a conversation on the day that she worked on this poem, she claimed that the poem was about thanking her ancestors for the freedom she now has (fieldnotes, February 16, 2016). In an interview, we had the following conversation:

G: And what makes that one your favorite poem?

D: Because it's like if you are happy that we are free, then why don't you, why can't you show it? Like come and come and thanks that it's, that we're free finally.

G: So kind of giving thanks for the things that we do have.

D: Yeah.

G: Do you think that we are completely free?

D: no.

G: no? What do you think would help? Like what do you think we still need freedom about?

D: I mean it's like. It's not like we are actually like slaves or...

G: Right.

D: It's like we are still hated. It's like still people out there who hate us and we can't fix them, so we're not that free, but we are free because we don't have to worry about having to go to a all white school and they are going to judge you, even though there is probably still people like that, but at least they aren't terribly how it was before.

(Interview, May 24, 2016)

It seems that Lucille Clifton's poem, in its theme of celebrating one's own identity in the face of oppression, opened up Diamond mind to considering what she has to be thankful for in relationship to her ancestors and their work that allowed her freedom. She understood her identity as related to a history of civil rights warriors who had fought in the face of oppression. She realized that this is not as simple a proclamation as it might seem. There is still work to be done. She reflected that she still, in some ways, felt hated because of her racial identity.

Diamond, through her poem and the discussion of the poem, displayed a sophisticated critique of her relationship to the world. She demonstrated her complicated feelings toward freedom—the acknowledgement of and subsequent gratefulness for her ancestors who fought so diligently for her rights, and, further, her lamentation that there is still so much work to go to be truly free. She also expressed her gratefulness for being located outside of whiteness, providing a

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nuanced lens to school segregation, seeing it as actually having the positive affect of shielding her from the hatred of white people who she implies are oppressive. Her critical self-celebration revealed that her identity included her attachment to her Black freedom-fighting lineage. This self-celebratory poem and her reflection exposed her understanding of progress and its attachment to the struggle of her people, and also the desire to do more, to continue the movement toward freedom that her ancestors started. Her celebration, then, located her in a trajectory towards freedom, neither at the beginning of this journey, nor at the end.

"A Short Note to My Very Critical and Well-Beloved Friends and Comrades":

Resisting Dominant Narratives through Poetry

As we continued through the curriculum, June Jordan was another foremother to the Unnormal Sisterhood who wrote politically, personally, and poetically in critical celebration of herself and other Black people. Jordan was a contemporary of Lucille Clifton, also born in 1936. Her work spanned the political to the personal, and crossed genre including narrative, poetry, essay, and journalism. Her writing traces such topics as her childhood as a Black girl in New York City, being mentored by civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, her activist work through the Civil Rights Era, and her continued fight for justice across her life span (Kinloch, 2006). We used Jordan's poem, "A Short Note to My Very Critical and Well-Beloved Friends and Comrades" as another mentor text that rebelled against negative perceptions of women and girls of color perpetuated by dominant ideologies.

I felt this poem was a gateway for a critical conversation about the varying and often conflicting messages girls of color get about respectability as well as a call

for girls of color to declare their independence from the onslaught of messages they receive about who they should be. Kelly Wissman (2009) used this poem with her Black female students, finding, "This poem provide a compelling entry way for discussions as well as for writing that gave the girls opportunities to name hegemonic discourses. In addition the last line especially provided language to speak back to these interlocutors and the assumptions they made" (p.41). The poem reads:

> First they said I was too light
> Then they said I was too dark
> Then they said I was too different
> Then they said I was too much the same
> Then they said I was too young
> Then they said I was too old
> Then they said I was too interracial
> Then they said I was too much a nationalist
> Then they said I was too silly
> Then they said I was too angry
> Then they said I was too idealistic
> Then they said I was too confusing all together:
> Make up your mind! They said. Are you militant
> or sweet? Are you vegetarian or meat? Are you straight
> or are you gay?
>
> And I said, Hey! It's not about *my* mind.
> (Jordan, 2005)

I introduced this poem to the girls in response to the conversations in the group about issues like perception and how others viewed them. Especially in reflection about pieces like the "My Name" responses, I thought I would be important to have the girls delve into the ideas of how we are perceived and how that relates to how we perceive ourselves.

After reading this poem, I invited the girls to discuss it. During this conversation, Seraphina and Diamond both brought up ideas about the need to

disregard what others say about you. This idea permeated the rest of the

conversation and writing the girls did that day. The next literacy engagement we

engaged to build off of their conversations was inspired by an activity run by

Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz at the 2013 Ethnography Forum. In this engagement, the girls

created Venn Diagrams, one side of which was labeled, "How Others See Me" the

other side of which read "How I See Myself" (see Figure 4.2).

These Venn diagrams reflected a very specific pattern. The "How Others See Me"

was overwhelmingly negative, while "How I See Myself" was overwhelmingly
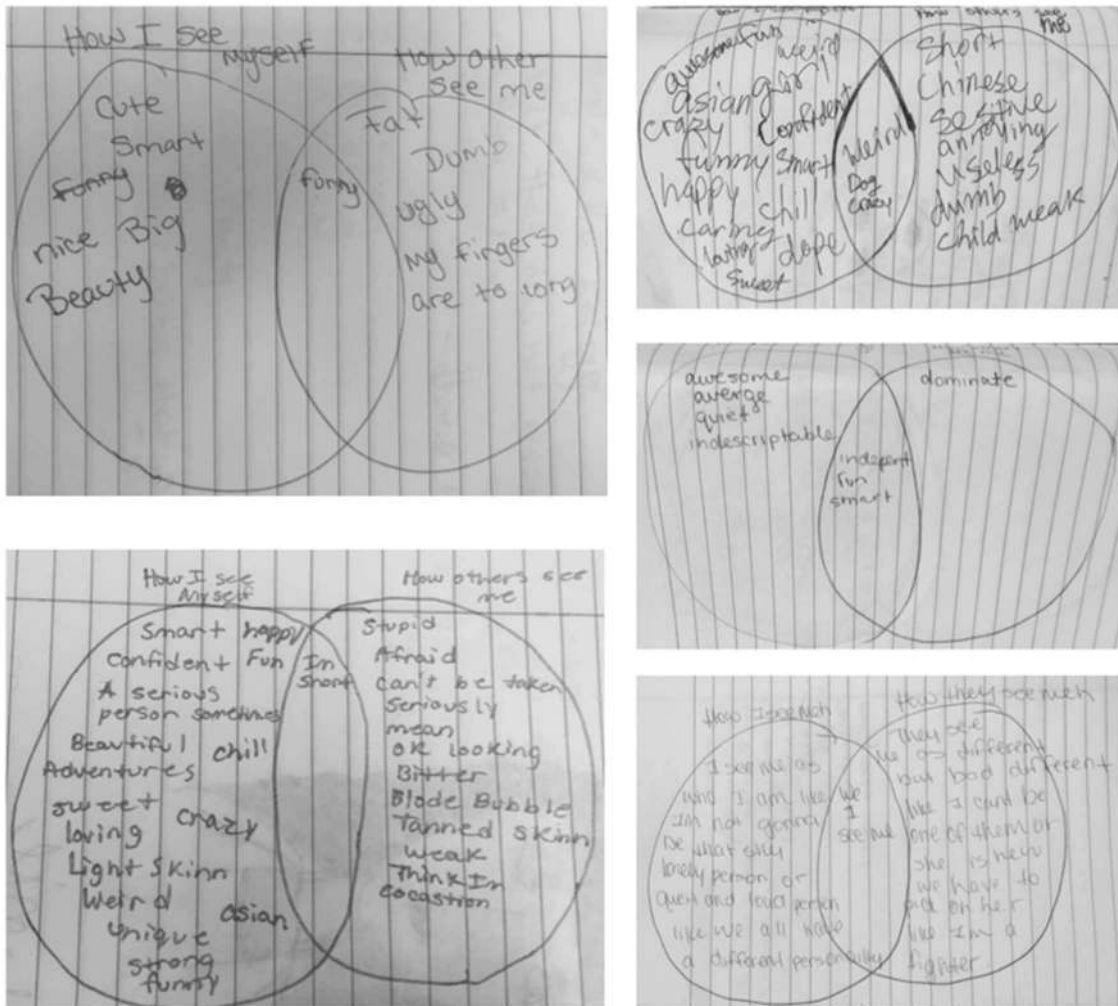
Figure 4.2. Examples of the Unnormal Sisterhood's Venn Diagrams

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positive. Folded into this pattern existed instances of how the girls addressed issues of race and culture explicitly. For instance, Halsey brought up the ways that she was often labeled as "Chinese," while she identified herself as "Asian" on the "How I See Myself" side of the diagram. This distinction points to her understanding and experiences as being flattened into an Asian American monolith, a trend she continues to unpack across the Unnormal Sisterhood meetings. Halsey was able to begin to apply a critical eye to the racist practices that often devalue her complexity and her unique identity and categorize her as "Chinese," a stand in term used to denote a monolithic Asian identity. In this particular text, she identified herself as "Asian," though, often, across the club, she would more specifically talk about her pride in her Vietnamese identity.

Another trend that arose in these Venn diagrams was that some of the dichotomies that came through in the girls' work often reflected their perceptions about stereotypes about their intersecting identities as well as how they rejected of those labels. These dichotomies are painful to read as they show girls of color, so young, already so aware of the brutality of the "arrogant perceptions" (Lugones, 1987) cast on them from Eurocentric culture. For instance, Seraphina's Venn Diagram reflects that she believed other see her as dominant, while she saw herself as not only average, but quiet, rejecting the label of dominant. Ciara, on the one hand stated that she believed people see her as fat, dumb, and ugly, but claimed to see herself as big, beautiful, and smart. Halsey listed weak, useless, and sensitive as how others might see her, while she described seeing herself as confident, smart, caring, and loving. The girls selected the specific words on the "How Others See Me"

side of the Venn Diagram that seem to reflect the arrogant perceptions of Eurocentric culture that diminishes, deficitizes, shames, and blasphemes girls of color on multiple levels—their appearance, their personalities, their intellect, their utility in the world. For these girls, though, they at least understood that these perceptions should not be believed, as they projected that they see themselves in positive light.

However, it did become clear that some of the Eurocentric values that cast these girls of color in a negative light seeped into their own ideologies and self perception. Ciara, for one, used the word "fat" in a negative way. Many women of color body image activists are pushing against the idea that "fat" is a negative quality (Salgado, 2017; Shackelford, 2016; Stanley, 2018), as they feel is a term worth reclaiming in the face of oppressive Eurocentric values that shame fat women and attach a slew of negative associations to fatness. Although Ciara claimed "big" as an affirmative descriptor that she lines up with her other positive self-perceptions, she still rejected the specific word "fat" aligning it with negative attributes.

Giselle also started to unpack the ways she felt seen by the world and in this attempt to gain control of her image, ended up reflecting a privileging of Eurocentric features. Giselle addressed how she was framed as "tanned skinn" by others, but saw herself as "light skinn." It is notable and unfortunate that, for her, "tanned skinn" lined up with negative perceptions, including "stupid, afraid, can't be taken seriously, mean, ok looking," that she stated other people project onto her. Thus the association of her tanned skin as a negative attribute came through. Further reifying this idea, she claimed to sees herself as "light skinn," listing this alongside positive

attributes like confident, loving, sweet, and beautiful. It seems that she had

internalized some of the ideologies of colorism, placing her value in her lightness.

Her categorizing of dark skin as negative and her internalization of the desirability

of light skin reflected a desire for a proximity to whiteness. This was an issue that

came up across the club, as discussed in Kathleen's privileging of her British

ancestry. Giselle's association of light skin with positive attributes recapitulated this

issue into our conversation, pointing to the pervasiveness of Eurocentric beauty

standards across racial boundaries for girls of color. As mentioned in regards to

Kathleen, this pushed me to address issues of colorism in the curriculum, defining

the term, interacting with texts that confront it, and allowing the girls to speak on

their experiences with it.

The Venn Diagrams served as a jumping off point for further poetic

reflections on identity for the girls. In addition to reflecting on June Jordan's poem

with the Venn Diagrams, the girls also wrote poems to develop their theories about

the ways they saw themselves versus the way the world saw them. Through these

poems it is evident that the girls were able to critique and resist negative

perceptions. In a sophisticated poetic analysis of the ways others perceive her,

Diamond wrote:

> They say Im rude
> They Im had a smart mouth
> But sure they do
> They say Im was dry
> They say Im was a cry baby
> But we all cry
> They said Im take it to deep
> They say fight
> But Im express myself so they

cry they are rude but
they wont amit it! So they
just talk about it
(Artifact, February 9, 2016)

In very obvious ways, Diamond drew from both the thematic and structural

influences of Jordan's poem, but she also made them distinctly her own, pulling from

her personal experiences. She, like Jordan, used a repeated refrain, "They say." She,

also like Jordan, critiqued the negative discourses aimed at her. Reflecting

Diamond's experiences of being framed by teachers as a problem student, as having

an attitude, and, in her words a "smart mouth," she explored the contradictory

nature of these accusations. This poem demonstrates that she was sharply aware of

the discourses that surrounded her. She departed from Jordan in her specific

critique of the ways that she is targeted with these discourses, despite the fact that

those casting the aspersions might also share the very characteristics they are

criticizing her for.

Diamond seems to intuit an idea that many women of color feminists,

including Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Audre Lorde (2007), and Sara Ahmed (2012),

have held about the raced and gendered stereotypes leveraged against women and

girls of color, particularly in academic spaces. Often, women and girls of color are

targeted as being overly emotional, in particular, angry, rude, and illogical. The

scholars who have addressed this issue have discussed that although it is a human

and shared attribute to be angry when faced with racism or sexism or other forms of

silencing, women of color are particularly targeted as being overly emotional or

overly angry, their emotions being read differently than those of, for example, white

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male. Diamond's poem critiques those who label her as rude, as having a smart mouth, and as being a crybaby, without acknowledging their own emotions and tendencies to be rude, to cry, and to be "smart" as a product of those emotions. This poem is a call for self-reflexivity and the squelching of harmful practices that mislabel, over exaggerate, and cast negative light on the emotions of Black girls.

Some of the other girls followed this trend of addressing the rejection of negative perceptions. Ciara wrote a poem tracing the ways that others have labeled her. These reflect the words she entered in her Venn diagram. Rather than taking the negative perceptions cast upon her lying down, though, she made affirmative claims about herself in response.

> They say that Im to fat
> They say that Im to dumb
> They say that my fingers are long
> They say that Im ugly
> but that does not mean
> A thing to me
>
> Im strong
> Im funny
> Im cute
> Im nice
> Im big
> I have beauty
>
> If you don't believe that o well.
> (Artifact, February 9, 2016)

Ciara acknowledged that negative opinions about her exist, but she expressed her disregard for them. She indicated it is others' prerogative to believe what they will, but it won't mean a thing to her. She listed affirmations about herself, using a

repetitive structure that pounds into the reader that she is so much more than what others have labeled her.

Giselle also expressed the tension between dominant narratives and self-love. In her case, she wrote her poem as advice to her audience.

> Never make anyone make you feel
> like your nothing
> You are unique, special,
> beautiful
> Its what you think is
> important
> Not what someone else
> <u>thinks</u>
> (Artifact, February 9, 2016)

She emphasized the listener's specialness, their uniqueness, and that this does not need to be based in the opinions of others. She conveyed the message that self-confidence is internal and important. In a stylistic move to add power to her final statement, she underlined the final word, "thinks" as if to emphasize others' opinions are merely their own constructions and have nothing to do with the way you conceive of yourself.

Halsey engaged in yet another stylistically interesting poem, playfully writing it as a conversation, with the lines alternating between the voice of a critic and the response of their target. It reads:

> "You're ugly"
> I know
> "You're dumb"
> You're right
> "You're weird"
> I know
> "You're weak"
> You're right
> "You're a bxxxh"

> I know
> "Wait so I'm right?
> You're right.
> "Haha" youre right "I know"
> Say something"
> Hi
> "You're just to scared"
> you're right
> "You know what"
> what
> "Im done with this."
> You're right.
> (Artifact, February 9, 2016)

In this poem, we can see Halsey spiritedly creating a scenario where someone is able to let her critics' attacks roll off of her until she becomes exhausted. By repeatedly agreeing with the critic, the protagonist of the poem wears them down until she is done, to which the narrator proclaims "you're right." This poem shows the sort of "sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me" sort of attitude, one that indicates that the protagonist in her poem is resilient against the constant slurs she receives. It represents the constant aspersions girls can receive, and almost all that are listed are words that are more commonly used against girls—according to Halsey: ugly, dumb, weak, bxxxch, scared. Through her conversational tone, a tone also utilize by Jordan in the mentor text, Halsey demonstrated a unique perspective on how to resist negative perceptions.

Seraphina also wrote a few poems that day that contended with the misalignment of her self-perception and how others view her. Like the poems explored in earlier sections of this chapter, she again attended to the ways she fights against negative stereotypes in her life. However, here, her poems explicated some

of the damaging effects of dominant narratives that can result in emotional

shutdown and isolation. The first read:

<div align="center">

I think I'm fine
with
me now

Im finally me
yes im
awesome

Hurt my feelings
HA, I have none

Ever felt alone
With friends
Disreguard them and get money

You over
(Artifact, February 9, 2016)

</div>

This reflects a complicated image of how Seraphina was coming to terms with her

own self-love. On the one hand, the poem speaks to Seraphina's feeling of self-

acceptance, one that, as she denotes with the word "finally," has taken time to

cultivate. She affirmed her self-confidence, noting "yes im awesome." The "yes" in

this line strikes a tone of a sort of defensiveness, where Seraphina is still fighting a

battle to affirm herself to those who might doubt or even argue with her.

The poem goes down a path that indicates a guardedness to her emotional

knowledge. She wrote dismissive claims about her feelings, of which here she

claimed to have none, and her relationships, which she recommends be dissolved in

order to obtain money. It seems, here, in an effort to tap into self- love, what I

consider a feminist practice, Seraphina rejected some knowledges that have been

categorized as feminine, and thus, of less value than logic (Jaggar, 1989; Lorde,

2007; Collins, 2000). What's more, she seemed to see currency as her main goal,

rather than relationships, which could, in fact, arm her against the negative

perceptions she named.

In the next text she created, she drew an image of slightly smiling lips, which

are flanked by the words, "NEVER KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT" on top and

"Disreguard Males aquire currucy" below (See Figure 4.3). In this multimodal entry
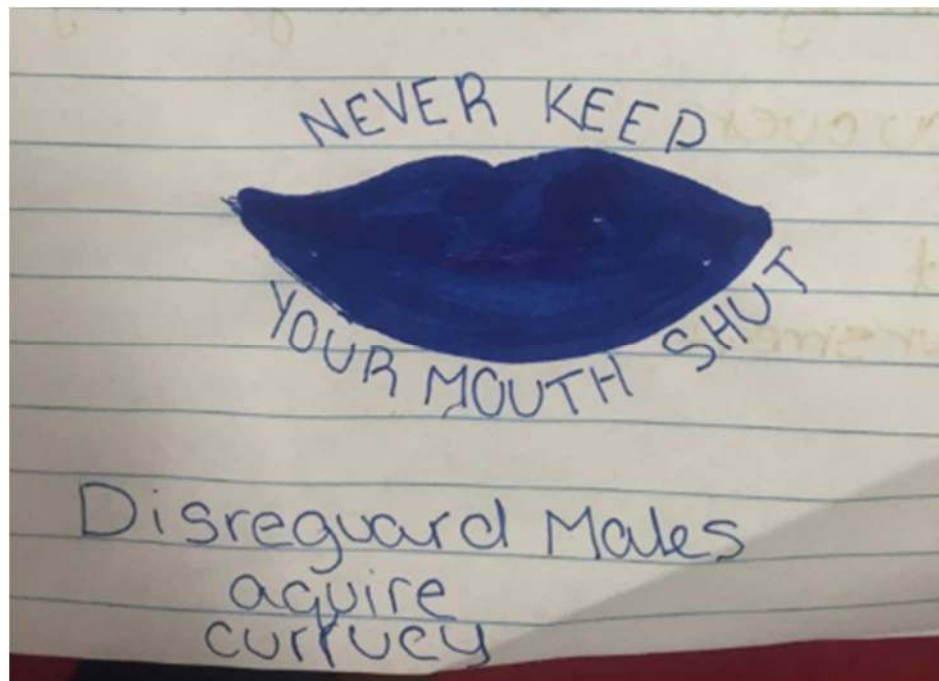
Figure 4.3: Seraphina's "Disreguard Males" multimodal text

into her notebook she portrayed a complicated message, that was, on the one hand,

celebratory of feminist values of speaking up for one's rights, much like Audre Lorde

(2007) who proclaimed "your silence will not protect you" (p. 41). Further, she

called for the disregarding of males, reflective of the feminist ideal that women

needn't center men in their lives. However, her final statement, a call to acquire

currency, strikes opposition to many anti-capitalist feminist values. This desire for

monetary power is not surprising. In a world where power is so connected to

capital, acquiring currency, particularly for women and girls of color, can be a way of accessing power otherwise denied to them. Economic power is one way they can achieve power in a world where racial and gendered power are largely unavailable.

Seraphina's final poem read:

Don't
try to blend
in
then others will
throw stones
be you be original
then
who care what they
say
thats the best defense
to their
offense

(Artifact, February 9, 2016)

This poem was accompanied by a picture of a person wearing a crown and standing in front of a stone wall (See figure 4.4). In this poem and picture, Seraphina again, highlighted the importance of individuality and guarding oneself from what others hurl at you. Again, she highlighted her feeling that she is special and that that matters. However, she does point to the importance of defending yourself against others.

Seraphina's defensiveness did not come out of nowhere. She was one of the sisters who most frequently addressed the ways that racism and sexism affected her. It seems that one of the effects of her experiences with racism and sexism was an increased guardedness, isolation, and the blocking of emotions. She seems to have chosen closedness in favor of coalition against these forces. Her work brings up
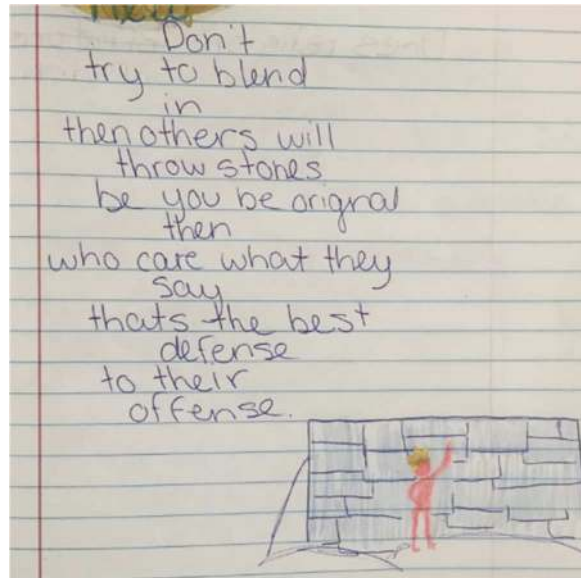
Figure 4.4. Seraphina's Don't Try to Blend In" Multimodal Text

interesting questions of the practicality of girls of color who, to preserve their self-love and care, feel the need to create barriers to the world.

Black female psychoanalyst Kathleen Poge White (2002) has discussed the effects of being the target of racial hatred. She speaks of the ways women of color, and all people who feel hated for various aspects of their identities, must fight to maintain a sense of self-love. She claims, "being a warrior for your personal integrity is lonely" (p. 405). Carter (2007) has also postulated that race based traumatic stress can lead to, among other things, depression, poor relationships, and withdrawal. Importantly, Shorter-Gooden (2004), suggests that women of color do have multiple resistance strategies. One of these is self-care and internal resistance strategies, which Seraphina and the girls seem to be relying heavily on. However, relying on external sources provides additional and important support. It was my goal through this project, to help girls understand more thoroughly how, while healthy self perception and self care were helpful in the face of intersecting

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oppressions, leaning on one another might be an additional important strategy in resisting racism and sexism. I am not suggesting I have the ability to diagnose Seraphina or any of the girls, nor do I desire to do so. What I am indicating is that Seraphina's poem and the poems of other girls do seem to reflect some of the ways that race based trauma might serve to isolate the girls.

Further, it points to the importance of spaces like the Unnormal Sisterhood that might open possibilities to solidarity amongst girls of color and in collective defense against oppression. Seraphina's writing across these pieces demonstrates how deeply seeded thinking that rejects feminist of color ideals is, as even girls of color who identify as feminist and who are engaging in self love work, still partake in a tendency toward isolation and a shut down of feeling, seeing these as protective barriers. Of course, this was in the first months of the club, so we were just beginning to tip toe toward the goal of balancing self-love with collaboration. The celebratory stance, again, was not purely for the sake of affirmation, but also designed to open critical inquiry and opportunities to examine oneself and one's worldview more closely with new theoretical lenses. Throughout this dissertation, we will revisit Seraphina's journeys, as she continues to investigate herself, her relationships with her sisters, and her critiques of schooling. Through this progression, we'll see the ways she both remains insistent on independence, but also finds ways to open herself up to the possibility of allyship.

The girls' writing in response to June Jordan's poems reflect their navigation between self-love and their relationships to their communities. The poetic engagement with these topics reflect the girls' understandings of the emotional

work and, at times, the rejection of emotional work, the girls engaged in order to survived, and, in some cases, even thrive, in the face of oppression. The girls' writings all reflected the ways that the deflect pain, but perhaps, at times, to a detriment to their abilities to relate to others and to tap into feelings that might offer them important understandings of and even resistant practices to their worlds. The girls' poems indicate, in part, an image of the destructiveness of white supremacist heteropatriarchy in that it not only damages a person, it also can create boundaries to their connections to other people. However, the poems also depict the ways that girls are understanding what it means to stay strong, to love oneself, and to poke holes in the negative ideologies cast upon them by white supremacist heteropatriarchal discourses. In all, the poems are reflections of the way girls are theorizing and enacting resilience and resistance in various and often powerful ways.

Self Portraits: Multimodal Critical Self-Celebration

Like poetry, visual arts provide an opportunity for girls of color to theorize their experiences by tapping into ways of knowing often external to dominant academic practices. There were multiple occasions over the course of the club for the girls to explore their identities through not only writing, but also visual arts. These experiences tapped into multiple modes of expression and a bevy of talents the girls brought with them to the Unnormal Sisterhood. Through the study and creation of multimodal texts, the girls were able to blend the intellectual work of examining identity by building off of artistic traditions of women of color and by drawing on youth culture.
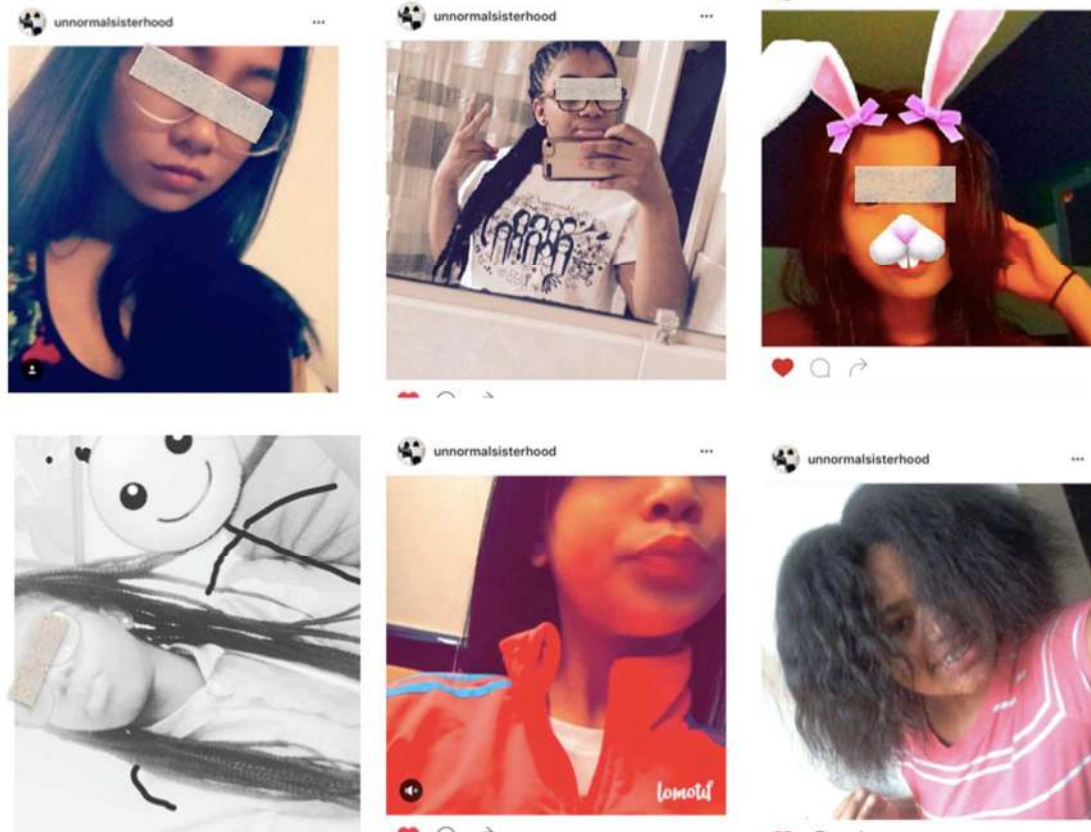
Figure 4.5. Some of the Unnormal Sisterhood Selfies Posted on our Instagram Account

Self-portraits are a valuable medium for self-exploration for women of color. As famed Mexican self-portraitist, Frida Kahlo (n.d.), explains, "In my self portraits, I really dealt head on with whatever I was facing. If I was in pain, I drew it, in literal ways I portrayed the emotions I was going through. And I guess that many women have difficulty sometimes expressing that sort of thing." I wanted the girls to have the opportunity to show themselves, in whatever way they wanted, in a manner that extended the textual representations they had already engaged with. I wanted them to have control over their self-representation in a way that spoke back to dominant

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perceptions of girls of color and allowed them to celebrate in their own beauty, both intellectual and physical.

The girls were already quite versed in one mode of self-portraiture: taking selfies. Selfies, digital self-portraiture, according to Jon Wargo (2015), can be a way for youth to index their selves and center aspects of their identities not always spotlighted in schools. What's more, selfies "are idealized and often contrived images that release significant moments in the present, privately initiated for displaying a public identity, functioning also to preserve aspects of the past for the future" (Harrison, 2004, as cited by Wargo, 2015, p. 3). These are sophisticated literacies that so many girls of color are engaging on a daily basis as they take agency to creatively project versions of themselves in particular moments into the world. Figure 4.5 shows some of the selfies posted on their shared Instagram account. In these portraits, the girls creatively and playfully presented themselves, adding filters, drawing on the pictures, posing themselves in particular ways, and even showing their affinity to the Unnormal Sisterhood with their clothing choices in Diamond's case.

Posting selfies is a way that girls of color can create media that represents them as beautiful, where they feel beautiful, in a world where most media outlets do not feature girls who look like them. In Ciara's selfie, for example, we see her showing off her voluminous hair, which she usually wore in a straightened shoulder length style. She elects to show off her curls, demonstrating a choice she is making to rebel against Eurocentric beauty standards with joy. This ability to control what counts as beautiful speaks to what Halsey critiqued in another art project as the lack

Figure 4.6. Halsey's Collage

of representation in mainstream media of people who were different races, who had different body types, who had nonbinary gender identities, who weren't over sexualized. She created a collage (see Figure 4.6), in what she described as an attempt to compile pictures of women and girls who she felt were underrepresented in media, including Asian women, Black women, gender fluid women, and women with mental health issues.

She used her art project as a call for popular media to reflect to her a breadth of identities, some of which she claimed, and others that she didn't, but were also under represented. To me, it seems that selfies and the use of social media that girls of color partake in, in part, provide opportunities for them to project more diverse images of women and girls, and allow girls to consume different standards of beauty than are commonly portrayed in mass media. The process of taking selfies allows

them to frame the picture, pose, and choose angles in a way that made them feel beautiful, thereby choosing the way that they want to be seen by the world, rather than allowing the world to falsely portray them. To extend and nuance the girls' engagement with self-portraiture, I chose to share with the girls the work of contemporary artist February James as an example of a woman of color artist playing with various media to create portraits. James is a former makeup artist who "has traded her skills of precisely covering up the flaws of women, while enhancing their features, for a chance to unearth truth through self-portraiture" (Word, 2015). James's work, in some cases, is vivid and bends between photorealism and abstraction, as she layers photographs with vibrant oil pastels. I shared some of her portraits with the girls and engaged them in a conversation about selfies. The girls, on the first day of this activity, took selfies. The following day, I had printed them out in back and white and the girls added color with oil pastels to the images.

Figure 4.7. Halsey's Self Portrait

Figure 4.8. Seraphina's Self Portrait

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Combining media, the girls were able to draw from multiple sources of creativity to project themselves into the world.

The selfies the girls created tapped into a modality they had ample experience in and the addition of pastels added a second opportunity for the girls to play with their images and make choices about representation. It was interesting to see the ways that the girls chose to highlight specific aspects of their faces, and that these were at times parts of themselves not considered beautiful by mainstream beauty standards. Diamond and Ciara, for instance, (see figures 4.9 and 4.10) outlined their noses, an act that, as pointed out to me by a Black woman friend of mine, rebelled against the Eurocentric privileging of narrow noses. Diamond (figure 4.9) further emboldened her eyeglasses, in a move that resisted the normative and anti-feminist statement "boys rarely make passes at girls

Figure 4.9. Diamond's Self Portrait

Figure 4.10. Ciara's Self Portrait
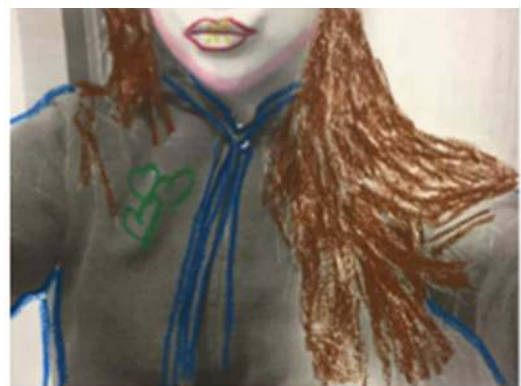
Figure 4.11. Giselle's Self Portrait

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who wear glasses." In this move, she seemed to indicate a disregard for this kind of

narrow view of what girls should look like. Ciara also chose to highlight her fingers

in green. This may seem innocuous, but across the data, she had brought up her

"long fingers" as something people make fun of her for. Thus, in this move, she

reclaimed something she had felt shamed for, drawing the viewer's eye straight to

what she claimed others had disparaged her for. In a similar effort to claim her

beauty under her own terms, Halsey (see figure 4.7) exaggerated her lip with a

smear of shocking red pastel, seeming to rebel against typical beauty standards that

would have her plump her lips with a neat and exaggerated shading. Halsey seems

to be staking claim on a beauty defined strictly on her own terms.

I want to be clear that I do not believe that selfies are either purely liberating

or inherently narcissistic (Murray, 2015) for girls of color. Selfies, in and of

themselves, are not empowering and, in some cases, culture around social media

can be harmful to girls of color, as they feel the pressure to seek "likes" as external

affirmation of their worth. What's more, to achieve higher numbers of likes, those

posting selfies might bend to normative and gendered representations if they feel

that is what their audience desires (Vivienne, 2017). The girls also brought up the

harmful practices of "calling out" one another, which is parlance for bullying each

other in the online sphere. Explicit cyber bulling and the desire for likes can both be

self-destructive practices that detract from the resistant and revolutionary potential

of selfies and social media self-representation. But this is precisely why I believe the

work of critical celebration through self-portraiture has potentially powerful

implications. It is an opportunity for girls to explore positive uses of social media

with guidance to learn how to celebrate themselves and each other. Social media,

when controlled by girls of color who make deliberate statements against

misconceptions of normativity, could be a platform with potential for transforming

how girls of color are portrayed. Further, when girls are engaged in critical

considerations of social media, they may more carefully consider how they consume

images of other girls of color in critical celebration.

Summary and Discussion

Critical celebration served as an important concept to shape the pedagogy of

the Unnormal Sisterhood. As the sisters strove to understand themselves as

unnormal, as transcendent of narrow and often negative views of girls of color, as

powerful in spite of and perhaps as a product of their marginalized positions,

literary experiences that promoted the critical but loving exploration of self proved

a key tool. Through critical engagement with texts that reflected notions of self-care

and self-love enacted by women of color, girls were able to reflect on the ways that

other powerful women of color have cared for themselves and expressed their love

for themselves in the face of the intersections of racial and gendered oppression.

Furthermore, they were able to create their own texts that both expressed and

helped them further develop their theorizations of what it meant to engage in self-

care and self-love. These texts exposed that the girls were in many ways resilient to

the negative stereotypes and deficitizing discourses that surrounded their

intersectional identities. They felt a sense of worthiness that they shared through

their writing and multimodal texts. Further, by centering these literary engagements

in the Unnormal Sisterhood curriculum, the girls were able to produce

counternarratives that brought to light their complex and nuanced understandings of themselves and their complex relationships to the world around them. These counternarratives also served as a political act to devalue the false narratives about them projected by mainstream media and project more accurate girl of color produced narratives.

The girls' notions of self-love were complicated and in process, as girls were navigating establishing their sense of self worth in all its complexity while receiving so many messages that sought to tear them down. Their theorizations through poetry and self portraiture represented in many instances first steps into inquiries that would, down the line, help them understand themselves through new analytical lenses that shed some of the hateful white supremacist and sexist ideologies that were nearly inescapable. Especially with more covert forms of sexism and racism, such as colorism and the devaluing of female emotion and relationships, the girls writing and portraits unearthed necessary directions for the curriculum in the Unnormal Sisterhood.

In these acts, the Unnormal Sisterhood was able to provide opportunities for the girls to recover and strengthen, see themselves as holders of important wisdom, of beauty, of power even in a world that contrasts this message. By engaging in multiple modes of expression, they introduced themselves to the world and to themselves under the terms of their choosing. These are important acts in the face of curriculum that does not even allow girls to mention themselves, that never seek to understand their stories. These acts of self-expression and self-definition fly in

the face of societal misconceptions, deficitizations, and erasures of girls of color as the girls stake their claim to diverse, unique, and ever changing identities.

As the popularity of the "self-care" movement erupts, especially amongst women claiming their right to treat themselves with kindness, it is important to be mindful of how critical celebration plays an active role in self-care. Many women of color describe the origins of the self-care movement in the work of women of color as inspired by women of color like Audre Lorde (1988), who says "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare" (Kindle Locations 1701-1702). Through Lorde's lens, self-care is more than self-centered luxuriating. It is, instead, an commitment to ones self that has political purpose that extends, though, beyond the self. What recent years have shown, though, is that the self-care movement has been co-opted and marketed by largely white affluent women. Kisner (2017) describes that this appropriation of self-care as often being centered in self-centered luxuries, rather than with the political aims of Lorde's self-care. It is important, then, like the girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood, that self-celebration maintains its critical edge, centering self-care as a route toward political action, rather than at preserving only the self.

The following chapters will explore the ways we built off of the concept of critical self-celebration and love toward a concept of sisterly celebration and love. In these chapters, I will address some of the difficult concepts of how girls of color in the Unnormal Sisterhood maintained and built anew more loving perceptions of one another, despite the destructive forces of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy

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that can too often cause girls and women of color to build walls and shut down

important affective power.

CHAPTER FIVE: CREATING NEW NOTIONS OF SOLIDARITY: COMPOSING

UNNORMAL SISTERHOOD

Introduction

A hashtag reading "#SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen" materialized on Twitter in 2013. Mikki Kendall (2013), the creator of the hashtag, has explained its origins, pointing to her encounters with "a brand of solidarity that centers on the safety and comfort of white women." This "brand of solidarity" ignores both the intellectual and activist work of women of color, as well as their needs, desires, and safety within feminist and women's rights movements. This hashtag, born out of real lived experiences, was created in order to provoke thought. It addresses a modern iteration of a phenomenon that has come up again and again across the years as white feminist movements have chosen to remain color evasive. And now, in the era of the Women's March, #MeToo, and #TimesUp, this hashtag calls for us to be thoughtful and act against what women of color have been calling out as short sighted and incomplete feminisms that are trans-exclusive, ignorant of race, and focused mainly on issues of white middle class and wealthy women.

As I began to formulate my dissertation, build my conceptual framework, and invest in the idea of solidarity as a major component of my work in the world, I encountered this hashtag and I cringed in self doubt, wondering if I were doing the same thing as the white women who elicited this hashtag. I wondered, as a mixed race East Asian woman with white ancestry on my father's side, what it meant for me to place so much stake in solidarity, to feel a need and desire for solidarity with women of color like and unlike myself—women who may have experienced the

intersections of racism, sexism, and classism in ways that I have not because of the manner in which power has operated across time. I wondered if my efforts toward solidarity were in vain, if they were selfish. I wondered, was there something I was missing, some way I was being ignorant, some place where I was being exclusive, self-centered, ignorant.

The answer, of course, is yes. But, perhaps, in this acknowledgement of my short sightedness, of my misunderstandings, and, further, of others' short sightedness and misunderstandings of me, a platform off of which solidarity—true solidarity—can be built takes form. Maybe it is with the knowledge that I am, to a degree, opaque and I have the right to that opacity (Glissant, 1990), and that others are, to a degree, opaque and they have the right to their opacity, that meaningful political and affective bonds can be established in the service of solidarity. I simply cannot know everything about a person, for I haven't lived as them, but I can seek to understand better what others need me to know and I can seek to help others understand me better and share with them what I believe they need to know in order to be in solidarity with me. In these efforts, we can collectively build new awarenesses, new theories, and new power toward change. With this knowledge, the understanding that true solidarity takes real and devoted work emerges. For, as Toni Cade Bambara (1983) shares:

> "It takes more than the self-disclosure and the bold glimpses of each other's life documents to make the grand resolve to fearlessly work toward potent meshings. Takes more than a rinsed lens to face unblinkingly the particular twists of the divide and conquer tactics of this moment… We have got to know each other better and teach each other our ways, our views, if we are to move the scales… and get the work done." (p. vii)

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This conscious form of solidarity acknowledges the real work of building coalition and necessitates that we understand that mere sharing can't be everything. With this conception of solidarity, we must engage ourselves in the reflexive labor of recognizing differences and connections and their relationships to systems of power. In turn, using these knew understandings, we must alter the ways we act in the world to combat not only the systems of oppression that affect us as individuals, but all systems of oppression. Mere "lip service to the need for diversity, but changing little about one's own practice" (Collins, 2000, p. 6) only serves to reify sexist and racist structures.

This chapter will explore the ways that the Unnormal Sisterhood attempted to enact solidarity in a way that more closely mirrors the calls by women of color feminists across time. The girls' relational, emotional, intellectual, and political labor toward solidarity will be traced. It was my goal to look to models of solidarity, posed to me from women of color feminists dedicated to working with other women of color, recognizing the value of difference in solidarity and the necessity to look closely at the varying ways that power manifests itself differently across nondominant differences (Lorde, 2007). Drawing from theories of solidarity constructed by women of color theorists like Audre Lorde (2007), Cherrie Moraga (1983), Maria Lugones (1987) and Toni Cade Bambara (1983), the Unnormal Sisterhood was fashioned to be a place where girls could work toward developing their notions of solidarity, while engaging in literate activities along side one another.

"World" Traveling through Speaking and Listening

One of the major efforts of the pedagogy of the Unnormal Sisterhood was for the sisters to take on "unarrogant" and "loving perceptions" (Lugones, 1987) of one another. In other words, I attempted to facilitate opportunities for girls to take on perceptions across difference that defied the stereotypical and limited ideas shaped by our existence within a world where white heteropatriarchal structures hold so much power. It was my feeling that the girls needed to make the choice to commit to one another and, thus, it was necessary for them to understand one another in ways they may not have previously. Girls were invited to interview one another, engage in critical listening sessions, write notes to one another, and read and write with one another. These activities served as a sort of sharing of girls' stories and ideas, inspired by the Chicana feminist conception of *testimonios* (Saavedra, 2011). As Saavedra discusses, *testimonios* can serve as a platform for new possibilities in literacy curriculum, as youth capture and share their realities and engage youth in critical pedagogies rooted in cultural and familial knowledge. In the case of the Unnormal Sisterhood, through the girls' sharing of stories, theories, and observations, they built knowledge coalitionally and in a way that closely replicated the critical, political, and artistic work born of women from communities like and unlike their own.

To foster the girls' intellectual, emotional, and political commitment to one another, I loosely set up a series of minilessons and engagements so that the interviews the girls gave to one another were deliberate and thoughtful. We first discussed what they might want to find out about one another and how they might

get to that information. They were told that they would first interview a partner, which I assigned, attempting to pair girls who did not know each other as well. Next, the girls drafted questions for one another, writing them in their notebooks. Then, they conducted interviews with a partner and wrote reflections and poems about the interviews. In the days following these one on one interviews, we then held whole group interviews, during which each girl asked one question of a focal girl. In the chart featured in Figure 5.1, the questions are listed, organized by their overarching themes.

Interview Questions			
Self-Perception	Relationships to Others	Basic Facts	Identity
1. What makes you you? 2. What type of person do you call yourself 3. What's your unique? 4. How is your life going? 5. Are you happy with yourself? 6. How do you feel about yourself? 7. Do you feel happy about yourself 8. How's your life been? 9. Are you insecure? 10. Are you insecure 11. Are you sensitive? 12. Does anybody make fun of you for your braces? 13. What's your fear? 14. Are you a follower or a leader? 15. Whats your passion? 16. What's your hobby? 17. Any odd talents	1. Do you have a crush? 2. Crushes 3. Do you have a crush? 4. Do you have any crushes? If so why do you like him? 5. Are you in love, meaning are you in a relationship? 6. Would you go out with anyone in your class? 7. Do you like explaining yourself to [a girl in class]? 8. How many friends do you have? 9. Who is your best friend 10. Why can't you hear? SIKE How long have you known Bri? 11. Who is your best friend and why? 12. Do you believe that 3 ppl in a group should be equal? 13. Do you like staying home and chilling or	1. How do you do your lips? 2. How do you get your nails done? 3. What's your favorite color? 4. Fav color 5. What's your favorite Color? 6. Do you have animals? 7. How many pets? What kind? 8. What time were you born? 9. Birthday 10. What are you doing for your birthday? 11. Do you like or have you tried to right with your right hand? 12. What type of phone do you have?	1. Do you like whites 2. Whats your ethnicity? (crossed out) 3. How does it feel to be a minority in your class? 4. What is your full name 5. Are you mixed? What are you if you are? 6. Where your from 7. Where are you from? 8. Religion 9. Have you been disrespected by a male?

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18. What is your favorite thing to do? 19. What do you want to be in the future? 20. You have any ideas you have for the future? 21. What do you plan on doing in the future? And why? 22. What would you be when your grown? 23. Do you want to go to college 24. What would you do if you could run the world and why? 25. Why did you come to STA 26. How was your first day in STA 27. How's school? 28. What is your favorite subject? 29. What's your favorite subject? 30. What is/was your favorite subject? 31. Why did you agree to join the club? 32. Why do you like writing? Why do you write? 33. Do you like makeup? Why? 34. You like makeup? 35. What's your favorite song? 36. You like magcon? Why? 37. Why do you love Starbucks?	hanging out with your friends? 14. How come you and G. are not close friends? 15. Why did you get smart with B.? 16. What do you feel about Monkey scissorhands especially today since her party is today 17. What kind of conversation did you have with Alien? 18. Do you like Mrs. _? 19. Why you don't like Mrs. __? 20. Who's your fav teacher? Why? 21. Why don't you like Mrs. __? 22. What happened with you and Ms. ___? 23. Who don't you like in the class? 24. What would your mom do if you did something wrong? How would you react? 25. Do you love your mom? 26. Any brothers/sisters		

Figure 5.1. Chart of Girls Interview Questions

The questions most frequently addressed the girls' curiosity about their

sisters' self-perception, addressing ideas about personality, confidence, future plans,

academic identity, and likes and dislikes. The girls also asked many questions about

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their sisters' relationships to friends, family, romantic interests, and figures in their schools including peers and teachers. Questions around basic facts were not as frequently addressed, but when they were, focused on cosmetics, colors, birthdays, pets, and technology ownership. The final category that the girls addressed were issues around identity, including categories like race, gender, religion, and experiences and ideas around those categories. In total, the questions gave rise to conversations about girls' inner lives, providing them opportunities to listen, testify, and collaboratively and multi-vocally create stories as the interviews ebbed in and out of formal question and answer sessions and took turns toward more natural conversations about the topics that arose as a result of the questions and answers.

To offer the girls more opportunities to share stories, the girls also participated in "critical listening sessions," an activity I adapted from a writing workshop I attended for women of color in academia, lead by Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz and Marcelle Haddix in February 2016. In this activity, girls were paired with a partner. The first partner was asked to talk for seven minutes straight, uninterrupted and without stopping as the other partner listened closely. After the seven minutes, the listener would repeat back, with as much detail as possible what they had heard the other person say. Then, they would switch turns. Unlike interviews, these sessions were more controlled by the girl "testifying," offering her a chance to speak at length about whatever might be on their mind, whatever might seem most important in the moment to share with their sister. This provided further opportunities for the girls to invite their sisters into their worlds, unencumbered by arrogant perceptions and unframed by anyone else but themselves. After both

critical listening sessions and the interviews, the girls were asked to writing some of their thoughts about what they had learned and what it meant to them.

Pedagogically and methodologically, group interviews served multiple purposes. Pedagogically, this was an opportunity for the girls to engage in the practice of writing questions, of listening, and responding. It was an opportunity for the girls to engage in the practice of dialogue to expand their current knowledge base. Methodologically, these group interviews broke down the formality of standard interviews, where I, as the researcher, am in control of the information shared. By having the girls write and ask one another questions, with my support, it seemed like an opportunity to more deeply engage with what the *girls* wanted to know about one another, thus prioritizing the knowledge they found most important and the images of themselves and each other that they would want to project in my research. Further, by having some of the conversations occur in larger groups, the girls were able to feed off one another's energies, establish a level of comfort by being surrounded by their familiars, build on one another's ideas, creating a fuller understandings of the information shared and generating collective, rather than individual, knowledge (Madriz, 1998).

Writing, "World" Traveling, and Shifting Toward Loving Perception

Through interviews and critical writing sessions, the sisters were invited to engage with one another in a structured way, but a structure that strove toward meaningful connection. Although performed in a semi-academic fashion, the work was relational, blurring the lines between personal and intellectual, allowing girls to

experience a curriculum in an academic setting that placed import on them and their relationships.

Two of the girls who engaged in one on one interviews with one another were Diamond and Seraphina. Through an intersectional lens, we can see that Diamond and Seraphina shared many connections, but also many differences. They both lived in the same neighborhood, identified as Black girls, had parents who were separated, and were from similar working class backgrounds. Seraphina, however, was considered to be one of the "smart" girls in her class, high achieving by traditional notions of success in schools. She was class president and belonged to a local cheerleading club, signifying her social and academic striving. She claimed her aspiration was to become a "Black Woman CEO," and she talked about how her identity as Black and Female would make her work toward this accomplishment very hard. Seraphina was also, at times, judgmental and easily annoyed by what she percieved as other kids being "bad." She was also a bit more of a loner than others, claiming "I'm in a no friend type thing." Further describing that she feels like an "outsider or outcast in the girl community," although she did have a few close female friends. This framing of other girls as less desirable and less welcoming friends is a trope I am very familiar with, as I occupied the same perceptions when I was Seraphina's age, assuming myself somehow better than the girls in my class and, in turn, framing the boys as more worthy companions. This primacy placed on masculinity is indeed a product of patriarchal messages Seraphina and I have received from dominant narratives about who girls are and who boys are and what that means about their worth.

Diamond was a year younger than Seraphina. She was someone who was

constantly targeted in school for "misbehavior," eventually being expelled from the

school for an altercation with a teacher. Her teachers and the principal would

comment on her "attitude" and she was labeled "smart" in that "don't get smart with

me" type of way. She was someone who was quick to state her opinion and did so

with incisive sharpness. It seemed her teachers framed this as a negative,

categorizing her as a problem, rather than working with her to uncover the

problems in the school that she is responding to. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) has

theorized, so often Black women and girls are subject to "controlling images," a set

of portrayals of African American women as, for example, "stereotypical mammies,

matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas" in order to justify the

perpetuation of intersecting oppressions. Diamond was very much categorized as

the "angry Black girl," an image often projected on Black girls. And as Sarah Ahmed

(2012) has discussed, terms like aggression and anger used to describe people of

color, and in this case, Black girls, "assign the black body with a negative value" (p.

159)[8].

This negative value was, indeed, something that Diamond contended with, as

she moved through school, consistently subject to punishment, and, what's more,

seen through the eyes of her schoolmates, like Seraphina, with that negative value in

tow. Seraphina, although she did respect Diamond in many ways and chose to

collaborate with her at times, did at times lump her into what she would see as

"bad" students, who impeded her own learning at school, who she blamed the

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[8] These topics will be further investigated in Chapter 6.

failures of her school on. This came up repeatedly in conversations about their school days, that it was the students' fault that they weren't learning and that more students should be expelled. It is important to note here that Diamond was eventually expelled by the school for what a teacher deemed an act of physical aggression toward her. Although Seraphina was critical of this punishment and did not believe Diamond should have been expelled, the expulsion was representative of the sort of punitive action she had often claimed to think was a proper solution for the issues she observed in school. This is especially important to note, as Black children are disproportionately expelled for behavior that white students' engage with far more lenient consequences (Saavedra & Marx, 2016, citing Skiba, et al., 2011). This helps us to understand that expulsion is a product of racism, and that it is maddening to see other children, especially Black children, adopt this as an acceptable view point.

Through literate activities in the club, though, it seems that the girls were able, at least temporarily, take on new lenses to re-see one another with more loving perception (Lugones, 1987). This was demonstrated by the interviews and resultant poems that the girls wrote about one another. To interview Seraphina, Diamond prepared the following questions:

- You have a crush?
- Do you like whites?
- What would you do if you could run the world? Why?
- What would your mom do if you did something wrong?
- How would you react?
- Do you love your mom?
- Do you like makeup? Why?
- Do you like explaining yourselves to consens [sic]?

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- Do you like or have you tried to write with your right hand?
- What would you be when your grown?
- What's your hobby?
- What's your favorite color?

Diamond's questions range from social dynamics to likes and dislikes to political.

Seraphina's questions for Diamond were:

- Fav color
- Religion
- Any brothers/sisters
- Any odd talents
- Crushes
- Whats your passion?
- Do you want to go to college?
- What makes you you
- Where your from
- Birthday
- Why did you come to STA?
- How was your first day here in STA

Like Diamond, she also covers likes and dislikes and social dynamics, but she also

craves knowledge about Diamond, about her deeper self—what makes Diamond,

Diamond. After the girls met together, they were given time to write poems in

response to their interviews.

Seraphina wrote two drafts of a poem about Diamond. In her second draft of

a poem (see Figure 5.2), she wrote:

Diamond a girl of many colors
a sassy thing
a opinionated thing
her smile is transmittable
she speaks her mind
when others disagree
She has a passion for the
ARTS
Diamond is strong & powerful
she will forever
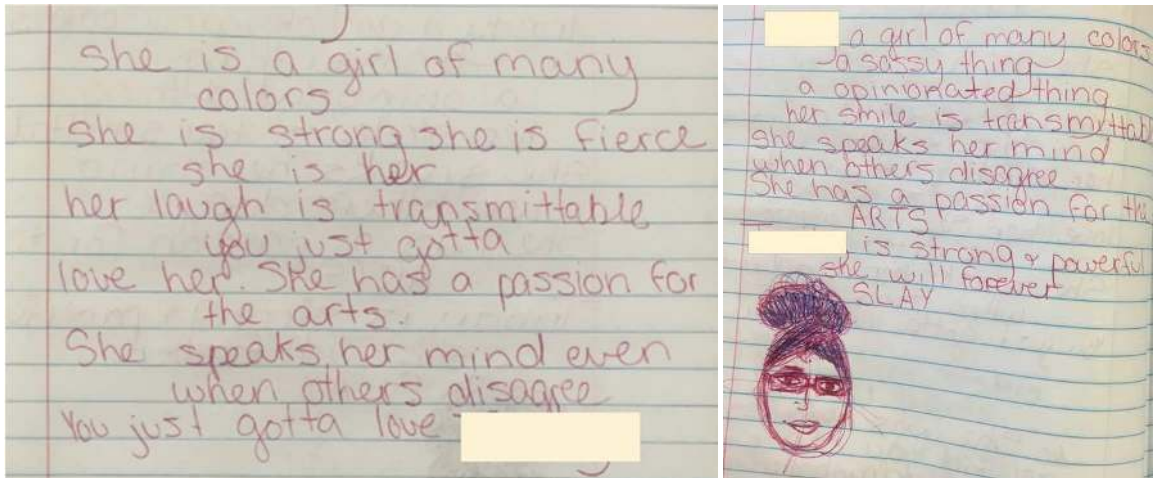
Figure 5.2. Drafts One and Two of Seraphina's Poems for Diamond

SLAY
(Artifact, February 2, 2016)

This poem and the small sketch that accompanies it are acts of loving perception.

They are acts of seeing difference and connectedness. They are acts of celebration of

Black girlhood, which, as Brown (2009) has discussed, are movement against racist

heteropatriarchy. Brown, in her discussion of Black girlhood celebration, names the

idea that part of celebration is engaging girls in the self creation of Black girl

narratives and allowing them to be audiences to those narratives. The poetic

interchange between Diamond and Seraphina seems to be just this type of

celebration, as they listened to one another, shared their narratives, and projected

new poetic expressions of those narratives to one another.

Part of Seraphina's narrativization of Diamond was resisting the arrogant

perception of school, which labels her opinionated nature as a negative, as being

"smart," not in a way that implies intellectuality, but in a way that implies an

unwelcomed attitude. In her alternative narrative, Seraphina takes on loving eyes, a

celebratory stance toward Diamond. In turn, she seems to understand their

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differences in a way that is more humanizing, more sisterly. Although Diamond's

method of expressing her opinions manifests itself differently than Seraphina's—

through the arrogant eyes of school, as more aggressive and disruptive—Seraphina,

here, is able to see these as strengths, as Diamond's own manner of "slayage." She is

taking on an asset orientation to Diamond.

This orientation is manifested in her specificity of language. She does not

stop at naming the existence of Diamond's smile, but to describe it as transmittable,

a word that, for me, evokes such power and transcendence. It speaks to the ways

that emotions are shared between girls of color and, in the case of the Unnormal

Sisterhood, in service of solidarity. Indeed, the transmittability of emotions can be

the seed of affective bonds that serve to bring communities together. It's worth
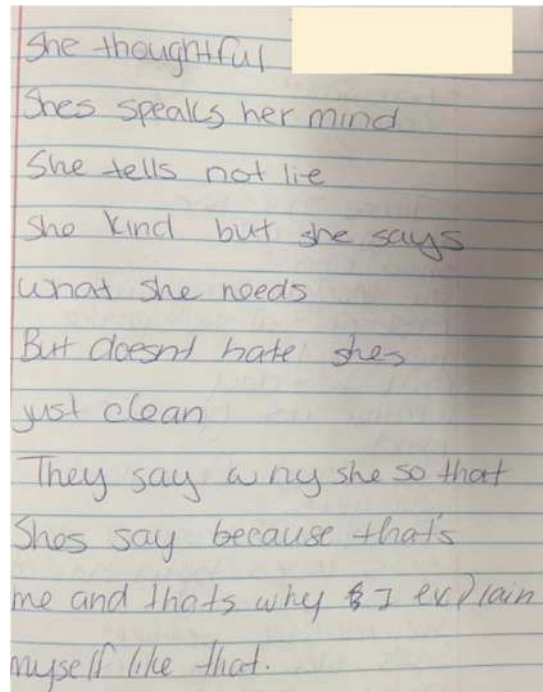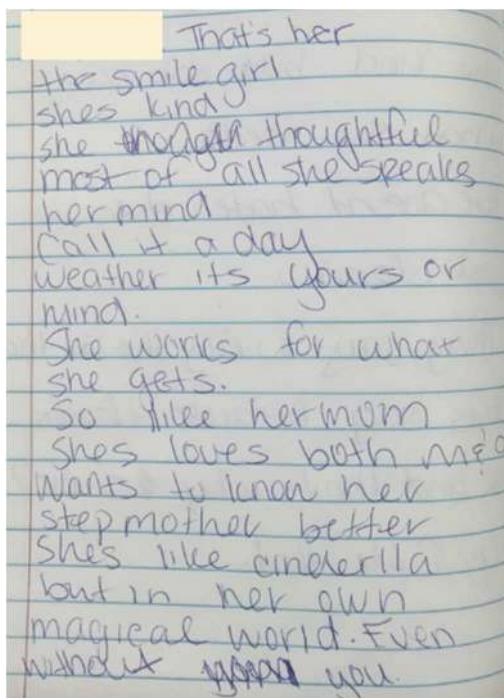
Figure 5.3. Diamond's Poems for Seraphina

mentioning that Diamond's smile is a characteristic that she has spoken of, describing it as one of the most important aspects of her identity, a characteristic that she inherited from her mother. Here, Seraphina seems to take on loving eyes toward Diamond. This is an act of rebellion against controlling images (Collins, 2000). In this rebellion, in the celebration of Diamond, Seraphina is acting in solidarity with her sister, working against the arrogant perceptions of schools and toward a celebratory stance.

As Seraphina captured Diamond in her writing, Diamond wrote two poems for Seraphina. In the second poem (see Figure 5.3), she wrote:

> Seraphina That's her
> The smile girl
> Shes kind
> She thoughtful
> Most of all she speaks
> Her mind
> Call it a day
> Weather its yours or
> Mine
> She works for what she gets.
> So like her mom
> She loves both m & d
> Wants to know her
> Stepmother better
> She's like Cinderella
> But in her own
> Magical world. Even
> Without you.
> (Artifact, February 2, 2016)

This poem expresses some similarities to Seraphina's poem. It focuses, too, on smiles and on speaking one's mind. It also addresses Seraphina's relationships with her parents. In this way, Diamond sees herself reflected back at her, as she also comes from a family with separated parents who have found new partners. She

further lifts Seraphina up, describing her as Cinderella, "but in her own magical world." This replicates Seraphina's own' self image as almost magical. Seraphina, as mentioned in Chapter 4, has written of herself as being "lost in stars and glitter" which evokes, to me, similar princess-like, fantastical imagery. This rebellion against controlling images demonstrates the ways that youth "create their own textual representations and… push back against dominant perspectives" (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). Here, it seems that Diamond is attempting to capture this same sort of magic Seraphina sees herself as possessing. Importantly, Diamond highlights that Seraphina is "*like* Cinderella/ but in her own/ magical world." She is spotlighting that Seraphina is princess-like, but still uniquely herself, still the owner of her own brand of magic. This is monumental in the face of such an absence of literature that allows girls to see themselves as princesses (Thomas, forthcoming), as occupants of worlds of stars and glitter. While Diamond's poem positions Seraphina as a princess, she does not attempt to erase her uniqueness or fit her exactly into the box of Eurocentric Disney images of princesses. This is an act of resistance against the ways that Black girls are so commonly portrayed within the confines of the controlling images that Patricia Hill Collins (2000) describes. This is a truly celebratory moment of Black girlhood.

It seems that through the act of story telling and listening, the girls found connections as well as differences. Importantly, the storytelling and listening were not passive acts, or what Bambara (1983) would refer to as mere "bold glimpses" at one another. Instead, their storytelling and listening were followed by critical celebratory action. The act of story sharing and the subsequent literary celebrations

in which they partook opened up opportunities for them to build affective and

political bonds that prevented them from imposing hegemonic viewpoints on one

another. Further, the act of writing about one another in this framing of beauty,

magic, and princess imagery was an opportunity for girls to rebel against

stereotypical and negative images about Black girls, not just through their oral story

sharing, but through their poetry. Rather than, in Seraphina's case, taking on the

arrogant eyes of school, or in Diamond's case, the arrogant eyes that might cast

Seraphina as a "goody goody," they see each other with love, with magic, as

connected and simultaneously different.

Importantly, Seraphina and Diamond came to co-create multiple texts

together as the club went on. For instance, they co-wrote a play together about

racism in schools, as will be elaborated upon in Chapter 6. They also created a video

together that explored their experiences as Black girls in school. In creating both of

these texts, they were able to come together through their shared experiences and

further forge their relationship and understandings of one another and continually

engage in the establishment of their girl of color politics.

Shifting Perceptions through Communal Knowledge Building

The interviews that the girls gave one another gave forth opportunities for

girls to shift their perceptions by building knowledge communally. This replicated

what Grace Lee Boggs (1998; brown, 2017) refers to as a humanistic dialectic,

where in people communally build knowledge toward resistance as they learn from

one another and adjust their assumptions. This was demonstrated in the ways that

girls shared information about their identities. In one group interview, Seraphina

asked Ash about her identity as a "minority" in her school. The conversation started:

> **Seraphina**: Ok, how does it feel to be a minority in your, um, school?
> **Ash**: I low key feel like I'm special. Because when I'm around my friends, like,
> … I have Chinese friends and they talk with their Chinese friends, Vietnamese
> friends talk with their Vietnamese friends, and there's no, like, Indonesians,
> so I low key feel special cuz I'm the only one and there's only like a rarity.…
> Sometimes I feel like, sometimes I feel special, but other times I'm like, damn,
> I wish I had an Indonesian friend I can talk Indo to. (Transcript, May 9, 2016)

In Ash's response, the other girls, none who shared Ash's ethnic identity, were

offered glimpses into an understanding of the dynamism of Asian American identity,

an identity that often is equated with an impenetrable foreignness and

simultaneously flattened into a monolith (Lowe, 1996; Lee, 2005). Here, Ash cites a

few of the hundreds identities that come under the "Asian" label—Chinese,

Vietnamese, and Indonesian. She specifically highlights the "rarity" of the

Indonesian identity, and how while this provides her with a feeling of being

"special" it also isolates her as she feels somewhat othered. This came up at multiple

points in the club, when Ash discussed how her teachers and fellow students would

assume that she is Vietnamese, and even offer her documents translated in

Vietnamese, an act that both erased her identity as Indonesian and reified the notion

of foreignness, assuming that she would need a translated document.

The girls continued their conversation, asking Ash to share with them her

language.

> **Ciara**: Well, like, can you speak a little bit?
> **Ash**: Sure, what do you want me to say?
> **Ciara**: Um, welcome to the library?
> **Ash**: I forgot what library is now. (speaks Indo) selamat datang ka… How do
> you say library?
> **Grace**: How bout book room, er…something like that

      Ash: (speaks Indo) ruang buku

      Diamond: What do you, When you go home, do you always speak your
      language, or do you can speak English...

      Ash: Um, with my sister, we speak, we speak in English, with my brother, too.
      I speak Indo with my parents. (Transcript, May 9, 2016)

Here, Ash is sharing with the girls her linguistic repertoire. This experience of

sharing nondominant language in an academic space, I believe, is an important one,

as, according to Garcia, Ibarra Johnson, and Seltzer (2017), the presence of

multilingualism in academic spaces helps challenge rigid language hierarchies that

often frame bilingual students as at a deficient. Here, Ash is cast as knowing, as

multiliterate, and as a teacher because she speaks Indonesian. This strikes

opposition to the ways she might otherwise be cast by language hierarchies that

might have listeners interpret her accented English a sign of defect.

      In this final excerpt of the discussion, the girls' raciolinguistic ideologies

(Flores & Rosa, 2015) were challenged as they discussed the issues of language and

ethnicity.

      Diamond: Do you... How do you talk when you're... It's funny when y'all, like
      when Chinese people talk in..

      Seraphina: She's...

      Someone: She's not Chinese

      Diamond: Well, what are you?

      Seraphina: She's Indonesian.

      Ash: Indonesian.

Here, the girls partake in an examination of the racist, nationalistic ideologies that

exist against Asian Americans. These are raciolinguistic ideologies which "conflate

certain racialized bodies with linguistic deficiency unrelated to any objective

linguistic practice" (Flores & Rosa, 2015, p. 150). As Diamond questions Ash about

her language, she both automatically assumes Ash speaks Chinese, a conflation often

made about Asian Americans, and, further, equates her language as being "funny."

Both the flattening of Asian identity into "Chinese" and the association of Asian

languages as "funny" demonstrate the way that Ash and other Asian Americans are

racialized as foreign and unfamiliar through their linguistic practices. This anecdote

is meant to highlight the ways that white supremacy has constructed nationalistic

conversations and to show that, at times, these discourses are picked up by those

exposed to them, even when they are intentionally working toward anti-racism.[9]

Through this conversation, we can see that girls were not necessarily

protected from racist ideologies in this space, which might be considered "safer"

than some of the other spaces they traverse. I hesitate to call it an entirely "safe"

space, as the girls' ideologies, which in certain ways and at certain times, were

infused with racist, sexist, homophobic, ablest discourse, did not disappear at the

door. This is most certainly not to label Diamond as "racist", for, as an African

American girl, I do not believe that she can, in fact, be labeled racist if issues of

power are taken into account in a definition of racism—she does not have power

over Ash, thus cannot be racist toward her. However, her language does represent

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[9] This story is not meant to equate negative language ideologies the Asian girls in
the group faced with the anti-Blackness. There are different ways that racism
manifested itself across the girls' different identities, and it was important that these
differences are not ignored. Diamond and Seraphina, for instance, pointed out at in
one conversation that they have noted a preference for Asian students in their
school (Video Artifact, April 12, 2016). Further, in conversations about discipline
with the girls, it is evident that girls like Diamond and Ciara were more frequently
disciplined, suspended and given detentions, while the Asian girls in the group
rarely reported that they experienced similar punishments. This aligns with findings
by Connie Wun (2016), who unearthed the ways that school discipline is specifically
anti-Black and that this has dire consequences for Black girls, who are over
represented in disciplinary cases in schools. These topics will be further
investigated later in this chapter.

racist ideologies that have been produced by exposure to white supremacy. In the words of Lugones, her view of Ash as foreign and as sounding "funny" is a product of the "arrogant perception" of white supremacy. It is with the help of both Ash, the girl in the center of the conversation and most directly effected by anti-Asian discussion, and Seraphina, who is more aware of the ways that anti-Asian sentiments play out, that Diamond is able to move toward a more accurate understanding of Ash's identity. These more accurate understandings are, indeed, exemplifications of "loving" perceptions, as opposed to the arrogant perception—white supremacist visions that cast Asian languages as both monolithic and "funny," foreign and undesirable. With her efforts to move toward loving perception, she can cast aside these arrogant perceptions and take on a more accurate understanding of language diversity, seeing it and normalized and even related to her own experience.

I also did not assume that the girls could ever completely understand one another's experiences, especially when differences were vast. The work that was done, though, did rely on co-constructing better understandings of difference. It helped to acknowledge the pluralities of experiences that the girls carried with them and how the way that they viewed one another was sometimes tinged with assumptions that, as Maria Lugones (1987) would say, the "arrogant eyes" of living in a white heteropatriarchal world gives us. It offered an opportunity to re-see one another, to "'world'-travel."

This specific experience did not carry with it a polished end product; no five-paragraph essay on language ideologies or anything of that sort were written to provide evidence of the girls' understanding of these concepts. However, what

happened was that the girls composed a community that was better able to enact solidarity with one another when they entered worlds that too often inflicted violence upon them. About six months after this initial conversation happened, Diamond told me a story about how one of her unnormal sisters, Emily, who identifies as part Vietnamese, was being teased by other students for speaking Vietnamese on the phone with her mother. Diamond stood up and said to them, "Stop. If someone made fun of you, your language, would you get mad? They just talking. Like a regular person" (Transcript, December 12, 2016). This story demonstrates how the girls began to understand that their sisters experienced the effects of a white heteropatriarchal world and how they might be more accountable to one another to both check their own biases and to stand up for one another when their sisters most needed it. She shifts from labeling an Asian language—which in this case, she was able to identify as Vietnamese, as opposed to "Chinese"—from "funny" to "regular," indicating the way she is starting to shed raciolinguistic ideologies that equate speakers of foreign languages, and in particular Asian languages, as foreign. What's more, she is inviting others to empathize with Emily, inviting them to imagine what it'd be like for them to experience the language shaming they are inflicting on her now, simply for speaking her home language. Diamond is taking on a sisterly role, where she is advocating for Emily when she is vulnerable. This demonstrates the ways that world traveling might work toward anti-oppressive ends. As girls see one another more clearly and understand the ways they, themselves, are experiencing racism or other oppressions, they develop

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sisterly bonds, which make it impossible to stand idly by as their sisters experience oppressive or violent acts.

Self-Reflexivity & Adjusting Arrogant Perceptions Through Story Telling

It cannot go unsaid that the shifting of arrogant perception toward loving perception necessitates self-reflexivity, which can be a painful process. It necessitates we see our mistakes and rectify them. As previously discussed, all of us carry misunderstandings of each others' experiences. We all are subject to learning from a white heteropatriarchal society that convinces us of untruths about ourselves and about each other. In order to get closer to real solidarity, we must be willing to understand when we are complicit with white supremacist and sexist ideologies that have clouded our loving perception, that have given rise to arrogant perceptions.

Playwriting seemed a genre rife with opportunities for girls to collaboratively process their experiences with and express their growing understandings of various intersecting oppressions. As discussed by Maisha Winn (2011), play writing and performance can provide a space for girls to heal as they engage in critical community writing practices. In her own work, she discusses how writing itself was a way for incarcerated girls to gain power over the issues they confront, as it gives them time and space to work through those issues as they wrote and then performed plays. What's more, the performative aspect of plays gave girls an opportunity to "reintroduce themselves to the world on their own terms" (Winn, 2012, p. 134).

The Unnormal Sisterhood read plays that other students had written about

their own critiques of schooling in Gerald Campano's (2007) fifth grade classroom.

After processing how Campano's students had used playwriting to analyze their

own experiences, Ciara worked through some of her own feelings about the ways

that girls are labeled sexually promiscuous while the perpetrators of sexual

harassment generally go unscathed. Ciara wrote a play inspired by real life events.

In it, two girls interact with boys at their school who end up grabbing the girls'

behinds. While the narrator protests, her friend simply lets it happen. The narrator

ends with a soliloquy:

> Does she know that is sexual harassment? Does she like it? Maybe she is a
> little slut. That's my friend, I should have never said that. But wait, do boys
> know that it's not right? I shouldn't be blaming this on my friend. I should be
> blaming it on the boys. (Artifact, May 4, 2016)

In her writing, Ciara processes her feelings about sexual promiscuity and reflect on

her own move toward more loving perceptions across differences between girls of

color. It is through her writing that we see these shifts occur as Ciara stories her

experiences with sexual harassment. Here we see Ciara narrate the process of

shifting perceptions. Initially, she labels her friend being sexually promiscuous, and

further denigrates her by using the sexist term "slut." But she pauses and shifts,

realizing that this is her friend—her sister—another girl who has lived through the

same sort of incidents as she has herself. At this point, she shifts to the question "Do

boys know that it's not right?" With this question she correctly understands that her

friend should not be punished for choosing not to speak up, as silence in these

situations can often be a protective measure. She narrates her realization that she

should be blaming the boys who are doing the criminal act, who are perpetuating sexist behavior, not being victimized by it, as her friend is.

Her questioning implies that she is not even sure if boys understand it is incorrect, signaling the issue with rape culture—that it is insidious and often unrecognized, and that, as a society, we are not teaching our boys to treat women and girls with love and dignity. These problems transcend individual acts of sexual aggression. Boys will not learn to treat women and girls with their due respect if they are not taught that these acts are wrong, if they are not held accountable for their actions. When girls of color shift their gaze, as Ciara has, away from blaming each other, shaming each other for sexist behavior, toward holding boys accountable for shifting their behavior and perceptions of women, this is when we move forward.

It seems that Ciara was able to prepare herself through playwriting to critique sexist assignments of promiscuity onto other girls. Further, she was able to analyze her own thought processes and realize that it was unjust for her to label another girl as promiscuous without processing the roots of this sort of shaming. Like Winn's (2012) students, playwriting serves Ciara as a pathway toward taking control over a situation by providing an opportunity to work through her issues through the process of writing and the subsequent performance of her narrative. In this case, Ciara used it as a way to understand how she might redirect her negative perceptions away from other girls, other girls who perhaps act in the world differently than herself, reserving and even reevaluating her judgments in order to

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be a better ally to them against various manifestations of sexist ideologies, some of which she experiences herself, and some of which she does not.

Developing Communal Activist Identities

The work the girls did to develop their understandings of one another's differences and their connectedness were important steps in developing activist identities. Some of the girls came to the club already having burgeoning senses of themselves as activists. For instance, on Ash's first day of the club, we took some time to get acquainted, and each girl introduced themselves to Ash. When Seraphina introduced herself, she pointed out to Ash, "You already know me," and then added, "but I am interested in gender and racial equality." When she said that Ash straightened up in her seat and smiled, clapping and saying a quiet, "yay!" I, too, joined in with the clapping and Kathleen said, "Oh me too! I didn't say that, but I am too." The work of the club, though, was to help push those understandings deeper as the girls began to understand themselves not simply as activists in isolation, but within their Unnormal Sisterhood (Fieldnotes, February 2, 2016). And, indeed, the work of "world" traveling and perceiving one another with loving perception was at the root of building more sophisticated engagements with activism.

In the work we engaged, I tried to encourage the sort of "dialectical humanism" that Grace Lee Boggs (1998), and adrienne maree brown (2017) refer to. Part of this work, as discussed by Boggs and brown, is that through communal sharing of knowledge, of stories, of strategies, we can continually move toward more developed conceptions of our politics and our paths toward engaging in activist work. Thus, in the Unnormal Sisterhood, I attempted to create conditions for

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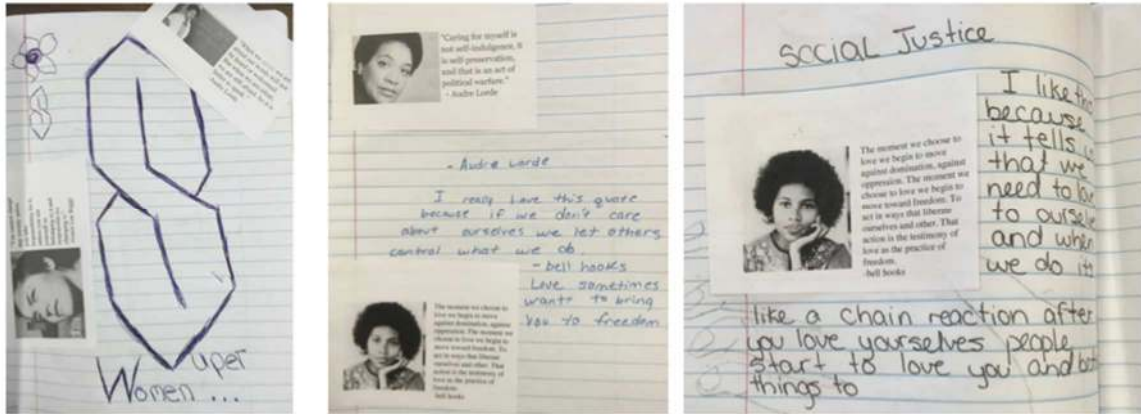
Figure 5.4. Girls' Jottings and Responses to Activist Women's Quotes.

learning that fostered the girls' burgeoning individual and collective activist

identities.

One successful activity to engage girls in activist discourses was a reading of

and response to a series of quotations by women of color activists who have helped

shape my own understanding of activism. I brought in quotes from women of color

activists and asked the girls to respond to them in their notebooks (Figure 5.4). The

quotes were printed on slips of paper with accompanying images of the women

quoted. The goal of this activity was to bring in a plurality voices of women who

historically and contemporarily were involved in activist movements and allow the

girls to connect and extend these ideas (See Appendix D).

The girls read quotes by Audre Lorde, Grace Lee Boggs, bell hooks, Melissa

Harris-Perry, June Jordan, Yuri Kochiyama, and Sandra Cisneros. I included pictures

of the women on the cards, so the girls could see images of women who looked more

like them than perhaps the authors of readings they did in their formal schooling.

This proved important as the girls shuffle through the cards, and lifted them to one

another's faces, at moments, saying, "She looks like you!" Seraphina did call out this

comparison as "racist" as Giselle held a picture of a young Grace Lee Boggs next to Halsey's face. However, I do think that the ability to see women who looked more like them, who had dark eyes and features, Afros and braids, hooded eye lids, and so on, was significant for the girls.

Through this activity, the girls engaged with one another and the texts in order to continue on their path towards understanding what an activist identity could be. The girls, then, entered our unit on social activism supplied with a variety of perspectives to serve as building blocks for the work that followed. Through conversations, writing, and interactions with texts, the girls continually worked toward the further development of political and activist identities, both as a group and as individuals.

"I didn't know that Asians cared about Blacks": Inquiry into Black-Asian

Coalition

Part of the movement toward political and activist identities was coming to an understanding of solidarity that took into account both their connections and differences across their intersecting identities. In the context of a group with Black and Asian girls, this meant unpacking, especially, the ways that anti-Blackness hold a specific urgency in the United States. The girls, over the course of their engagement with the Unnormal Sisterhood, began to develop deeper understandings of how to ally with one another with some of the concepts beginning to be unpacked. It was clear that while the girls were coming to politically align themselves with one another through the course of the club, there were often

tensions and curiosities about the ways difference played out in their

understandings of each other and the world.

Across the data, race was the most frequently discussed identity category

and it was also the category in which the girls most obviously shared differences.

Through an intersectional lens, we understand that their other identity categories

such as gender and class were impacted by these differences, often creating fissures

in clear understandings of one another. For instance, the conversation about Asian-

Black allyship came up repeatedly across the course of the club. The first time it

explicitly came up was when Halsey questioned, "Why are there so many things like

Black Lives Matter and groups like that, but there aren't things for Asian people?"

(Fieldnotes, March 8, 2016). Halsey's comment alludes to her desire to better

understand the ways that anti-Black and anti-Asian racism manifest themselves, and

additionally, how different communities have enacted resistance. This conjures

ideas of how and why many immigrant populations have chosen to assimilate to

Eurocentric culture and how the ability to assimilate is related to anti-Blackness

(Nopper, 2011).

During another session, where just Seraphina, Diamond, and myself were

present, Seraphina commented while recording a video about her experiences as a

Black girl in schools that, "it seems that [the teacher] has a favoritism towards the…

um, Asian Americans… that's just how I feel… I think because she doesn't really

seem to like the African Americans" (Transcript, February 10, 2016). Seraphina's

comments illustrate her understanding that her experiences as a Black girl are

indeed different than those of Asian girls. Her lived experiences are uncovering the

ways that she is impacted by anti-Black racism in her school. Both Seraphina's and

Halsey's comments point to the girls' understandings of how their experiences are

different across race, a notion that is necessary to grasp in the building of solidarity

(Bambara, 1983; Lorde, 2007; Moraga, 1983).

I felt, as a product of these conversations, that it would be important to

facilitate an inquiry around issues of difference, solidarity, and anti-Blackness to

open girls up to understanding some of the issues of Black-Asian allyship in the

United States. This inquiry traversed both the unit on their relationships and the

unit on social action. I wanted to help the girls use their epistemic privilege, the

knowledge arising from their experiences (Campano, 2007; Mohanty, 2000; Moya,

2000) as a basis for this conversation, trusting that their intuitions around some of

these issues had import. Further I hoped to assist in cultivating their understanding

that by sharing their personal experiences they might move toward building more

accurate understandings and more thorough theorizations of these issues as they

learned from one another (Boggs, 1998; brown, 2017).

However, I realized that it was necessary to also bring in additional

perspectives and stories that they might not have exposure to in school. By bringing

in additional voices into the conversation, perhaps they might put a name to and

context around some of their intuitions, helping them to broaden their theories and

understandings. This would address what Miranda Fricker (2007) considers

"structural hermeneutical injustice," which she describes as "the injustice of having

some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective

understanding owning to a structure identity prejudice in the collective

hermeneutic resource" (p.155). In other words, when a person is denied the opportunity to pool their knowledge with that of others who may share their experiences, this can prohibit them from being able to articulate their experiences and, in some cases, understand them. It is necessary, then, to introduce theories and stories that provide historical, political, and structural context for some of the girls' experiences in order to expand their understandings and critiques against said injustices. Thus, it seemed significant to create conditions for listening about issues of race and racism that girls experienced themselves, as well as offering them further testimonials and theories that they likely did not have exposure to because of the testimonial injustice served by schools, but that might contribute to the deepening of their understandings of anti-Blackness and anti-Asian racism that might help support movement toward allyship. Through this inquiry, I wanted simultaneously to put emphasis on the girls' individual knowledge, to put that knowledge into play with the collective knowledge and differing experiences within the group, and to provide the girls with new visions denied to them by formal curriculum in schools.

To build off of the conversations the girls had already started and to provide a missing perspective, I invited the girls to read a blog post by my dear friend, Niki Magtoto (2015) and later interview her about the piece via Skype. The blog post, titled, "Why Grace Lee Boggs, Yuri Kochiyama, and Richard Aoki have given me #SquadGoals," addressed what it meant for Niki, as an Asian presenting mixed race person with Filipina, Mexican, and Black heritage, to engage in allyship and how we might enact what she calls a "black/brown/yellow/mocha/ caramel/buttermilk love

for one another" as we seek to create a shared future. She goes on to explore the scarcity of Asian allies to the black community, but lands on inspiration from Grace Lee Boggs, Yuri Kochiyama, and Richard Ayoki, three prominent Asian American activists who, throughout their careers, devoted themselves to fighting anti-Blackness.

After reading this piece and discussing it with Niki, the girls wrote reflections in their notebooks. Seraphina wrote, "I never know that Asians even cared for blacks" (Artifact, April 12, 2016). Ciara wrote, "I didn't know that Asians cared about Blacks. I like how she said that those people were #squadgoals. I guess I get building community is to the collective as spiritual practice is to the individual. End the war on Black people" (Artifact, April 12, 2016). Emily wrote "At first I didn't know how much Asian people cared about to have equality with Black people and to stop the war against Black people" (Artifact, April 12, 2016). This is striking especially in the context of their neighborhood and school, whose two largest populations are Black and Asian. Their writing points to the reality that many of the Black girls faced, that the existence of anti-Black racism is prevalent amongst many Asian American communities, despite the many ways that many Asian Americans, particularly those of East Asian descent, have benefited from the civil rights battle fought largely by Black Americans in ways that Black Americans, themselves, have not (Nopper, 2011).

This also highlights what might be considered an unevenness in anti-Blackness amongst Asian communities and anti-Asian sentiments amongst Black communities, an idea explored by Jared Sexton (2010). In these conversations, it is

necessary to understand that while both anti-Blackness amongst Asian communities and anti-Asian sentiments amongst Black communities may exist, the impact of anti-Blackness, in most cases, outweighs the impact of anti-Asian racism, and the benefits Asian American communities might heed from anti-Blackness most commonly are greater than the benefits reaped from anti-Asian racism by Black Americans. This is not to deny that some Asian communities, particularly some Southeast Asian communities, face the same sorts of criminalization and systemic violences that Black communities do or to deny the legacies of imperialism that have shaped Asian Diasporas. It is necessary to recognize that Asian American experiences are not monolithic and, dependent on context, many Asian Americans face sever consequences of the intersections of racism, nationalism, and classism (Lee, 2009). However, these manifestations of anti-Asianness do not seem to benefit the Black community in the same ways that too many Asian communities have benefitted off of anti-Blackness and the civil rights activism lead by Black leaders. The fact that both Black and Asian girls in the group noted a lack of caring for Black Americans by Asian Americans sheds light on the ways that this unevenness manifests itself, in creating neighborhoods where it seems, as implied by the girls' perspectives, that Asian Americans are fighting for themselves, not for the totality of the neighborhood. It invites the imagination of what could be occurring in these mixed race communities of minoritized people: a joined fight against white supremacy, which would benefit both communities as well as other minoritized communities with whom they share space and resources.

This vision of coalition against white supremacy is partially addressed by a comment Seraphina made in reference to Niki's writing. She stated that she believed that stereotypes about Asian Americans and African Americans were created because America didn't want them to come together because they'd be too powerful (Fieldnotes, April 12, 2016). These stirrings of understanding about what it would mean to be allies to one another across their racial differences were important and collectively built as the girls were able to engage in conversations directly about solidarity, reading and hearing testimonials from others who have been long engaged in the work of allyship, including Niki and myself.

Understanding "Other Racism": Coming to Newer Notions of Solidarity

Importantly, it seemed as though the girls were cultivating notions of solidarity. These notions, perhaps, were not fully formed, but they were in process and beginning to unearth some connections. It seems that the Unnormal Sisterhood meetings were a space where the girls were able to explore these ideas around solidarity and difference. This was reflected by Halsey. In the months after the end of the Unnormal Sisterhood, I asked Halsey what her favorite thing about being an Asian girl was. She responded:

> Well, my favorite things about being an Asian girl is that I get to understand other racism. . . . I get to understand what other races go through, like such as discrimination and how it feels being an outsider, I know that I can help comfort people because I've been through the same things. And, I guess it is really empowering to me knowing that I can help the world. (Transcript, April 25, 2017)

Although she is still working on comprehending, in its full complexity, how racisms manifest differently across identities, Halsey, here, demonstrates that she understands that she has marginalized knowledge that can be used toward change.

She shows the ways that she hopes to use that marginalized knowledge to work in solidarity with others who experience "other racisms," which are simultaneously connected and different.

Later, upon reviewing this data, I emailed Halsey and asked her what she meant by "other racisms." She replied:

> What I meant by other racism is what other races go through such as Hispanics, immigrants, the black community. I obviously don't [have] the same exact discrimination as the others such as police brutality, or being called thugs or murders (I blame trump) for moving to another country. As being a middle-class Asian American girl, I am thankful that I don't experience such horrible things as bad as other races, but I think it's very important to let others know that racism against Asians exists and it's just as serious compared to racism against the black,Muslim,Hispanics [sic] communities. (Personal communication, December 13, 2016)

There is still some teasing out to do about issues of inequity and differences.

However, here, Halsey is acknowledging that the racism she faces is, in fact, different from that of others and that it isn't "as bad as other races." She acknowledges that she is privileged in that her intersecting identities line up in a way that protects her from some of the more violent oppressions that others face. But she still emphasizes that anti-Asian racism exists and needs to be countered just as other manifestations of racisms. I think these two quotes show that Halsey is starting to unpack her role as an ally, although she does have some ways to go to understand anti-Black racism in Asian communities. What is encouraging, though, is that she is showing an understanding—an understanding underscored by feminists of color like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Cherrie Moraga, Patricia Hill Collins, and Gloria Anzaldúa, that as someone who experiences racism and sexism, she has unique power to combat what she is calling "other racisms." She is staring to theorize how her experience-based

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knowledge gives her power to fight against oppression, both violences she has

experienced herself, and those she has not. Further, this demonstrates how

experiencing oppression herself seems to open her to empathizing with other

marginalized people, even if their oppressions do not look exactly the same. This is a

truly compassionate stance that is replicated by other community activists in

service of their intersectional activist work.

This sort of thinking was replicated by Ash, another Asian girl who was also

reaching toward understandings of her own experiences with racism and anti-

Blackness. She wrote at one point,

> Racism is the oppression of a certain group of people. Black, White, Asian,
> Hispanic. As an Asian girl living in America, I, of course, have experienced
> racism but to think about it, everyone has.
> I was never aware of these issues: social justice issues. However coming here,
> I have become aware and sensitive about it. So much that my friend says that
> I'm too easily offended by these racist slurs/jokes, and it made me feel that
> way when I shouldn't. (Personal Communication, January 20, 2017)

Here, she is, on the one hand, expressing that she is well aware of the multitude of

ways that racism manifests itself and breadth of ways people experience racism. She

expresses her desire to confront these issues and the difficulties of standing up

against issues of racism when others so frequently jump to assigning her with labels,

rather than fixing racist behavior itself. This echoes the sentiments that Sarah

Ahmed (2017b) expresses, as she discusses the feminist and anti-racist act of

naming racism and sexism. Ahmed claims, "Even to describe something as sexist and

racist here and now can get you into trouble. You point to structures; they say it is in

your head. What you describe as material is dismissed as mental" (p. 6). As Ash

attempts to find her footing as an anti-racist feminist, she knows she will be labeled

as too sensitive, and that she will have to resist this labeling.

It is important to note, though, that in Ash's writing, she does take on some

colorblind ideologies, as she explains she believes everyone has experienced racism.

I emailed her about this later, asking her to tease out what she meant with this and if

her ideas had changed. She wrote back to me, saying:

> I used to think that everyone has experienced racism, including white folks. There are often times where white folks were "oppressed" because they would try so hard to make us feel that their experiences are equal to those who are people of color. But it is not. White privilege exists, reverse racism does not. There is a difference between prejudice and racism…. (Personal Communication, January 20, 2017)

She shows she has been engaged in these ideas for some while, living a life

dedicated to understanding more deeply the concepts of race and racism. She is

showing that she is, at least in part, resisting the temptation to take the easy road

out, to put weight on the criticisms of those who call her out for "sensitivity" as she

seeks to both learn and act against oppression. She went on in her email to explain

how she is starting to understand the differences between her own experiences with

oppression and the ways that others, in particular Black girls, might experience it:

> Often the racism I experienced are connected to the way I look and where my ancestors came from. Indonesia is a tropical country, naturally native Indonesians are darker complexion than I am. My grandparents came from China, so my complexion is paler than most. Because of this, I have been called slurs like "chink" and "chicken noodle" even stereotypes when I go to work, American customers come up to me and try to greet me in Chinese. I understand I have Chinese in my blood, but I am Indonesian. I was born in Indonesia and I speak Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian). I feel offended when they assume I'm full on Chinese and speak to me that way. And obviously the way I experienced it and the way African Americans, especially those who have been in the U.S for generations, experienced it is different. They may have been more oppressed than I am. They are seen as dangerous stereotypes than I am. If I walk into a store, they would not expect a small,

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glasses wearing Asian girl would steal compare to if it was an African American girl….(Personal Communication, January 20, 2017)

Here, Ash points to the ways that her experiences with racism are different than those of Black girls. She discusses that her experiences with racism are mostly around stereotypes and flattening of her identity into a monolithic idea of what Asian Americans are. She also sights the privileges she has as a product her Asian identity that protect her from criminalization that Black girls might experience. She closed with some thoughts about the importance of standing up against racism.

> Of course it's important to call out racism and oppression. People need to learn and be educated. The only hard thing is that people would tell you tt you're too sensitive and can't take a joke, or that I need to "get out of my feelings" instead of apologizing like a respectful person. I try to call it out when it is against others especially when my significant other is a different race than me. I do mostly call it out when it is directed towards me because it seems easier for me to not care what they say because I would a certain way about it. I do try my hardest to call out when it happens to others as well. (Personal Communication, January 20, 2017)

In these words, we can see that Ash is continuing to process her role as an ally, explaining the difficulties she is encountering in fully engaging this role. She indicates that she feels more empowered to call out racism that affects her own identity because she will get less worked up about it. When it comes to calling out racism against others, it is more emotional for her—she "feels a certain way about it." Like Halsey, she is in the process of finding her footing as an ally to other people of color. She does sight her relationship with her "significant other," a Black boy, as a motivating factor for her standing up against anti-Blackness. However, she does not seem, completely prepared to take on the role as advocate for anti-Black racism.

In our email exchange, I asked Ash how her understandings of racism were expanding, as she developed her own intersectional feminist identity. She explained

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that in addition to conversation with her multiracial group of friends, "the girls at the club are so very inquisitive and smart, they definitely taught me some of these things" (Personal Communication, January 20, 2017). This reflects the ways that often times the conversations that the girls had within the Unnormal Sisterhood were replicative of those they had with one another. I strove to build curriculum in a way that built on the intellectual work that exists in friendly relationships, where girls discuss matters of racism and sexism, where they often do so much of their learning. This relational work helped develop the ways that girls were coming to understandings of their roles as allies to one another and how they came to identify their desire to enact solidarity with one another.

There is certainly more work to do be done with these ideas with girls like Halsey and Ash who are beginning to understand that there exist differences in how one experiences white supremacy and that much of white supremacy manifests itself most clearly in anti-Blackness. As many have theorized, Asian Americans have used anti-Blackness to their advantage, have profited of the civil rights work done by Black Americans, while, themselves, reinstituting anti-Black racism (Nopper, 2011). Conversations about how and why these sentiments exist so strongly with so many Asian communities is necessary if we are to establish solidarity across racial boundaries.

"To Support One Another Even if You Aren't the Same Culture, Race, or Gender"

Seraphina also showed evidence of her evolving understandings of solidarity through the club. In a culminating interview, she discussed her burgeoning ideas

about working with one another toward justice. Her thoughts about it are still in

formation and do take on a somewhat negative tilt at some points.

> **G**: Ok, is there anything that you have learned through this club.
> **S**: hmmm... I learned about social activism and how we should try to be more involved about, like, don't you know how we did something about how the Chinese people are support Black lives matter. To support one another even if you aren't the same culture, race, or gender...
> **G**: Why do you think that is important?
> **S**: I don't know.
> **G**: Not sure?
> **S**: Not sure yet. Not sure yet. Probably because everybody is equal to me. And if you are not supporting another person, then it's kind of like you are not supporting yourself. (May 24, 2016)

Seraphina is demonstrating that she is processing what it means to engage in social

activism that is intersectional and that goes beyond ones self interest. Her words

seem to echo Audre Lorde's (2007) words, "I am not free while any woman is

unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. And I am not free as

long as one person of Color remains chained. Nor is any one of you" (pp. 132-133)

and Fanny Lou Hamer (2011) who said, "Nobody's free until everybody's free" (p.

136). Seraphina is showing that her humanity is connected to the humanity of

others. She claims to see everyone as equal to her, as equally affected by the

workings of the world. So, she expresses, to support herself, she must support

others. I went on to ask her about what this means for how she operates in the

world.

> **G**: So, do you feel like… cuz a lot of what we talked about is this social activism and, um, things that are unfair in the world and how we are dealing with them. Do you think you can change some of those unfair things in the world?
> **S**: In my dream, yeah, but in reality, not so much.
> **G**: Can you say more about that?
> **S**: Because, um, you are a girl first of all. Nobody. They are not really going to care about what you have to say, um, and also, because, um, if you're a

minority, they are going to think you are illiterate, you don't know what you are talking about, sit down and be quiet. (May 24, 2016)

Seraphina shows skepticism about the power of activism. She explains that activism might be effective "in [her] dream, yeah, but in reality, not so much." When she explains her skepticism, she explains it in the context of the oppressions she knows to exist from personal experiences arising from her intersectional identity as a Black girl. She addresses the ways that stereotypes will be wielded against her, attempting to silence her. I tried to probe into this concept a bit, unwilling to let her sit on this idea that she is powerless in the face of the arrogant perceptions of racist heteropatriarchy.

> **G**: Hmm... Do you think there are ways to fight through that? Like do you think that...
> **S**: Prove them wrong.
> **G**: Yeah. Yeah, and what are you going to do to prove them wrong?
> **S**: Do better than them.
> **G**: mmhmm
> **S**: I guess... Be better than them
> **G**: Keep fighting, right?
> **S**: Yeah.
> **G**: Yeah. And sometimes I think, like, something you said about coming together, that can often be one route to that. Right? Like, if we all work together, we will become a stronger force.
> **S**: Yeah.
> **G**: if we stay separate, then, you know, we can do some stuff, but, I think we could do more together... (May 24, 2016)

Seraphina acknowledges here that she is not entirely hopeless and that she understands she can fight through stereotypes to accomplish her ends. This transcript also demonstrates the way that I attempted to confront the ways that she was framing her ideas about activism. I wanted to tie her confidence in confronting stereotypes back to my original line of questioning. I knew Seraphina was aware that many of her career and academic goals would be reached as she engaged in a

fight she put forth against stereotypes, but I was not positive she was making this connection to her role as an activist, as indicated by her doubts about her effectiveness as a change agent in this line of questioning, especially because, as noted in chapter four, Seraphina has a history of rejecting relationships.

Seraphina, Ash, and Halsey all demonstrate their in-process work towards understandings of solidarity and justice. There is a certain fluidity to their identities as activists, all of them adopting anti-racist stances, all realizing that the way they experience racism, at some level, is different than others and that that matters, and all understanding that there is a necessity to work with one another across those differences toward coalition. They are all demonstrating the ways that consciousness is non-linear (Guerra, 2004), the ways they slip in and out of their roles and identities as activists, as feminists, as anti-racists, as they learn from their experiences, as they reflect on their past experiences, as they continually come into contact with and adopt harmful ideologies, and as they experiment with the application newly learned concepts.

Enacting Coalition and Building Collective Activist Identities Through Fluid Texts

As the Unnormal Sisterhood investigated the issues that affected them both as individuals and as a group and came to understandings of both their differences and connectedness around these issues, they also began to develop a collective activist identity. This identity was one that relied on understanding their commitments to each other and to social justice causes that effected girls within the group as well as other marginalized people. Through the co-creation of various

texts, they were able to explore and express this communal identity and the ways they could leverage their community toward change. Far from static, this communal identity evolved over time. As they learned about each other and as they responded to the events in the world around them, different components of their communal identity came forward.

One place where this was particularly evident was on their shared Instagram account. The account fits into what Paris (2010) describes as "identity texts," or "youth-space texts inscribing ethnic, linguistic, local, and transnational affiliations on clothing, binders, backpacks, public spaces, rap lyrics, and electronic media. These texts [are] bound together by three factors: they indexed identities as members of particular groups, they were unsolicited literary acts not officially evaluated by school, and all youth [in the Unnormal Sisterhood] participated in creating them" (p.279). Paris further discusses the affordances of texts not bound by school evaluations, that although they do not have power within the dominant economy, they provide a way for students to claim and explore identities not often celebrated in schools in resistant and critical manners. In the case of the Unnormal Sisterhood, it was a space that allowed the girls to participate in establishing a group identity through the creation of fluid and every shifting text.

The Instagram account was created as a non-evaluative space for girls to communicate ideas related to our club between sessions. Pedagogically, I did not wish to use the account as a bridge to what dominant schooling practices might consider more "important" literacies, as is often done in classrooms using youth culture texts (Gutiérrez, 2008). Rather, the Instagram account was meant to

"emphasize the development of literacies in which everyday and institutional literacies are reframed into powerful literacies" (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 149). Part of the power girls acquired was in the agency they took to create texts at any point they chose, in a variety of forms. The girls and I would enter a variety of posts—selfies, memes, artwork, social justice related posts, and so on.

We took the act of engaging critical literacies in both the reading and production of the Instagram account. We, for instance, studied other Instagram accounts as texts, particularly those with social justice bets, in order to critically engage ideas about curating and consuming social media presences. We, for instance, did a close read of the Black Lives Matter Instagram account, discussing how the account was using the social media platform as a way to communicate social justice issues. We also studied some of the accounts of celebrity girls and young women of color who were using their platforms for social justice causes. For instance, we looked at posts by popular teen actresses, Zendaya, Yara Shahidi, and Rowan Blanchard, all young self-identified feminists of color who have consistently used their platforms to speak out about issues of social justice. These conversations allowed girls to take note of both the ways these girls were celebrating themselves, projecting positive imagery of girls of color into the world, as well as how they allowed their celebrity to be used to express important messages around issues of race, gender, and sexuality.

Over time, the girls added, took away, revised, and commented on posts in our account, providing an opportunity to continually compose how they chose to identify themselves as a group. One place this particularly showed up is in the ways
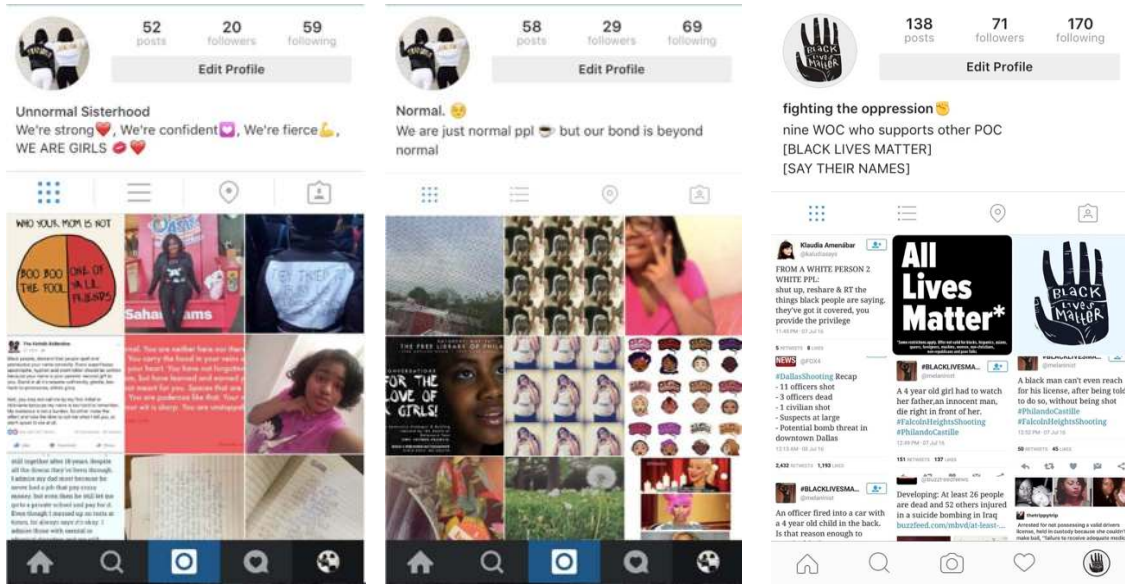
Figures 5.5, 5.6, 5.7. Screenshots of the Unnormal Sisterhood Instagram Account Over Time

that they identified themselves in the account's bio. In three different instances, they

described themselves as:

1. We're strong <3, We're confident <3, We're fierce (flexing emoji) WE ARE GIRLS <3
2. Normal. ☺
   We're just normal people (tea cup emoji) but our bond is beyond normal'
3. fighting the oppression (fist emoji)
   nine WOC who supports other POC
   [BLACK LIVES MATTER]
   [SAY THEIR NAMES]

Across these three bios, one aspect that remains steady is the focus on their identity

as a group, paying attention to their "bond." In the first bio (See Figure 5.5), they

expressed an identity that was particularly centered on their assets. They cited their

ferocity and strength followed by their gendered identity. This conveys a very "girl

power" type of message that does not include any mention of race. At this point,

many of the posts were selfies as well as some pieces of writing they created and I

prompted them to post. Additionally, I had posted some more social justice related

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posts, such as a picture of a person wearing a patch reading "They tried to bury us but they didn't know we were seeds" and a post about name pronunciation.

In the second bio (See Figure 5.6), the girls played with the naming "unnormal" and reidentified themselves as "normal," although also highlighting that their bond was "beyond normal." Here, it seemed they were playing with the idea that normality is constructed, that although they were unique, as indicated by the profile name, "unnormalsisterhood," their not individuality was not something that was, itself, unique. They seemed to emphasize that any group of girls of color is different, is unnormal, and thus, this challenges the notion of sameness across girls of color. The tea cup emoji is often used in internet speak to humorously indicate gossip or a sarcastic indication of minding ones own business. The use of the emoji here does seem to point to the activities of the club—a coming together to discuss the issues of the girls lives, often in the form of what some would reductively interpret as gossip, but what I see as a sharing of life stories as a means of protection and growth. Finally, the indication that their bond is beyond normal seems to point out that the girls have been working toward sharing in a way that defies convention. They are not simply spilling tea and gossiping, but forming bonds that are transformative and important, that transcend normality. This, as discussed earlier in this dissertation, points to the type of identity that Imani Perry (2004) discusses, in the naming of themselves as outsiders, as having knowledge, perhaps born of their sipping tea together, that will help them understand, critique, and change the world.

In the final bio (See Figure 5.7), which was written in the days following the police shootings of Philando Castille and Alton Sterling, there is specific attention to

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race and solidarity. Their identity as a collective of "nine WOC" now not only refers to their gender, but also to how they are racialized. Further, they politicize this identity as they mention their support for "other POC." They also flooded the account with posts conveying the message "BLACK LIVES MATTER." Their posts demonstrate that the girls maintain their identities as "women of color" but also point to the ways that they are concerned not only with their own well being, but that of "other POC," They show the way they had chosen to identify as committed to fighting anti-Black racism. Asian girls and Black girls shared posts. Ash, who is Indonesian American, put up the majority of the posts (See Figure 5.8) and was the girl who changed the bio description after the police shootings.

Some of the Black girls posted particularly emotional responses to the shootings. Diamond posted a striking video that showed her grief. The screen was black, but her voice rang clear. In a tone marked by sadness and fear and frustration and anger, she said:

> Like, when I made this video, I'm not trying to be racist or nothing, but it's like why these cops killin' innocent Black people. Like I just saw a video where a cop just started shooting a man because he wouldn't lay down. Like, he laid down and, and soon as he laid down, he's gonna start shooting. Like you have shoot? Like, why you shooting us? And then they wonder why not enough blacks or anything in this world, we have a chance to be doctors and stuff. Because you are killing us and it's not all your world. It's shared. So you gonna have to deal with it. But if I was a cop, I swear to god I would shoot every one of you whites. It's not fair, like y'all put us in slavery and now you wanna start killing us. Like, um, you should see what it feels like to lose your ancestors and stuff. But it's like, are you serious? Like, you are shooting us for what? Like Black Lives Really matter. So does whites. But you whites need to like stop. Like for real. (Transcript, July 6, 2016)

Her words reflect the pain she was feeling, the deep impact that seeing these two men's deaths caused her. The Unnormal Sisterhood Instagram account gave her the

Figure 5.8. Images Shared on the Unnormal Sisterhood Instagram Account

opportunity to share out that grief with her sisters, and by entering it into this

communal text, she built it into part of their communal activist identity. With this

account, the sisters demonstrated the ways they, together, could project their own

statements of grief, fear, and desire to be in solidarity and to establish a group

activist identity that was built on different experiences, but held together by its core

desires for freedom and justice for all minoritized people.

　　With the co-creation of the Instagram account, the girls took agency by

spontaneously developing their group and individual activist identities over time.

The malleability of the Instagram account represented the ways that the girls' group

and individual identities were far from static, but instead in a state of flux that they

could revisit, revise, and change as they learned from their worlds and each other.

Unlike capitalistic modes of writing, this text was not seen as ever finished, ever

publishable in a complete form. Rather, it was an emblem of their constant growth,

their continued efforts toward the establishment of coalition and political

ideologies. By removing emphasis from finished and published products, the girls

were able to see themselves in flux, allowing their political and affective

commitments to continually shift in response to their learning and to the context

that surrounded them.

Summary and Discussion

The story narrated in this chapter reveals a moving towards solidarity. I do

not claim that an ideal manifestation of solidarity was met. However, I believe that

the pedagogy of the Unnormal Sisterhood helped to facilitate the work that is

involved in solidarity building—"world"-traveling, self-reflexivity,

acknowledgement of difference, collective knowledge building, dialectic humanism,

and the shared understanding that this work is ongoing and in constant flux. The

girls moved through ongoing and simultaneous processes of sharing with one

another; of looking deeply at each other in order to better understand their

differences and their relationships through those differences; of working on the

sometimes painful work of self reflexivity; of analysis of systemic oppressions that

shape the girls' differences and what it means to work with one another in those

structures; of coming to realize their strengths as allies, born out of their own

experience based knowledge paired with ability to empathize; and of coming to

project activist messages into the world in support of those sharing identity

categories and those who do not.

Although the girls did much of this work on their own, building off of the

activist, feminist, anti-racist, poetic, and artistic identities they lay claim to from

before they established the Unnormal Sisterhood, it wasn't without pedagogy of the

Unnormal Sisterhood that our meetings became spaces for these identities to

progress and shift. By incorporating concepts of freedom and by creating

opportunities for the girls to engage with new ideas perhaps not available to them in their everyday school life, I created a critical intervention to promote ideas of solidarity and conditions for girls to develop commitments to one another in solidarity, as they engaged not only in literary experiences, but in the process of understanding one another through their differences and connectedness.

I, like bell hooks (2008), "want there to be a place in the world where people engage in one another's differences in a way that is redemptive, full of hope and possibility" (p. 153). This, in part, was what I was trying to accomplish with the creation of the Unnormal Sisterhood. In other words, I wanted to create a space in which the girls were not trying to overcome difference, to treat difference as something to be ameliorated. Rather, I wanted to create a space where girls would be invited to look deeply at one an others' differences in order to better understand how they are different, in what ways they might support one another through experiences they, as individuals might never experience and in what ways they need allies at times—that their sisters could be people to turn to when they needed support. What's more, it wasn't just about difference, but also about radical connectedness. It is about seeing, or at least beginning to see, that their oppressions were connected, that their freedom was connected, and that supporting one another was not a purely selfless act, but an integral part of moving toward their own liberation. The next chapter will explore the ways that the girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood engaged in co-constructed critiques of the systems, and in particular schooling, that they named as failing them.

CHAPTER SIX: "YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO DEPRIVE ME OF MY NAME":

COMPOSING CRITIQUES OF SCHOOL

Introduction

In her notebook, Halsey scrawled the following statement:

> It's a hard knock life for us. I really really really really hate school. So much that I wished it burns down to the ground. (Artifact, April 12, 2016)

This statement, along with many similarly toned declarations about school that arose during the Unnormal Sisterhood, brings to light the emotional reaction the girls had to schooling. Halsey's words certainly carry what might be viewed as the melodrama of preteen angst, but this does not mean we shouldn't take them seriously. Her words, as will unfold across this chapter, reflect the emotional interpretations of schooling that the girls consistently engaged. Her words, laden with emotion, an embodied source of knowledge, reveal the complexities of the liminal spaces in which women and girls of color exist (Anzaldúa, 1983). They unveil the emotional impact that schooling can have on girls of color. When interacting with the girls' discussions of schooling, I consistently was brought to question why girls like Halsey, who preformed well in school, were well liked by teachers, had solid and sisterly groups of friends at school, still had such deeply felt negative responses to school. An analysis of her words and the words of her sisters invites us to ponder the meanings of the angst the girls expressed toward schooling, despite their simultaneous desires and efforts to do well in school.

The data explored in this chapter reveals that girls utilized literacies, including embodied literacies, the ways girls made and expressed meanings by

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tapping into their minds and bodies as equally important and entangled sources of

knowing (Lara, 2002), to engage critiques of schooling. While literacy pedagogy in

school can be used as a mechanism of control, it also has the potential to engage

girls of color in critical literacies work that is rooted in their theories, born of the

interaction between their personal experiences, their emotions, their relationships,

their politics, and their academic learning. I hope to further highlight through the

girls' conversations and writing, often imbued with a viscerality that could easily be

characterized as disrespect or hostility (Ife, 2017; Koonce, 2012; Morris, 2007), that

their fervent critique is tied, not to a pure rejection of schooling, but instead, to their

understand that they are deserving of quality education. This chapter will explore

the critiques that girls have to offer about their school experiences, especially

concerning the ways they feel not only intellectually short changed, but emotionally

unsupported, and the ways that critical celebratory pedagogy that gave way to and

honored these critiques.

Creating Spaces for Girls' Critiques to Arise

The girls, on multiple occasions, claimed that part of their appreciation for

the Unnormal Sisterhood was that they were able to speak more freely on topics

that were not addressed in most areas of their lives. Ciara explains she liked the

group because she had the opportunity to "talk about the things that [she] wouldn't

normally talk about." (Interview, May 24, 2016). Ciara mentioned issues like

feminism and "like how we are treated in school" as topics sanctioned by the

Unnormal Sisterhood, but not by school itself. She reiterated later in the same

interview that she enjoyed using the space of the club for "talking about the things

that happened during school, which be irking my soul." Because the curriculum followed the girls' lead, it was the topics that they were most interested in that came to the center of the curriculum. And very frequently, this topic was schooling. The freedom of the Unnormal Sisterhood curriculum, then, gave way to critiques about the control that was present in their classrooms.

The girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood, in the space of our inquiry group, were not shy about speaking and writing about the ways they felt mistreated, uncared for, and silenced in schools. I believe this was in part because of the way the club was structured to work in tandem with, rather than against, the girls' critiques, which they expressed both in writing and in conversation, that were often imbued with emotion and physical expressions of emotion. This space, then, provided opportunities for girls to critically reflect on schooling without risk of punishment.

The Unnormal Sisterhood mimicked what Carmen Kynard (2010) theorized as a "hush harbor." Building on the legacies of African American resistance, she defines hush harbors a space, "hidden in plain sight" (p. 34) that allowed those involved, not only to survive, to find relief in a safe haven, but also to theorize and disrupt "the reproduction of bourgeois whiteness" (p. 34). The Unnormal Sisterhood was a space at the border of schooling, like Foucault's (1986) concept of "heterotopia," a space of otherness that operates outside of hegemonic structures, yet is connected enough to those structures enough to offer a space to critique and challenge them. Wissman (2011) has postulated that the writing spaces she created for girls of color reflect Foucault's (1984) theorizations of "heterotopias" or "other spaces", "in which he explores the emergence of spaces that acknowledge and affirm

difference in ways that also comment upon and contest dominant or official spaces"
(p.410). The Unnormal Sisterhood functioned similarly to Wissman's heterotopias.
The Unnormal Sisterhood gave way for girls to engage theories about schooling,
wherein they simultaneously critiqued it, and empowered themselves to push
forward, interrupting the structural barriers erected to maintain hegemonic power
structures.

Girl of Color Knowledge and Ways of Knowing at the Center of Critique

Engaging in the girls' critiques required me, as the facilitator, to recognize the
full range of ways girls of color understood and expressed their understandings of
the world around them, and in particular, their schooling. This meant recognizing
that not only were their words as laden with theories, but so were their embodied
reactions and performances. It meant rejecting notions that "if you want to
'succeed': develop your reason, conceal your emotions, fragment your mind from
your body" (Lara, 2002, p. 434). One day in early March, Diamond rolled her eyes at
me while I was giving instructions on how to construct their questions to interview
one another. I made eye contact with her and said "woow..." and then paused. I
followed with: "It's ok. You are allowed to get annoyed with me. I know I can be
annoying." She started laughing and then hid her face in a book (Fieldnotes, March 1,
2016). In this moment, I tried to acknowledge, with care, that I understood that her
eye rolling was valid, that I saw it, but it did not upset me. In this moment, after I
acknowledge the legitimacy of her eye roll, her edge melted and she relaxed into
laughter. My choice to read her eye roll not as hostility, but as a legitimate response
to her understanding of what was happening in the club in that moment was an

effort to understand, that eye rolls, hand claps, outbursts of laughter, tears, yelling,

cursing, dancing, were all ways that girls were, in their full humanity, reacting to the

world, making sense of the world, and expressing those understandings. It was not

only the words they wrote and said, but also the volume, tone, and the physical

reactions that accompanied them that collectively unearthed and expressed the

girls' full interpretations of the world.

The pedagogy of the Unnormal Sisterhood attempted to be a space for the

girls to be free in expressing themselves not only through "rational" expressions,

typically valued in academic spaces, but also through their embodied knowledge

(Jaggar, 1989, Lara, 2002). Wargo (2015b) describes embodiment as "An expression

of the present. A corporeal and affective reworking of the content of social worlds"

(p. 50). Lara (2002) explains the necessity to challenging the "mind/body split," and

instead, engage the "bodymindspirit" as a cite of knowledge. The pedagogy of the

Unnormal Sisterhood attempted to understand and build on the girls' visceral and

emotional reactions as valid points of critique, rather than as signs of disrespect or

overemotionality. Fahima I. Ife (2017) asks a series of questions that illuminates the

ways that reframing Black girls' physical responses to schooling allow us to

understand the dehumanizing practices they are exposed to. She writes:

> Why must Black girls continue to enter classrooms where teachers aspire to
> refashion their behavior and to forcibly eradicate loud, wild, and sassy
> expressions of Black girlhood, rather than "celebrate" (Brown, 2013) their
> vibrant spirits? Perhaps a Black girl rolls her eyes because it's one way she
> attempts to shift calcified pain throughout her body? … Perhaps she's
> signaling her need for creative outlet, a mythical opportunity worth of her
> sentience?

Perhaps a Black girl rolls her eyes to intervene against daily assaults against her humanity in hostile classes? Where *being* Black-and-girl incites dehumanization and despiritualization? (pp.1-2)

The bodily responses that girls had to their worlds were instrumental to making full sense of their experiences. What's more, as Koonce (2012) has discussed, what she refers to as the Black female speech practice of "talking with attitude," is "used to show confidence or resistance in oppressive situations" (p. 28). However, those who are outside of their speech community too often label girls partaking in this resistant practice as "loud Black girls" or as having negative attitudes. In turn, during schooling, Black girls are often disciplined and commanded to be more "ladylike," although many of the behaviors associated with this "attitude" are, in fact, behaviors and outlooks that could lead to educational success, such as outspokenness, assertiveness, commitment, and a feeling of deservedness (Morris, 2017). What's more, these comportments are often encouraged in white male students as routes toward academic and career success. Although I do not belong to the speech community of most of the girls in the group, and in fact, the girls within the group also belonged to different speech communities than each other, I attempted to create a space where it was understood that their assertiveness was an important resource to the Unnormal Sisterhood as we engaged in critical conversation and writing.

Critiquing Schooling Through Embodied Literacies

The following sections will illuminate the richness of girls' critiques about schooling. These critiques reveal the ways that, in school, their embodied knowledges are impeded upon. In contrast, the very nature of the Unnormal

Sisterhood, which engaged these embodied knowledges, gave way for the girls'

critiques to emerge.

"We Can't Breathe": Control in the Classroom

Frequently, the girls would report the constraints they felt in the classroom.

Diamond, in discussing her experiences in school articulated her frustration with

the constant discipline she experienced in some teachers' classes. "We can't breathe

in Ms. Z's class" (Interview, May 24, 2009), she claimed. I asked her, "Do you think

you can do better work when you are able to breathe?" She responded with a drawn

out, "mmhmm." Here, Diamond is directly naming a physical response to what she is

interpreting as a limiting curriculum. The feeling of shortness of breath is an

embodied reaction to the constraints her education is inflicting on her. She

describes her understanding that when her full humanity—her right to breathe—is

attacked, she cannot learn to her full potential. She cannot, in her entirety, be and

learn in the classroom when she is not seen as fully human.

It's no surprise that the statement "we can't breathe" parallels the activist call

utilized by the Black Lives Matter movement. Eric Gardner, a Black man in Staten

Island, uttered the words "I can't breathe" as he was held in a lethal and illegal

chokehold by NYPD officer. This statement has been adopted by Black Lives Matter

activists as a rallying cry that points to both the literal and symbolic suffocation and

violence inflicted on Black people by the state in the United States. What Diamond

implies when she says "we can't breathe" in classrooms is that, like the larger

structures that control the United States, school, for her, is restrictive and

regulatory, and, although perhaps not literally, life taking. Through her bodily

feeling of being suffocated, she understands that schooling is not what it should be.

Diamond's embodied reaction to schooling reflects Patricia Hill Collins's

(2000) postulation that structures, such as schooling, operate within "highly

effective systems of social control designed to keep African-American women [and

girls] in a subordinate place. This larger system of oppression works to suppress the

ideas of black women [and girl] intellectuals and to protect elite White male

interests and worldviews" (p. 5). As will be discussed throughout this chapter

various forms of control are enacted on the girls that constrain their knowledge,

including embodied knowledge. The byproduct of this is a seeming suppression of

their creativity and intellectual prowess and are often dehumanizing and reifying of

the subordination of girls marginalized along racial, gendered, and classed lines. We

see here that Diamond is understanding these injustices, not just on a "logical" level,

but through her body, through the embodied feeling of constrained breath.

A Demand for Silence

One way that the girls cited the attempted overcontrol of their bodies and, in

turn, minds was through the demand for silence they felt in the classroom. This

mirrors the idea articulated by Saavedra and Marx (2016), that often times silent

and still bodies are, through schooled perceptions, seen as good, teachable bodies.

Those that are not still and quiet are seen as bad and unteachable. In an excerpt

from my fieldnotes, we can see the ways the girls were understanding this:

> I asked the 6th grade girls who were there how they were doing and if there
> was anything they wanted to share about the last couple days. Ciara and
> Diamond commented on their substitute teacher. Diamond said that the sub

didn't let them speak at all during class. Emily added on, "even during group work." I laughed and said, "How does she expect you to do group work if you can't talk?" They shook their heads and rolled their eyes. (Fieldnotes, April 26, 2017)

The girls first name the ways that their substitute teacher is taking control over their bodies as well as limiting potential knowledge generation through relational and collaborative learning by forbidding them to speak and interact with one another. This is especially nonsensical as the girls are being asked to keep silent even during labor that would seemingly demand conversation. This story demonstrates that the control that this teacher attempted to place over students is clearly not for the sake of learning or intellectual pursuit, the supposed goals of schooling. It highlights the way that the girls' bodies and minds are being subjugated to controlling mechanisms in schools. Through not only their naming of the experience, but their headshakes and eye rolls, they demonstrate that they understand how ridiculous this is. In the space of the Unnormal Sisterhood, where they are free to speak, free to move, free to share their ideas through not only words, but through their bodies, they are able to name and react to experiences they feel are unjust.

Teachers' Language in the Classroom

In addition to the sisters' conversations about the control over their physical bodies, they also addressed the ways that teachers would attack their senses of selves. Often, according to the girls, it seemed that the way that control was achieved through demeaning language that had the potential to tear down the girls' emotional well-being. The girls reported name-calling and being told to "shut up" by teachers. Further, they expressed that they were frequently yelled at and lied about.

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The girls observations reflect what scholars have demonstrated: that the discourses teachers too often used to discipline students of color, particularly Black, Native, and Latina/o youth, framed students as "'wild,' 'other,' unruly, and in need of taming" (Saavedra & Marx, 2016).

Seraphina wisely interrogated name-calling that carried these meanings and the ways it emotionally affected her and her classmates. In a personal narrative in her notebook, she wrote:

> When I was walking to class and sat down the teacher automaticly screamed at our class yes we were loud but she didn't even say stop she called us inmates and animals I don't think she knows how it feels when she does, that it makes me feel like less of a person. (Artifact, April 26, 2016)

In this passage, Seraphina is naming her emotional response to name-calling. Seraphina directly addressed the issue of dehumanization that can be felt by youth when their teachers—the people who presumably care for them during the school day, the vast majority of their waking hours—make them feel uncared for (Valenzuela, 1999). I want to emphasize Seraphina's use of the word "feel." She does not address simply that these are cruel words or that this isn't right. She imparts that it has real emotional effects on her. Like Diamond's recitation that in some classes, "we can't breathe," Seraphina addresses that there are consequences to her education that go beyond the rational and intellectual, and in, fact, also impact her sense of her own humanity. It is through her emotionality that she is understanding the dehumanization impacted on her by teachers.

Seraphina brought up the issue of name-calling and her subsequent feelings of dehumanization multiple times during the course of the club. An excerpt from my fieldnotes reads:

She then told me that in her class, a teacher had called them "inmates." She shook her head and wrinkled her brow. She said, "It makes me feel less than human." She continued, claiming, "You have no right to deprive me of my name." She told me that this happened often. For instance, once her teacher had referred to a child as "that thing over there" (this story has come up repeatedly). She also said that her teachers often refer to the kids as "animals." (Fieldnotes, February 16, 2016)

Here, Seraphina is again speaking out against the dehumanization of students in her class, addressing the degrading effects of name calling by her teachers. She points to the importance of her identity by claiming teachers have "no right to deprive [her] of [her] name." This statement suggests that her whole self is not being invited and celebrated in her class. She has been deprived of her name, which, as discussed in Chapter 4 is laden with meaning. Depravation of her full humanity is a dire consequence that she and her classmates, all students of color, suffer at the hands of white teachers.

Wrapped up in these feelings of dehumanization and deprivation is specifically racially coded language. Seraphina, in both of these instances, addresses the criminalizing language used against students in her class—the use of the word "inmate"—and directly dehumanizing language—the use of the word "animals." This, similar to implications of Diamond's use of "we can't breathe," reflects the ways that girls felt their school operating to criminalize them as minoritized students. This feeling of criminalization is reflective of the grave issue of the increased imprisonment of girls of color in the United States. In 2013, of the 6,000 girls in prison, 35 percent were Black girls. It is important to note, that Black girls are only 14 percent of all girls in the United States, making their imprisonment vastly disproportionate to the general population (Morris, 2016). Thus, as Seraphina

is sensing, the assignment of terms like "inmates" to Black girls in school must be taken seriously. The teachers who assign these terms to the girls, seem to be playing into this system that, over the past 30 years has increasingly exposed Black girls to the criminal and juvenile systems (Morris, 2016). What is necessary to understand, here, is that, as both Kimberlé Crenshaw (2015) and Monique Morris (2016) note, it is often the stigmas and stereotypes that surround Black girls that increase their chances of being put into criminal or juvenile systems. Seraphina names in this conversation the emotional consequences of the way her teacher criminalizes, deprives, and dehumanizes her classmates. These acts are linked to real life consequences for students of color who are made vulnerable already by so many aspects of a system that perpetually punishes them and labels them as criminal.

The Decentering of Emotions in Classrooms

It comes as no surprise that the girls reported a percieved lack of caring from teachers. This observation is distilled in Seraphina's comment, "Ms. X cares nothing about feelings" (Fieldnotes, April 26, 2016). The girls reported that they felt that teachers do not listen to the students. In an interview, Emily expressed her sentiment that she did not believe teachers would listen to them. I asked her about the potential utility of the play she wrote that narrated a negative interaction with a teacher.

> **G**: Yeah. Do you think if teachers saw your play or if we preformed those for the teachers, do you think this would change their mind about anything?
> **E**: Maybe, but some teachers, but some teachers don't care.
> **G**: Yeah? Do you think there is a way to get teachers to care more?
> **E**: For them to just listen! (Transcript, May 24, 2016)

Our conversation highlights that Emily sees listening as connected to caring. Emily's

call for caring through listening evokes a line of questioning brought up by the

opening lines of Valenzuela's (1999) *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and*

the Politics of Caring, which reads:

> When teenagers lament that "Nobody cares," few adults listen. Whether it is
> offered as an observation, description, explanation, or excuse, the charge that
> "Nobody cares" is routinely dismissed as childish exaggeration. But what if it
> were *not* hyperbole? What if each weekday, for eight hours a day, teenagers
> inhabited a world populated by adults who did not care—or at least did not
> care for *them* sufficiently? (p.3)

It would be an easy assumption to make, that as preteen and teenage emotion

swells, they flippantly make untrustworthy statements about the lack of listening

and care in their lives from adults. But, this seems too persistent a cry to ignore.

Kathleen also iterated what Emily indicated about teacher listening, pointing

to the ways she feels unheard in school. When I asked her about what she believed

was an important lesson that other teachers could learn from the Unnormal

Sisterhood, she expressed how she sensed that her teachers do not listen and named

how this affects her and her peers:

> K: I would say teachers could benefit from this club because they could
> finally understand why, how, how the students or kids feel or just kids in
> general feel about the world itself and about grown ups and how they want
> to actually talk to grown ups but not in like a bad way, like actually get their
> words out cuz kids usually can't get their words out to the grown ups
> because the grown ups will be like be quiet, shut up, stuff like that. So I think
> that the teachers will understand how to talk to us more and be there for the
> students more than they are.
> G: Mmhmm. Ok, so kind of listening?
> K: Listening and speaking to them in a good mannered way, not take out, not
> take all their anger out on them because of their problems, also. That's a huge
> problem also. (Interview, May 24, 2016)

Kathleen astutely articulates the ways that adults and teachers too often put

primacy on silence and obedience, rather than creating opportunities for students to

express themselves freely. She further highlights that "good manners," or respect, are necessary in listening relationships between adults and youth. This is especially prevalent for Brown and Black students, who are too often subject to schooling that attempts to quiet them, equating quiet, still bodies with good bodies (Saavedra & Marx, 2016). She points out the interruption this causes in the relationships between students and teachers, as teachers don't learn how to "be there for the students." The highly controlled environments that the students exist in are not places where they feel nurtured or cared for, but rather silenced and ignored, leading to misunderstandings between teachers and students. Again, as in so many of the conversations about schooling, Kathleen repeatedly uses the word "feel," further highlighting the suppression of students' emotional knowledge and the lack of care for their emotional well being in school.

Sonia Nieto (2000) highlights that the feeling that adults do not listen to young people has consistently been echoed by youth over the years. Elizabeth Dutro (2011) expounds on this, speaking of the importance of dialogue in classrooms, including circles of testimony and witness. Through this process of listening and sharing, the space created in classrooms for students and teachers alike to share their personal stories is a humanizing process that, further, engenders deeply intellectual activity. Katherine Schultz (2003) also speaks to the importance of listening in teaching, utilizing bell hooks's words to point to the important of care and respect for students:

> To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin." (hooks, 1994, p. 13)

Schultz challenges the notion that good students stay silent and listen and suggests, instead, that classrooms that locate listening as the duty of the teacher can help to create relationship-based classrooms that generate new, student-centered knowledge. Further, teaching that is based in listening allows educators to engage in more responsive teaching that builds on students' knowledge and is attuned to the potentialities for growth of students.

The centering of listening in classrooms takes on specific importance in classrooms where teachers come from different cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds from their students. In the highly diverse classrooms like the ones at St. Francis, barriers to listening created obstacles to understanding students, which correlates with the punitive disciplinary measures, stunted Eurocentric curriculum, and high running tensions between teachers and youth. Without a culture of listening, it might be too common for teachers to dismiss behaviors they don't understand as deviant or deficient (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 1999; Paris & Halim, 2014; Saavedra & Marx, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999). What's more, because the teachers at St. Frances wield power as both adults and as white people to control students young Black and Brown bodies (Saavedra & Marx, 2016). This means, without efforts to understand their students, efforts to learn from, about, and with them, teachers are likely to perpetuate racial and gendered control that attempts to deprive students of agency and voice within school.

Discipline and Teachers' Emotional Responses

Important in Kathleen's conversation about teachers, is that she notes that she wishes teachers would "not take all their anger out on [students] because of

their problems, also. That's a huge problem also." This "huge problem" explicates

that teachers' emotional responses came out in the classroom frequently, even as

the girls' emotions were suppressed, demonstrating an unevenness in who had

rights to emotions. Teachers' reactions to students were highly charged with

emotions and had negative consequences on the girls. The girls name that the ways

that they are disciplined—often for their own expressions of emotions—are

frequently connected to teachers' own emotions. Thus, there becomes an imbalance

where teachers' emotions are legitimized, while students' are silenced. Seraphina

points to this understanding in one of our conversations. I asked her what she

would want teachers to learn from our club, and she responded:

> **S**: …I don't like when teachers yell at [students][10] and take away their education. And call them inmates because it degrades a person. It's not cool.
> **G**: … So that kind of goes to my next question, what do you think other educators need to learn from the work that we did?
> **S**: That you shouldn't, like when you get mad, don't take away education. Other children… like… I get, like, for the person who is being bad, get out, but not for the whole classroom. You don't like, oh you threw something at me, well 215mot stop teaching. All of you are going to suffer. Ok, cool. So kind of respecting students, seeing them as… human beings… (Interview, May 24, 2016)

In this conversation, she notes how teachers' anger can eclipse everything else that

happens in the classroom, resulting in a classroom full of students losing out on

educational opportunities. She explicates what seems to be an irrational response

by teachers that results in widespread consequences for the students in her class.

In another instance, Seraphina explained that one of their teachers

threatened them with taking away their graduation if they continued to misbehave.

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[10] Transcript read "teachers." I've chosen to substitute this with the word "students" to accurately portray her meaning.

She explained, "Ms. X said we are not going to have a graduation. ...The principal is just going to hand us a diploma. That's pretty mean" (Group Interview, April 26, 2016). Seraphina is naming an unusual cruelty very much detached from the material reality of the students' lives. To deny students of color the joy and celebration of graduation, in a world that in so many ways fails to celebrate them, is a slap in the face—a denial of the positive movement the girls have made, the academic accomplishments they have achieved, the hurdles they jumped and oppressions they've contended with. To even taunt a class of youth of color with the threat of canceling graduation is a symbol that their accomplishments will, for certain people, always remain secondary, or even invisible, to what are thought to be their deficiencies. Seraphina names this as "mean" citing the ways that negative relationships are implicated in her schooling experiences.

What is additionally disturbing is the way that these systems influence the students thinking of one another. As Winn (2013) discusses, "over time, academically successful students learn to view their peers through a deficit lens and grow comfortable in being sorted and separated from them" (p. 130). It seems that Seraphina is adopting the arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987) of her school, labeling her fellow students as the problem, rather than seeking to better understand students' motivations, the roots of their discontent. We engaged in many discussions about this, but it has been such an ingrained part of their understanding of school that it was hard to break. However, the second year of the club, after the formal data collection period, Seraphina did choose to do a project on

restorative justice approaches to discipline, indicating a trajectory toward new imaginings of school discipline.

Like Seraphina, Diamond also discussed how disciplinary measures that arose from teachers' emotional responses ended up impeding on her education. In Diamond's case, her teacher claimed to open a space for conversation about their students' experiences. However, Diamond's honest response was greeted with an emotional response by the teacher and, in turn, punishment, rather than dialogue. In an interview, Diamond narrated:

> I remember when the counselor came in. It's like a new counselor who comes in every Monday, and we were talking and, um, she was like, what else makes you mad, and I raised my hand and I had said, "Teachers" and Ms. X started staring at me, was like, "Why did, why did she say that?" ...and the counselor said, "Why, what makes you mad, why the teachers make you mad?" .... I said they say things that aren't true and they always believe, and they always take the other side." And Ms. X was like, "Well you never talk to me." And I said, "Ms. X, I wasn't talking about you, specifically, I'm talking about teachers." And she said "Do not get smart, Diamond. Do not get smart, Diamond. You need to take a walk." (Interview, May 24, 2016)

In this narrative, we see that Diamond is asked, specifically, what makes her mad and she replies honestly. The teacher immediately replies defensively and then issues out punishment. Diamond is made to exit the room. It seems, in this case, that this space was created as a "nonperformative" (Ahmed, 2012; Butler, 1993) of listening and of allowing students to express their emotions. In other words, it seems that the school was claiming to create a space for students to express themselves and for teachers to listen, but in actuality, did not carry out their stated aim. The teacher in this situation took such fast offense to a general statement that Diamond made and let her personal feelings get in the way of an educative moment. Had Diamond been allowed to stay in the room, a fruitful conversation about

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student-teacher relations could have occurred, which might help inform both students and teachers about ways to better address discontent that is so clearly felt in these classrooms. But instead, by forcing Trinity out of the room, the conversation was immediately ended, ongoing issues remained unresolved, and tensions were likely left even more heightened. When students' emotions are punished, learning is stunted and, further, senses of dissatisfaction and anger arise. Diamond, in this situation, was not only denied the opportunity to explore her embodied knowledge—what makes her mad—with her classmates and teacher, but she was physically removed from the classroom, barred from whatever learning would have occurred there in collaboration with the teacher, counselor, and other students.

False Performances of Care

The sisters further highlighted the importance of genuine care in the classroom as they investigated the ways their teachers performed care in their school. The girls often spoke of a certain disingenuousness in teachers' attempts to demonstrate care. They showed a sophisticated reading and understanding of care, one that recognized that all care was not equal, as they talked through their analysis of their teachers. They perceived that although teachers sought out opportunities to learn about them, this was not always out of care for their emotional, spiritual, or intellectual wellbeing, but, rather, because they were "nosey." In one instance, Diamond reported that a teacher would pry for information even when she expressed the desire for privacy. This is important to consider in light of the girls desires for teachers to "listen." It seems, though, in this conversation, the girls distinguish between authentic, invited listening and surveillance—a form of

listening meant to lead to further control, rather than listening as a mechanism of

care. Diamond explained:

> That's why I really haven't been getting along with Ms. X this past week
> because... She, like, one day I came in and I wasn't, like, happy and everybody
> knew that because Melanie had asked me what's wrong and I just ignored
> her but I didn't say nothing and [Ms. X] had asked me and I had said it's
> personal and she was like, well what's wrong? And I said, I don't have to tell
> you what's wrong. It's personal. I just said that and ever since then she's been
> giving me an ugly eye and stuff. And I don't like the fact that she has to know
> my personal. I'm like you don't have to know my personal feelings. (Group
> Interview, March 9, 2016)

Diamond named that her right to privacy seemed violated by the teacher in this

moment. The teacher's questioning seemed more like demands for information than

invitations to share. The teacher seemed to put on an act of caring, asking Diamond

to share her interior life, but when she refused, rather than accepting this as a

natural human desire for personal space, she took it as an offense. In this way, she

seemed to be attempting to remove agency from Diamond, demanding a testimony

of her trauma, rather than allowing this testimony to arise spontaneously on

Diamond's own terms. As Dutro explores, students' traumas are often interpreted

through deficitizing lenses (2008). This is something Diamond may have sensed and

therefore tried to keep her story to herself, not seeing the relationship with her

teacher as trustworthy. Discussing our own trauma is "destabilizing" (Dutro, 2008),

and if a student already feels unsafe in their classroom, it is likely that they'll not

want to put themselves at further risk by revealing what might them more

vulnerable to scrutiny or misinterpretation. It is not the role of teachers to force

students to expose their inner pain, their tears, their fragility, but instead, create

environments where students have the choice to share and feel safe doing so.

It seemed, by Diamond's account, it was in part the culture of surveillance

that may have been a barrier to the safety to bear testimony of traumas. A transcript

from one of the group interviews reads:

> **H**: What happened to you and Ms. X today?
>   (Laughter and Pause)
> **H**: You don't have to answer.
> **D**: Nothing really happened. Ms. X is just petty.
> **G**: She's petty?
> **H**: Cuz she was like yelling, like "DIAMOND!" or something like that.
> **D**: She wasn't yelling.
> **H**: Not *yelling*, but like in 7th grade, she was mumbling what happened.
> **D**: She was trying to get the principal over to the parents. She was telling the
>   principal because of what happened in Mr. Y class, but she didn't even
>   know what happened. It was something really small. And Mr. Y was trying
>   to talk to me, and she come out in the hallway out of nowhere. "Ms. Z, call
>   the principal!" on me! What, you didn't.. What! You don't even, what you
>   even talking about? She's a ear hustler and she's petty and she needs to
>   mind her business. Mind her business.
> **G**: So how would you have preferred that she had handled that situation?
> **D**: Get out of my face and mind her business. (Group Interview, May 9, 2016)

This account demonstrated Diamond's feelings that, rather than genuinely listening,

that teachers were enacting a form of surveillance and interference that violated

Diamond's sense of safety and wellbeing in school. It was not listening for the sake

of creating an environment where teachers and students could enter into a circle of

trust and, in turn, problem solving. Rather, it appeared to be an environment where

girls were at risk of punishment and escalation of negative consequences whether

they shared with teachers or not.

It also seemed that the girls had a sense that the ways that teachers enacted

friendliness was not genuine, and perhaps this was part of the root of their

unwillingness to share their inner lives with their teachers. At one point during the

club, when the principal at the time came into the room and said hello, Emily said

hello to him, but the other girls stayed silent. After he left, Diamond said, "I don't know why he's acting all buddy buddy after he just got me in trouble" (Fieldnotes, May 18, 2016). These gestures of kindness were quickly rejected by girls, especially Diamond, who was probably the most frequently disciplined (and eventually expelled) student. Additionally, I had been on the receiving end of conversations where the principal did reveal some negative feelings about Diamond, and I'm sure these were not unbeknownst to her.

This strikes me as particularly interesting because it highlights that when the teachers performed interest in the girls' lives, the girls didn't necessarily respond positively. For me this demonstrates that the girls were aware of a sort of false closeness that the teachers were performing. In these situations, the control remained in the teachers' hands, as they attempted to force students to express themselves, instead of creating spaces where students felt safe enough to express themselves on their own terms. It seems likely that because their emotions were so highly relegated in some situations, it probably did not seem safe to make themselves vulnerable by sharing their feelings. As demonstrated earlier in the chapter, even when teachers asked for their opinions, when they were honest, they were at risk of being punished. The girls, then, found themselves in a sort of catch-22 when it came to their emotions, punished if they shared, punished if they withheld.

The girls explained that the kind of emotional care given to the students in the school was uneven, and perhaps this is why they rejected it. Seraphina explained how some students were allowed more freedom and given rewards like Starbucks

and McDonalds treats for "doing nothing", while others consistently were punished and ostracized. Seraphina also commented in a video that she and Diamond created about their experiences as Black girls, that teachers showed preferential treatment toward Asian students. At another point, it was indicated that Catholic students (who are mostly non-Black children of color) are often given opportunities that others are not. For example Seraphina shared that only Catholic students were invited to join to an academic team, the Mathletes. These pieces of data together create a disturbing narrative, as students like Seraphina bear witness to differential treatment along racial lines. These stories indicate that there are structures in place that elevate the success of non-Black students and suppress opportunities for Black students.

There was also an indication of inconsistency in the ways teachers treated students, surely driving a deeper wedge in trusting student-teacher relationships. Diamond critiqued the way that teachers seemed to act differently toward students depending on who was in the room, indicating that teachers were putting on performances of kindness, rather than actual enactments. She commented:

> Ms. X, as soon as the principal comes up, like, say she was yelling at someone, she will change her whole attitude, "yes, and I try" but when, but before he came up, "YOU NEED TO STOP IT!" So why, why can't you do that when he comes in here? Why don't you just stay what you were doing. Because you are scared you are gonna get fired. If you knew you were going to get fired, why come? (Interview, May 24, 2016)

Diamond brought up the important point that teachers feel comfortable yelling at students, except when being surveiled themselves. She indicated that she felt teachers knew that yelling at students is inappropriate behavior, but would still do it behind closed doors. From my own observations in the school over the years, it

was not uncommon to hear teachers yelling at students, so I am sure it was no secret

from the principal that teachers yelled at their students. And yet, according to

Diamond, teachers felt the need, when directly in front of the principal, to hide their

behavior, to perform caring. It seems as though it was the ability to switch on and off

performances of caring at the "right moments" that allowed the behavior to stay in

place. As long as the yelling wasn't seen directly, under explicit surveillance, the

teachers could maintain their behavior.

Diamond also sited teachers' inconsistency with their treatment of students

as being selfish. She explained:

> It seems like she got bored too, because one minute she's nice to us, one
> minute she not. One minute we're her favorite. One minute we're not. It's like,
> Ms. X., you shouldn't have no favorites or nothing. You should just come here
> to teach and not just worry about you, it's like they just worried about their
> money so much, so they like to rush, like to do this thing. If I do this, this is
> going to make my money faster. No it's not. It's not going to work. (Interview,
> May 24, 2016)

Although Diamond's analysis of how the teachers at her school got paid is

inaccurate, there is an important implication here. For Diamond, it felt like the

motivation for teachers' interactions with students was external to their actual

caring for students. Part of this feeling was the unpredictability of teacher's

treatment of students, which Diamond read as being dependent on their mood,

rather than their relationship to students. For students, this inconsistency could be

very jarring. This is not to say that teachers do not have a right to their emotions,

but in care work, emotions must be shared in a way that dignifies all parties of a

relationship.

The girls' noting of the inconsistency of their teachers' care and the

vacillation between moods, from being nice one minute to being mean the next, adds

to the evidence that they did not feel genuinely cared for. As bell hooks (2000)

explores in her conception of love, childhood and adolescence are formative times

when we create our understandings of love, and when children are subject to

violence or abuse from the adults who claim to love or care about them, this sends

them a very confusing message. She goes on to explain loving relationships with

children are not without discipline, and at times punishment, but it does mean that

punishment and vitriol is not the primary defining factor of a relationship.

According to the girls' narration of their school, however, punishment seemed to

define the relationships between the teachers and many of the girls. hooks claims

part of loving children is to teach them to be self-disciplined and how to cope with

emotions. This seems far from what is happening in the classrooms the sisters

described. The girls read their classrooms as unsafe places for emotions. Thus, the

loving act of helping children learn to cope with emotions was not enacted in their

school experience.

Representation in School Faculty and Staff

The relationships between students and teachers were most certainly shaped

by their understandings and misunderstandings of one another across differences in

their identities. Where as the space of the Unnormal Sisterhood was structured to

specifically attune to those differences, it did not seem the same sorts of

engagements were occurring in the school. St. Francis was made up almost entirely

of white faculty and this did not go unnoticed by the girls. In an interview with

Diamond, we spoke about the ways that she experienced racism in school. The following is an excerpt from that conversation:

> **D**: It always seems like, like, I had, I never really had a Black teacher in my whole entire life and it seems like I've always been picked on because I'm Black, or all the Black students in my class. Cuz Ms. X is kind of like that. She's, she always picks toward the Black people and a little bit toward, like, the Asian people, like Emily. She always picks the people who are going to act up, but not ever Black person is like that and, yeah.
> **G**: Mmhmm. So your interpretation is that people make assumptions about you that you are going to act up because of your race?
> **D**: Mmhmm.
> **G**: And how do you think things would change if you had a Black teacher? How do you think things would be different?
> **D:** We would be equal and not having to worry about our teacher judging you, who you are. Judging you... judging you.

Through this conversation, Diamond revealed that she believed that racial stereotyping might be rooted in her teachers' misunderstandings of her. Notice that she said that her teacher "picks on people who are *going to* act up," not those who *are* acting up or *have* acted up. With this distinction, Diamond indicates that she believes her teachers had made assumptions about who she and her Black and Asian classmates were and treated them accordingly, rather than giving them the benefit of the doubt. She claimed that she believed if she had Black teachers, they wouldn't judge her in the same way as her White teachers do. This mirrors findings by Koonce (2012) who found that teachers who did not belong to the speech communities of girls of color would interpret their speech as hostile, rather than understanding the resistance in their "Talking with attitude."

Diamond's desire for Black teachers echo what Marcelle Haddix's (2017) experiences never having had a school teacher who shared her racial or cultural background. She cites Ebony Elizabeth Thomas's (2015) examination of how a white

teaching force leads to a centering of white, middle class, monolingual values and ways of knowing. Diamond shows an understanding that the absence of Black teachers means that she does not have teachers that fully comprehend her. Instead she has teachers who judge her based on their misunderstandings. Her comments suggest that structures need to evolve so that curriculum and ways of teaching are more representative of more diverse teacher and student experiences, needs, and desires (Haddix, 2017).

It seems many of the problems that girls named stemmed from misunderstandings between students and teachers. I do not believe that most of the teachers were acting out of intentional hate or a conscious desire to harm the children and youth at the school. However, I do believe that there was a certain brand of ignorance that shaped their interactions with students, unaware of the ways their behaviors perpetuated white supremacy. This was perhaps because most of them did not share common experiences with the girls and, thus could not break away from the arrogant lenses of their own experiences. Again, as Saavedra and Marx (2016) discuss, schooling disciplines teachers in a particular way to enact domination over students and, especially for white teachers who have not themselves experienced what it is like to be a person of color in school, it is difficult to break from arrogant perceptions without concerted and prolonged effort.

Writing Curriculum as Control

The control over students was not only in the interactions between teachers and students, but also at the core of the curriculum. The girls named writing as a place where they sometimes felt restricted in school. Several of the girls critiqued

the way they were asked to write in school, indicating a felt lack of freedom and expression in their writing. To the girls, the work they were asked to do often felt menial and rather anti-intellectual. Seraphina, for instance, explained that writing in school was relegated to mostly essay writing. When I asked her if she enjoyed writing in school she responded:

> Writing in school is ok. We give you a prompt, follow the prompt and if you don't you are in trouble… Writing in school is OK but it can get tedious because if you are doing it constantly, constantly. The thing [in the Unnormal Sisterhood] is like you can do whatever you want. It's cool. So I would prefer this one better because in school you have to follow something directly. I don't mind doing that, but sometimes it just gets annoying where you are not allowed to be creative or think on your own. (Interview, March 15, 2016)

As one of the top students in her class, Seraphina was able to, for the most part, navigate the writing curriculum in a way that wasn't difficult for her, but that was "annoying." Moreover, Seraphina describes the writing done within school as lacking creative or critical thought. Instead, writing was usually an exercise in following directions. She highlighted that not only do students have to follow mostly meaningless prompts, but also if they strayed from them, they risked punishment. The nature of these assignments seems inherently one of control rather than of intellectual growth, expression, or exploration. Indeed, as discussed in the theoretical framework, writing is framed, as it is often in schooling, as a product, rather than a process (Calkins, 1944; Lensmire, 1998). The school takes on a factory orientation to writing, which keeps students in line, rather than in an excited process of learning or creating.

Diamond also spoke of the phenomenon of highly controlled writing, explaining that although she and her classmates were sometimes allowed to write in

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a private writer's notebook that was mostly unmonitored by teachers, more frequently, "The teachers speaks a specific things, like they make us write that." She went on to say, "It's like in class, it's boring. And then, it's basically like, in class you have to follow instructions, and, like, in here [in the Unnormal Sisterhood], of course, you have to follow some instructions, but it's sort of like your own instructions" (Interview, February 6, 2016). Seraphina and Diamond both referred to the ways that they are affectively impacted by this type of writing, using words like "tedious," "annoying," and "boring." They both placed this in opposition to the curriculum of the Unnormal Sisterhood, where, they indicated they appreciated the greater flexibility. Seraphina named this as "you can do whatever you want" while Diamond articulated the freer curriculum saying, "it's sort of like your own instructions." What Diamond specifically highlighted was that it was not that there are no limits or rules within the sisterhood. However, the girls were a part of that process of creating the boundaries and making choices about what and how they would create texts.

Seraphina shared with me some of her school worksheets as typical examples of writing homework they do for school. When she showed these sheets to me, she expressed her discontent with them, upset that she had to do multiple pages of homework with repetitive activities like the ones shown in Figure 6.1. These examples of assignments are prompt based and lacking in opportunities for students to incorporate their personal experiences. Rather than giving room to children to explore their own experiences, develop critiques, or exercise their imaginations, they are instead relegated to activities that ask them to merely
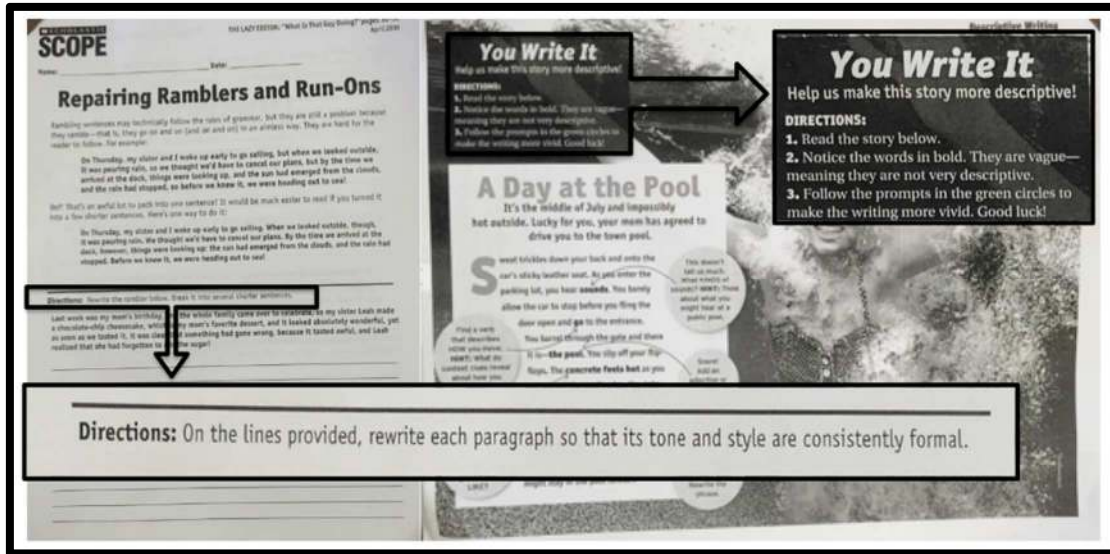
Figure 6.1. Seraphina's School Writing Assignments

rewrite and/or edit stories and ideas that likely have little relationship to them.

Importantly the grammar and craft moves these worksheets are attempting to teach

are all teachable through genuine writing practices.

When we take the lens of feminist of color writers and literary theorists, we

see the ways that girls and other children of color are being short changed by this

kind of curriculum. As Gloria Anzaldúa (1983) claims, "the world I create in the

writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put

order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it" (p 169). These words

demonstrate the ways that writing can serve women of color as a way of resisting

dominant narratives. And this is not a neutral or insignificant feat. Barbara Christian

(1988) adds, "What I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And

I mean that literally. For me literature is a way of knowing that I am not

hallucinating, that whatever I feel/know *is*" (pp. 77-78). Christian illuminates the

value of this kind of writing in that it serves as a confirmation of the embodied

knowledge, born of experiences, that helps her to understand the injustices in the world. Of particular significance is that these realities are often devalued as "hallucinations" by white supremacist and heteropatriarchal structures. By staking claim of her reality through writing, Christian maintains her ability to move forward in resistance to those structures that label her reality hallucinations.

At times the girls would rebel against controlling assignments, only to be faced with punishments. Ash also recalled a story when she was in Ms. X's class. She was assigned a math worksheet that she saw as being relatively pointless and decided she was not going to do it. She recalled:

> I told her, like, I'm not going to do math, this worksheet. I was so scared of, like, you know, failing and nothing else. And she started yelling at me. And I was like, Ms. X, I have the right to say no! And she started going, she was like, "Go to the principal office and sharpen his pencils." And I was like, "Why do I have to? He can sharpen his own pencils?" She got, she got so mad at me. She got *so* mad at me. (Group Interview, May 9, 2016)

This anecdotes helps us understand the emotional rollercoaster that the girls sometimes experience in schools, as Ash moved through boredom, obstinacy, fear, and outrage. It further points to the ways Ash felt that schools exercised various physical, intellectual, and emotional control over students. On one level, she was asked to do a worksheet she saw as unhelpful to her intellectual growth, and so she attempted to take control of her choices. However, in doing so, she was emotionally manipulated, experiencing fear of failure as well as the consequences of being yelled at. Finally, she was forced to do yet another intellectually boring project— sharpening pencils. Her body was forced to do an activity that was highly controlled, and, in turn, she was barred from further actual intellectual activity. Additionally, we, again, see that the teacher is "mad" and takes her anger out on students, this

time Ash. While Ash's emotions were punished, the teacher's emotions went unchecked and are pooled towards disciplining Ash.

Play Writing as a Genre to Access Girls' Embodied Critiques

In contrast to schooling, the Unnormal Sisterhood was a place where the girls were able to center their embodied knowledge not only in conversations, but also in writing itself. It was important to incorporate specific literary engagements for the girls that would allow them to explore their experience on a deep level. Playwriting not only is a powerful in its ability for girls to fictionalize their real life experiences, it also has the affordance of being a performative genre. When the girls wrote their plays, they could name the feelings involved, but also enact them, using their full bodies to express the accounts they narrated.

Seraphina and Diamond based one of our largest writing projects around the issue of how teachers treat students in school. They co-wrote the following play to critique the ways that teachers talk to students in school. This play was inspired by the work of Dr. Gerald Campano's (2007) students who wrote critiques of their own schooling in the form of plays. Here, it is significant that they took the lead from other youth engaged in writing plays as a form of resistance.

As the Unnormal Sisterhood wrote, they imagined the audience for this play could be teachers. Seraphina and Diamond claimed that they wanted their teachers to better understand the ways that their language affected their students. For, as Seraphina mentioned before, she felt as though teachers may not even know the way that their language made them feel "less than human." The following is the play that Seraphina and Diamond wrote.

Teachers getting taught a lesson

*Mrs.Graceia[11]   *Xhocitli mom
*Diamond   *Mr. Langson
*Xhocitli

Scene 1

*Students enter the classroom

Diamond: Were do I sit Mrs. Graceia

Mrs. Graceia: Right next to Xhocitli

Xhocitil: Hi what is your name mine is Xhocitli I just come here from Peru sorry if my English isn't the best.

Diamond: Its fine
Diamond: Why did you come here?

Xhocitli : Well their was gangs rivalries in our hometown of Lima so we left and when to American for a better life. We also heard that the United States was one of the most diverse places on the plant

Scene 2

*A few months of school are in

Mrs. Graceia: Kids we are learning about South America I am giving 3 weeks to come up with a presentation and A dish from the country

Xhocitli: Yes (excited) can we do Peru?
Mrs. Graceia : OK (face looks confuse)

Diamond : What's wrong Teacher?

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[11] I want to point out, not completely out of vanity's sake, but because I think it is genuinely important, that I asked Seraphina about the naming of this character and she said she used my name as the root, not because she thinks I would ever treat students like this, but because it was the first teacher name she could come up with, and then she thought that I would never treat students like that, so she changed it. This idea of her contrast between my pedagogy and the pedagogies she critiques will come up later.

Xhocitli: Yeah what's so bad about Peru (about to cry)

Mrs. Graceia: Ugh, Out of all the places why Peru? Because if you have a problem you can address me with Mr. Langston

Xhocitli and Diamond: We will *angry * walking out of the class

Scene 3

Both Xhocitli and Diamond's parents are furious at the teacher's comments about Xhocitli's homeland {Peru}

Xhocitli mother: How dear you allow such mockery to go on in your school. Isn't America supposed to be diverse and cherish one another's cultures? Should you allow this?

Xhocitli: {Que horrible, sin valor cerdo racist[12]} you horrible worthless racist pig

Xhocitili mom: Ie encenderán {you will be fired}

Mrs.Graceia: Vaya por delante que así perunan ningún trabajo que tiene que de cruzar la frontera con el sida que tenga azada *screaming and taking the two girls with her

Scene 4
*Later that week

Mrs.Graceia: Because I was in a meeting with two of my students*eye balling Diamond and Xhocitli* I am now not allow to talk about racial things because are stundents our llorones (crybabies)…

Xhocitli: Stop it right there you no right to talk about me or my home land I try my best to keep up even thought I just came here heritage or put me down for being me or disrespect my virtues you should be ashamed.

Diamond: Right! You shouldn't just judge because where their from its crazy. Also, if you want to talk about someone and where their from you have to talk about everyone in the world and you because we all are from specific country's or states and you need to realize how everyone is unique

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[12] Diamond and Seraphina used Google Translate to write their Spanish language text.

Mrs.Graceia: Ir a morir a los estudiantes yo (go die you dumb students I quit)

Yellow, My name is Seraphina I'm a 13 year old from Philadelphia I wrote this to show that how you treat students. And isn't the best because say if I called you a inmate how would you like it. I believe by doing that degrades you as a person. I also don't that when you get mad or have a bad day you take it out on us and that's not cool.

(Artifact, May 11, 2016)

In this play, Diamond and Seraphina characterized the ways that teachers treat them—as other, as criminals, as worthy of degradation. We see, importantly, the reoccurrence of language around students as "inmates." That she brought this up again further highlights the impact of this criminalizing discourse on Seraphina.

In addition, in the play, the girls portrayed a stark contrast between the ways that students treat one another and the ways that they are treated by their teacher. From the start of the play, the two girls portrayed, Diamond and Xhocitli, engage in conversations about their subjective realities, as Diamond inquires into why Xhocitli has immigrated to the United States from Peru, showing a level of care for one another (Valenzuela, 1999) not reflected by Diamond and Seraphina's interpretation of their teachers. It is interesting to note that the primary way that the teacher attempts to engage with culture, is through a research report and the preparation of an ethnic dish, objectives that seem rather removed from the relational work of understanding students' experiences with their cultures and nationalities. It seems the teacher seems not to care about the students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and categorizes South American countries as merely topics for research reports,

rather than connected to students' actual lives, a shortsighted vision of what multicultural education can and should be (Nieto, 1999).

In this play, the girls reimagined a situation where they had agency to speak back to their teachers without major consequence, besides some escalating language from the teacher. Through their writing and performance, they were able to express their anger and their resistance, emotions and behaviors that would, in real life, would surely get them into trouble. In the play, however, the teacher decides to quit, presumably freeing the students from her wrath. This was a revising of reality, a projection of their desires that contrasted the ways they felt so often dismissed, their voices undervalued or villainized, labeled as unruly or disrespectful.

Not only were they able to write the play, they were able to act it out (See Figure 6.2). The emotions they named were not just expressed in words, but also in their physical enactments. This gave them the opportunity to play out their anger, as they stomped and threw items on the floor as they acted out the scene for the rest of us. Performance gave an opportunity to tap into their embodied knowledge and

Figure 6.2. Diamond and Seraphina acting out their play.

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physically project their emotional knowledge in ways that were too often punished

in their classrooms.

To better understand their motivations and process in creating the play, I

asked Seraphina what inspired them to write this play. She responded:

> Me and Diamond didn't like how the teachers were treating us students. Like she would say how Ms. X would flick papers at her, call her names, scream at her, lie on her, so I just, influenced it, like how Ms. X would treat us in the beginning and put it in here, the play. (Interview, May 24, 2016)

Playwriting as a genre that allowed the girls to work through issues by writing and

enacting fictional accounts, based in reality, of the issues that mattered most to them

(Winn, 2011). The play demonstrated a flipping of the script as they analyzed and

processed relationships in school and used the same sort of language they claimed

to be exposed to by their teachers, on their teachers. They seem to be calling for

empathy from the teachers as they put on display an account of racist and vitriolic

behavior from a teacher that is, perhaps, in some ways an exaggerated form of their

experiences. In that exaggeration, though, we can find evidence of what the girls

experience most deeply (Lowe, 1996). This provides a counternarrative that traces

the girls affective response to teacher behavior, highlighting something that isn't

quite reality, but that does reflect their very real emotions.

Positive Views of School and Education

I want to be sure to provide a nod toward the ways that their school did

come up in a positive light from the sisters. While the girls did have many critiques

of their school, they also saw hope in it and viewed it as having some positive

qualities. They were able to name positive relationships with teachers and peers as

well as favorite subjects. Additionally, and very importantly, they saw that their path

with education was long term and that it would potentially lead to meeting their life

and career goals.

In the interviews they conducted with each other (as discussed in Chapter 4),

the girls frequently brought up the question "who is your favorite teacher,"

indicating that there was a general feeling that there *were* teachers at the school

who the girls liked and that they assumed that their sisters also had positive

relationships with some of the teachers. One teacher, Mr. Y, the girls' science and

social studies teacher, came up most frequently as their favorite. He was someone

who I had also worked with in previous years and had been witness to his positive

interactions with students over time. He was someone who frequently partook in

acts of kindness with the girls. For instance, during our club meetings in the library,

he at one point stopped by to share a huge chunk of chocolate with the girls and I

witnessed that he frequently greeted them with friendly joking in the hallways.

Diamond described Mr. Y:

> Mr. Y is basically funny and he does care about us, even though sometimes he
> says some things that he shouldn't say, but he's much more nicer than Mrs. X.
> He makes us laugh and stuff. (Interview, May 24, 2016)

In this description, we see that, although he is imperfect and "says some things he

shouldn't say," he, importantly cares about the girls. What's more, Diamond sites

that he makes them laugh. When she refers to Mr. Y., she addresses both their

positive relationship and the positive affect she associates with him.

It also seems that Mr. Y's class was one of the girls' favorites. Diamond

described her favorite class as social studies. She claimed,

> I like social studies, and then I don't know. Some things about social studies I
> never knew there was something like that. I only knew that was all science. I

thought that social studies was based on like history and based on certain people, I didn't know about the Asians. I never knew about that until now. It's kind of hard, because Mr. Y is an advanced teacher. (Interview, February 16, 2016)

Diamond stated that social studies is her favorite because it gives her a vision of history and exposes her to new knowledge, for instance, Asian history. She praised Mr. Y as an advanced teacher, marking her appreciation of a challenge as she engages with new information in his class. It is important to note that here, where she feels cared for and associates positive emotions with the teacher, she also feels like she is learning the most. This strikes an important contrast with her description of Ms. X's class where she claimed she "can't breath."

Seraphina also named Social Studies as her favorite subject. She even once brought up her like of social studies as one of her defining factors when describing herself, saying "I'm a twelve year old African American girl that is pretty awesome. I prefer cake over pie and that's a big deal breaker. Um, I like social studies and I'm pretty cool." During a group interview, when Seraphina was asked about her favorite subject, she replied:

> **S**: Probably social studies, because we can concentrate on women, well… not really, but. Social studies is pretty easy.
> **D**: Yeah, you have Mr. Y.
> **G**: What interests you about it?
> **S**: I like, not, like, more, like, the past, but the present day jobs, businesses, I want to be a CEO or something, so I think social studies is going to help me do that. (Group Interview, March 9, 2016)

Here Seraphina is speaking to the potential of Social Studies as a place to explore women's issues, although, it seems this doesn't really happen. She also attaches social studies to her visions of success in the future pointing again to the material realities of school success.

The framing of school as a route toward success and toward pursuing and developing interests came up multiple times. The girls looked toward high school with great excitement. Kathleen and Seraphina both spoke of the importance of their high school visits as they were making decisions about where they wanted to apply. Ash, as the oldest girl in the group, was asked about her own experiences in high school as the girls contemplated their own choices of high schools and course work. She provided them insights about race relations, how to get to class on time in a big and crowded building, and what line of coursework they should take, suggesting they pursue honors classes. The line of questioning the girls took with her as well as her responses showed that the girls wanted to make good choices when it came to their schooling and to obtain success, They, therefore, framed Ash as an important resource and mentor as they inquired into their own visions of their future education.

Ash also discussed how school provided her exposure to one of her greatest passions, poetry. She explained to me in an interview:

> **A**: Cuz in first grade, in, um, my language class in Indonesian, we are supposed, we usually write poems, like this poem about the sky or something. I'm just like, ok I'll write poems. And I think I was good at it. I think I was good. The teacher's like "Oh that's nice."
> **G**: Yeah.
> **A**: And I didn't write until I get older. Funny story actually. Um, I was about to apply to [high school], I'm in 8th grade. And I'm like I want to go to [an arts based high school]. [The school] makes you have more of, like a portfolio of your art, stuff like that, I don't actually draw. I don't actually paint either. So I'm just like, I'm mean, I do like to write, so I just start writing and from then, I just keep writing, I didn't even go into [that school]. (Interview, June, 2016)

Ash shows that she initially developed a conception of herself as a writer as early as first grade, although that identity didn't really take full hold until late into idle

school. At that point, it was school admissions that actually reengaged her interests in poetry, as she tried to determine how she could present her own talents. Interestingly enough, Ash shows that the parts of schooling that help her develop her intellectual identity, and in this case poetry, are of great importance to her.

Striving in School Despite it All
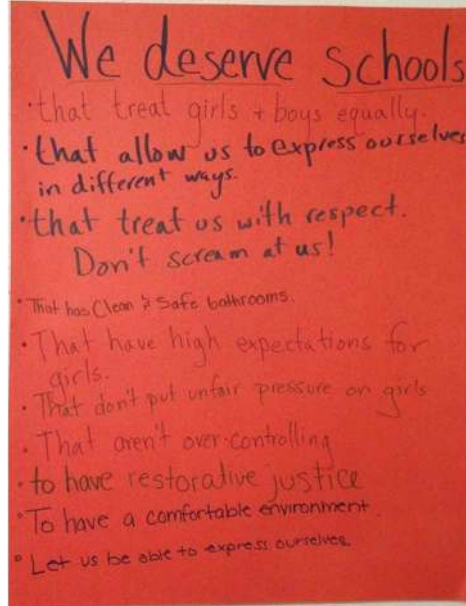
Figure 6.3. Girls' Co-Constructed Text About What They Deserve in Schools

Apparent to me through the girls' narratives and their emotional responses to schooling is that they had a feeling of deservedness of high quality education. The girls, in fact, created the co-constructed text in Figure 6.3 to elaborate on their feelings of deservedness. The girls listed not only ideas that had directly academic implications, for example, the demand that schools "have high expectations" for girls but also issues concerning their emotional well being. For instance, the girls indicate that they deserve schools where teachers respect them, where they aren't overly controlled, and where they are allowed to express themselves. The girls even bring up their physical needs, claiming the demand for cleanliness and safety. What this

indicates is not that girls "hate school," but that they desire schooling that is better for them both to meet their academic needs, but also to meet their emotional and physical needs.

Their feelings, not of rejection, but of the desire for better school conditions, contrasts with many interpretation of Fordam and Ogbu's (1986) theorization of an oppositional identity to schooling held by students of color. Fordham and Ogbu theorized that certain racial and ethnic groups in the United States do poorly in school because schools serve as extensions of dominant culture. What I value in their framing is the attention to the dehumanizing nature of schooling for children and youth of color, an important shift from other deficitizing views of the achievement of Black children. However, I do wish to add to this theory in order to speak back to some of the ways that their theories have been interpreted and used in harmful ways (Akom, 2008). This theory of opposition can be read as describing a culture of deficit that frames Black and other minoritized students in a way that erases the nuances of how schools themselves are largely accountable for differences of achievements and instead indicates that there is a fundamental dissonance between the cultures of many minoritized students and school culture (Harris, 2011).

These theories of opposition can also obscure that academic and cultural knowledge are not diametrically opposed (Brayboy, 2005), and that, in fact, there is potential for important synergy between "schooled" and community knowledge when schools engage culturally responsive pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017). Taking a historical view of establishment of public education, we come to understand that

Black people have largely been responsible for the establishment of free education for American children (Anderson, 1988). With this understanding, we can see the ways that education has been seen by minoritized people as something worth struggling for, rather than simply a symbol of whiteness.

The girls' conversations and writing about schooling highlights that at the root of their fervent critique is that they understand their deservingness of quality education that both offers them opportunities toward success and that respects them as feeling, expressive humans with much to offer. I align myself with Akom (2008) who extends beyond Fordham and Ogbu's theories of "acting white" and instead suggests an asset oriented approach to understanding the relationship to schooling that students of color develop, focusing on community agency, knowledge, and political prowess as resources in critiquing and challenging oppressive and dehumanizing school cultures. Harris's (2011) postulation that youth of color do not reject school wholesale, and most do not necessarily see schooling as fundamentally opposed to their culture.

When I attended the older girls' 8th grade graduation, all of the Unnormal Sisters graduating that year wore Honor Roll sashes. It's important to also note that girls with higher achievement records were students who were popular in their school, liked by classmates of various ethnic and racial backgrounds, contradicting an overgeneralization of Fordham and Ogbu's theory that academic achievement can be associated with "acting white," and thus, can create fissures between successful students of color and their classmates of color. Further, Seraphina, one of the most consistent critics of schooling, was simultaneously class president and

amongst the highest achieving students in her grade, *and* visibly and agentively proud of her Blackness.

There were, of course, some Unnormal Sisters who did not do well in school, but it did not seem that this was as a result of not *desiring* to succeed. On report card days, the girls who were not doing well, some even receiving F's, would express anger and frustration that they did not receive higher marks. They felt anger at their teachers for not seeing the hard work they did in school, feeling a sense of deservingness of higher marks. Here, it seemed that failure was imposed on students, despite their efforts to do well. It was not the case that the girls were indifferent towards school success or desiring of failure. In fact, there was a felt drive for schools that would frame them as successful.

Of note, the sisters' desire for success was often tethered to the material realities of their lives as girls of color. Unlike Willis's (1977) study on British boys form working class backgrounds, who consistently preformed poorly in school because they saw school work as having little to no consequence on their lives, these girls strove for high marks and success despite their often negative feelings toward parts of schools. And it is of relevance that their attitudes toward school, both their critiques and their efforts to succeed were imbued with issues of race and gender. Seraphina, for instance, often claimed that she would one day be a "Black woman CEO of a company." She marked her vision of success as being both raced and gendered. With the connection of her career to her race and gender, she carried the additional understanding that she would have to work twice as hard as a white male because she was Black and female. In her words, people "wouldn't expect [her] to go

as high as a male counterpart." Thus, she would have to prove them wrong. Success

in school was part of her conception of how to achieve success and to prove her

capabilities to those who would always see her race and gender first, and her talents

last.

Kathleen brought up her own wishes for her future and her understandings

of how her education would provide a pathway towards her goals. When asked

about her hopes for her future, she shared the following in addition to her desire for

a family:

> **K**: Ok, and, um, a wonderful career.
> **G**: Any idea what that career is going to be? Or are you still thinking about it?
> **K**: Um, well, I'm going to high school and find out about forensics. And, ... And AP Biology. I really want to be in that.
> **G**: Yeah! That's awesome.
> **K**: But, I like forensics, so probably a career in that.
> **G**: Oh! Cool. So you'd be like a.... police scientist?
> **K**: Yeah.
> **A**: I have a friend who's a senior and she, she wants to be a forensic anthropologist.
> **G**: Yeah. That's really cool. That's awesome. I could never do that job. I'm too weak in the stomach.
> **K**: Yeah, yeah, but I had, a lot of people ask me that, and I was like, well, I can't, I don't know, I have to see dead bodies, ... And I thought it was pretty cool! Even though, I was like "I'm sorry god," I thought it was pretty cool. You know, somebody died, but, ...
> **G**: You were interested in, like what the causes were and all of that?
> **K**: Yeah, and then I didn't know what it was called when you do, you know, like, bodies?
> **G**: Yeah, like autopsies...
> K: Yeah and then somebody told me it was called forensics and I visited a high school that had forensics..., so, I wanted to go there and check out forensics.[13] (Group Interview, April 6, 2016)

It is evident in Kathleen's conversation that she sees high school as an important

step toward one of her major life goals. She is invested in making smart choices that

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[13] Transcript cleaned up to eliminate side conversations and extraneous comments.

will help her achieve her dreams and understands that high school is a crucial

element of these choices. She also highlights the importance of schools that have

varied academic opportunities that might assist girls in reaching their goals. Unlike

Willis's lads, success in school did indeed have dire consequences on her life

outcomes, and, therefore, she and the other girls continued to, despite so many

negative experiences in school, continued to strive toward success.

Summary and Discussion

The data discussed in this chapter points to the importance of opening

spaces for girls to express, in their full capacity, their concerns about schools. This

chapter narrates the ways that girls' emotional and embodied knowledge are

impacted by their schooling experiences. Further it highlights that they are able to

understand schooling because they are tapped into their emotions. It is important to

us, as pedagogues to listen to these tracings in order to best create schooling that is

responsive to and caring of the emotional well being of girls of color. Connie Wun

(2016) explicates that it is time for us to lean in and listen to girls of color in order to

reframe our understandings of girls' navigation of schooling. She says:

> I suggest that schools begin to examine the complexities of girls' lives by
> reframing the problem. Instead of seeing *them* as the problem, the girls'
> narratives reveal that there are larger problems that may elicit anger,
> necessitating their agentic assertions and resistance. The girls' narratives
> suggest that the problems do not lie with them, but are embedded in the
> structures of school that govern their lives. (p. 12-13)

Like Akom (2008), she suggests we take an asset orientation to the ways we

understand minoritized students, and specifically girls of color, in order to better

understand how we can create change in schools. If we lean into this way of

understanding girls, perhaps we can create schools where girls of color are not

forced to engage in ongoing struggles to succeed in a system that doesn't love them.

Perhaps, then, we can create conditions where girls of color are able to flourish in

educative spaces that celebrate them, that take their knowledge in all forms

seriously, and that provide bridges to the opportunities they fight so hard for.

Perhaps we can create spaces that allow girls to thrive as they strive.

CONCLUSION: COMPOSING THE LITERACY PEDAGOGY THAT GIRLS OF COLOR

DESERVE

Introduction

The Unnormal Sisterhood became a world on the borders of schooling, where both otherness and togetherness was critically celebrated. This was a world of discovery, of imperfections, and of growth. It was a world where girls of color traveled together toward something not yet fully defined, learning to navigate that path hand in hand with their sisters. As they traveled in this world in sisterhood, they looked at themselves and at each other, learning how to be with one another both in the Unnormal Sisterhood and in the other spaces they occupied together. In the Unnormal Sisterhood, they were able to celebrate themselves, thereby creating lens to understand and imagine the worlds they deserved, that they desired. They were able to peer out into the spaces they occupied—their school, families, neighborhoods, city, and country—and, in relative safety, work together toward theorizing, critiquing, and imagining change, imagining the creation of what they deserved and desired.

Statement of Main Findings

The knowledge generated from this dissertation speaks to the necessity of creating girl of color centered pedagogies. The chapters sought to answer the questions:

- What happens when girls of color are invited to think deeply about their identities, their relationships, and the issues that matter most to them using multimodal means of expression and exploration within a feminist writing pedagogy?

- What does a feminist of color pedagogy that is celebratory of girls look like and what is my role as the teacher-learner in this space?

The key arguments in response to these questions are summarized in this section and will serve as a launching off point for a conversation about the implications regarding literacy pedagogy and research.

Composing Self-Definition and Self-Love

A primary argument of this research is that critically celebratory feminist of color pedagogy for girls of color goes beyond a naïve sense of celebration that is simply affirmative, and instead moves toward critical celebration. Through critical celebratory curriculum, girls of color are able to do the important work of exploring and theorizing their identities, critiquing injustices that impedes on their positive self image and ability to thrive, and creating counternarratives and other texts that resist those injustices. By creating various multimodal texts across genre, the Unnormal Sisters showed their multilayered identities, their complex ways of being, their emotional and intellectual understandings of themselves, and their resistance to misinterpretations of their being.

This work was valuable because it was, for the most part, centered on the joys and desires of the girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood, rather than on their trauma and pain, which so much research and so many narratives about girls of color tend to highlight (Tuck, 2009). The curriculum of the Unnormal Sisterhood was highly controlled by the girls and their desires, reflecting that when given the opportunity to express what they feel is important about themselves, they chose, for the most part, to write about their strengths, beauty, and power, even as they discussed some of their pains disappointments, and anger with the world. They persistently

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depicted themselves in positive light, not ignoring the ways the outside world affected them, but still making sure to promote images of themselves that reflected their strengths. The writing of counternarrative and the creation of other self-representations through multimodal texts were literate acts that helped girls navigate their critical self-celebration. These texts and the processes that occurred along side the creation of these texts were opportunities for girls to seize control over their representation, an important and resistant act in the face of deficitizing narratives and controlling images that, as girls of color, they too often were faced with.

One of the crucial interventions that the critical celebratory curriculum of the Unnormal Sisterhood made was that, even as girls explored their pain and reflected their buy into some white supremacist heteropatriarchal values, the critical inquiry that was at the heart of the work did not let the girls stagnate in these views. Through the cracks of the girls' beautiful representations of themselves, every once in a while, seeped evidence of their negative self-perceptions, often framed in the intersections of racist and sexist ideologies. For instance, some of the girls' writing reflected colorism, a predilection for capitalism, and a devaluing of emotions and relationships. These anti-feminist of color principals, though, through the lens of critical celebration, were not stuck. When the girls self-reflection unearthed these ideals, this opened opportunities to engage in discussions and experiences that offered new perspectives that pushed them to engage in new more nuanced celebrations, rooted in anti-racist and anti-sexist ideologies. Critical celebration, then, was one aspect of the ways that girls built understandings of racist and sexist

ideologies while maintaining healthy concepts of self worth and appreciation for their sisters, as they continued to develop and complicate their theories about their worlds.

Composing Unnormal Sisterhood

This chapter illustrated the ways that the Unnormal Sisterhood moved toward understandings and enactments of solidarity as they engaged in various literate experiences with one another. This growing solidarity that the girls inhabited was marked by an understanding that their differences as well as their connectedness were important resources for a viable notion of solidarity across their multiracial identities. The understandings and appreciations of difference and connection were enhanced by literary engagements that created conditions for girls to continually build a more sisterly intimacy with one another. With the continual nuancing of these understanding, the girls were able to not only begin to recognize their combined strength, but also to realize how to best support one another as individuals faced different vulnerabilities. In particular, the Black and Asian girls were able to work toward developing their awarenesses of how, across their differences, they were privy to different understandings of and experiences with racism and sexism and the intersections of these violences.

This chapter highlighted the ways in which curriculum of the Unnormal Sisterhood was designed to place primacy on not just the actual physical pieces of writing produced by the girls, but instead, to focus on the important correlated growth that was taking place amongst the girls. While they did produce beautiful pieces of writing and art, they, perhaps more importantly, were given opportunities

to develop fluid communal and individual political identities and intentions in tandem with these productions. Additionally, many of the texts the produced, for example the Instagram account we shared, were fluid texts that had no exact end point. This mirrored their evolving senses of individual and group identity. By removing the stress of producing polished and controlled pieces of writing and, instead, by allowing the girls to engage in the creation of fluid texts that represented their in-process conception of sisterhood, the girls were able to compose an ever-evolving community around the writing by engage in developing loving perceptions of one another (Lugones, 1987) and, in turn, growing commitments to one another in the face of various intersecting violences of white supremacist heteropatriarchy.

Composing Critiques of School

The third major finding from this work was that the centering of girls of color knowledge and ways of knowing in the curriculum of the Unnormal Sisterhood gave way to critical engagement with ideas of schooling. Because schooling was the structure in which they found themselves for the majority of their waking hours, it was often the topic of conversation and critique. What became evident was that the girls had strong affective responses to schooling that reflected their understandings that school was not designed for them. The curriculum of the Unnormal Sisterhood engaged resources, such as emotional knowledge, that were often silenced or criticized in schools, and, in turn, developed critiques of school.

The girls' conversations reflected that they felt a lack of control during school as a product of an uncaring environment produced by teachers and the dominant ideologies that structured school. They spoke of the ways that teachers and

administrators infringed on their freedom through degrading language, through disingenuous relationships and a lack of listening, by ignoring their needs for protection and support, and through the curriculum itself, in particular writing. As they engaged their multifaceted ways of comprehending schooling, they revealed that they understood that schooling denied them opportunities to use their full range of ways of knowing. This is not to say they never spoke positively about school or that they developed completely oppositional identities to school. In fact, the girls were almost all successful in school and desired an education that would help them achieve their long-term goals. However, what is evident through their critiques is that they were most certainly felt short changed. Were the sisters able to engage in curriculum that centered their lives and understandings, that worked towards freedom rather than control, and engaged critical practices aimed at dismantling, rather than reifying, oppressive structures, there is no telling what levels of intellectual and political flourishing could be reached.

Discussion

The work of the Unnormal Sisterhood can best be encapsulated through the words of the girls. The following is a found poem, created by culling the girls' words from interviews on the final day of the club (Interviews, May 24, 2016) . I drew from, especially, the conversations about what they learned in the Unnormal Sisterhood to help me understand, from their perspectives, what the value of the club was.

I learned a lot.

I learned about bettering myself

To be myself
Being yourself and not trying
    to be like other people
To express your feelings,
    don't care about what
    anyone else say

We were all girls, you know?

I learned about sisterhood.
I learned about friendship.
We learned each other's
    ethnicity and race,
    and family background.
We learned about other people's culture
    you have more knowledge so
    you won't offend
    anyone else of that race.
That they experience different things
    than you do.
To support one another
    even if you aren't the same
    culture, race, or gender

I realized about the racial conflict
    that has been occurring
    females and minorities
    have went through so much.
I'm like, wow,
    that makes me
    a pretty awesome
            person
    for being able to go through that
            every day.

I'm so happy
    I'm female
I learned about
    womanhood
    and all that
about women's power
    that women can really change the world

We have so much power in the world
Can change the world and everything.

> We learned about social activism
> > we should try to be more involved
>
> There's a lot of women social activists around this world
> > who can actually give me hope
> > in feminism.
>
> What's the word I'm looking for,
> > feminism?
>
> This is where
> > we had a fun time being
> > with these girls
> > and knowing them more
>
> I really like hanging out with these girls
> I like being with you girls.

The girls' words reflect Unnormal Sisterhood. They reflect the ways that they came together to critically celebrate themselves and each other. The girls iterate that they came to understand their unnormal power as they investigated not only the brilliance of their sisters, but the ways other women of color have made intellectual and political changes in the world. Importantly, this was all done in the joyful company of their sisters. These words will be carried through this discussion in service of making implications for both practice and research.

Feminist Ideologies in the Unnormal Sisterhood

As pedagogues engage in the work to establish critical celebratory writing curriculum that challenges white supremacist heteropatriarchal values, it is of utmost important that theorists who have been the most challenged by intersecting oppressions form the basis of their work. Women of color theorists who take a specific lens to understand the relationship between writing, intersectional

identities, and systems of power have long theorized why writing matters to women

of color. What is often ignored in these conversations, but is brought to light by

Esther Ohito (2016), is that much of the decentering of white male hegemony is

already taking place, although not in ways recognizable through a white

heteropatriarchal lens. She refers to "the utensils that Black feminist theorists and

cultural workers have fashioned and used to stealthily till the charred earth layering

the curricular space of death, and then to plant in those soils the seed of life that is

Black girls' and women's humanness" (p. 438). Attention to these "utensils" helps us

name and disrupt the exclusionary and violent nature of curriculum while also

taking notice of the intellectual and political and artistic work girls and women of

color are doing in spite of these curricular violence imparted upon them. The

Unnormal Sisterhood was a space in which I hoped the girls would become aware of

their manipulations of these utensils in order to exercise their strengths, brilliance,

and resistant strategies whether in the space of the Unnormal Sisterhood or beyond.

      Unnormal Sisterhood and Girl of Color Knowledge. Currently, in

dominant conceptions of writing and literacy pedagogy, there is a primacy placed on

hegemonic values that attempts to decenter, to work against or ignore other forms

of knowledge and ways of knowing (Paris & Alim, 2014). What is valued in most of

these curricula is particular structures, logics, and modalities. These values are often

to the exclusion of the knowledge of minoritized communities. However, as Barbara

Christian (1987) describes, people of color take in theorization, which she describes

as a threading together of the personal, political, particular, and proverbial.

Christian (1987) claims, "For people of color have always theorized—but in forms

quite different from Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" (p. 52). Christian suggests, like Lorde (2007), that it is the right of people of color to determine their own lives, and this is a right that they consistently exercise. However, because of societal structures, these theorizations are often left ignored by those with power and, thus, existing power structures remain intact. It was the goal of the Unnormal Sisterhood to emphasize the girls' already existing power to theorize and to determine their own lives.

Significant to curriculum that is responsive to the needs of girls of color is that theorization described by Christian is not created in isolation, but through the interaction between people. The Unnormal Sisterhood put primacy on the relational knowledge built amongst girls of color. Following in the footsteps of theorists like Patricia Hill Collins (2000), the work took on a stance that care is a source of political and intellectual understanding. Following the legacy of Grace Lee Boggs (1998), the Unnormal Sisterhood centered on dialectical knowledge formation that counted on relational learning as a key aspect to resistance and revolution.

The Unnormal Sisterhood provides an example of how curriculum could make valuable shifts towards centering girl of color knowledge and ways of knowing. The girls, when describing the work of the Unnormal Sisterhood, unearthed the importance of that centralization. When I asked Kathleen what she learned from the Unnormal Sisterhood, she responded:

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I learned about sisterhood. I learned about friendship. I learned about bettering myself. Um, the one thing that I really loved was that we were all girls, you know? I loved that. I'm, I'm so happy I'm female because I feel like we have so much power in the world and can change the world and everything. And I'm glad, you know, it's a woman who's probably going to be running the country. So, I am very happy about women and power and stuff like that. I'm glad that I learned about womanhood and all that. (Interview, May 24, 2016)

Kathleen's response indicates the centrality of girls and their relationships, their sisterhood in the curriculum and what that meant to her. In this quote she indicates that learning about women and developing sisterhood helped her understand her own power attached to her female identity.

Ciara also highlighted her appreciation for the Unnormal Sisterhood, commenting, "I like the people that's here, and I like to talk about the things that I wouldn't normally talk about…. Isn't it feminism? And like how we are treated in school and like all the random things." She specifically spoke about writing as well, saying, "Cuz we got to write about, like, things that happened, like teachers and like what, uh sexual harassment and that we couldn't talk to our parents about And what we wouldn't normally write about…I like talking about the things that happened during school, which be irking my soul" (Interview, May 24, 2016). Her words indicate that, within the Unnormal Sisterhood, she was able to address, through discussion and writing, issues she felt she had little outlet for otherwise, including developing an understanding of feminism. This highlights the importance that speaking of the girls' experience based knowledge took for her. Further, she claims that part of the comfort of doing this was doing it with the other girls in the group, highlighting the relational quality of the learning that occurred there. Finally, she

points to the emotional quality of the work, explaining that she appreciated the opportunity to talk about things "which be irking [her] soul."

Emily's final interview reflected similar themes of the importance of expressing emotions in the Unnormal Sisterhood.

>**G**: Ok, aright. So what would you say is your favorite part of this club?
>**E**: When we write poems and express our feelings.
>**G**: Mmhmm, and why do you like that?
>**E**: Because it helps me get everything out.
>….
>**G**: So, what do you feel like you've learned in this club?
>**E**: Like, to express your feelings, don't care about what anyone else say, and other things. (Interview, May 24, 2016)

Emily brings up the importance of feelings and working through them during the Unnormal Sisterhood. This was not just a benign act for her. Rather, it helped her process important aspects of her life and prevent them from festering by not expressing them. This speaks to the importance of centering emotions in literacy curriculum, as the penting up of emotions can be destructive. A caring pedagogy needs to attend not only to the intellectual growth of students, but also to their emotional wellbeing. For girls of color who do face many traumas as a result of intersecting oppressions, work that validates their emotions can provide pathways toward critique, resistance, and healing.

A caring environment that allows girls to practice a healthy exploration of their emotions requires a certain level of safety and trust. Halsey also spoke of the importance of having a "comfortable place to share your feelings" (Interview, May 24, 2016). She explained that she loved that "we could all talk really in that there shouldn't be drama involved in it. That we can also learn a lot about gossip in this school, which is a freebee. And it is fun to do something after school to help us

engage our brains and not be at home, be all bored, and complaining about it." In these words, we see that she highlights the necessity of comfort around the sharing of feelings and stories. She speaks to the necessity of a "drama free" environment, a place where the girls were not seeking to tear one another down or stir up bad feelings toward one another, but instead, to relate with one another as they shared stories, sometimes in the form of gossip, and ideas, and emotional reflections with one another.

The girls also emphasized the importance of social justice issues in the curriculum. Seraphina commented during a whole group conversation on the last day of the club, reflecting on the year, "It was fun being here because you get to talk about stuff which you usually wouldn't talk to, about… We learned about social injustices, which I like, and that's pretty cool" (group conversation, May 24, 2016). In this comment, Seraphina names that the discussion of unsanctioned topics and social injustice were of great significance to her in the Unnormal Sisterhood. Halsey added on, "I really liked hanging out with these girls. People. Humans, and I get to learn about a lot of you guys and even make some new friends and I learned a lot about social equality, especially on Asians, like myself" (Group Conversation, May 24, 2016). In a one on one interview, she also commented that she developed friendships with people she would not have otherwise been friends with, citing Diamond, specifically (Interview, May 24, 2016). When I asked her to name something important that she learned from the club she said:

> **H**: The thing that was important was that we learned each other's ethnicity and race, and family background.
> **G**: so kind of those conversations where we interviewed each other?

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H: Yeah, yeah. Like culture, and we learned about other people's culture are very important so you have more knowledge so you won't offend anyone else of that race. (Interview, May 24, 2016)

Here, Halsey is citing the importance of understanding across difference. Although her explanation is partial, citing that learning not to offend as the main benefit, rather than the development of solidarity or coming to a deeper analysis of systemic racism, this is still an important indication that the relational work of understanding difference across intersectional identities mattered to the girls.

Giselle also explained her enjoyment of the club being based in both relational work as well as political work. She commented, "It was like this is where we had a fun time being with these girls and knowing them more…. And learn a lot about women's power." (Group Conversation, May 24, 2016). Across these comments, we see how the girls highlight the importance of speaking about unsanctioned topics, such as feminism, women's rights, racism, and social justice, in the company of other girls of color.

Across the girls' reflections on the Unnormal Sisterhood, we see that girls call for a place where they are allowed to be more themselves, more free with their feelings, more open about the occurrences of their lives, more able to address topics about identity and power, and more in touch with other girls of color with whom they can safely share their stories and ideas. This has important implications for literacy pedagogy. It highlights the importance of brining these desires of girls of color into the curriculum in order to create literacy pedagogies that stimulate girls' interests and center their knowledge and ways of knowing in service of developing important conversations about their world.

Traversing Genres in the Unnormal Sisterhood. Central to the work of the Unnormal Sisterhood was that it tapped into various genres in order to allow the girls to explore their dynamism. The genres utilized in by the Unnormal Sisters were genre that tapped into not only more traditionally conceived forms of knowledge, but also girls' emotional knowledge and aesthetic considerations. Breaking from the highly structured and overly controlled genre of their school day, this type of writing and text production allowed girls to tap into a fuller breadth of their intellect and humanity. What's more, the multimodal literacies utilized tapped into both girls' lineages of woman of color intellectuals, as well as their contemporary culture, allowing them to create unique texts that reflected their dynamic identities and communal and cultural knowledge (Campano, Nichols, & Player, forthcoming).

The girls were reflective on the ways that the different genre worked for them. For instance, Diamond reflected on her love of poetry, citing writing poetry as her favorite part of the club. What's more, she understood that her writing stood not only to benefit her, but those who read it as well. I asked her what she thought people would learn from reading her poetry. She claimed, "They'll learn that you can express yourself, don't care about what anyone thinks basically. You can express yourself if you want" (Interview, May 24, 2016). Here she shows her understandings of the importance of poetry as a means to express oneself. She demonstrates that poetry has power in that it accesses the personal and gives the writer control of how they represent themselves unencumbered by outside opinions. Further, when she says "you can express yourself if you want" she indicates an understanding that she,

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as a poet, has agency in making decisions about when and how she shares herself in

her writing..

Seraphina also spoke directly about her favorite modalities. She claimed:

Figure 7.1. One of Seraphina's collages

> I like the collage piece, was pretty cool. Um, the poems are good. I like writing about myself. Um, I think one of my favorite things was the collage. Now the thing we did now, to take the pictures (see Figure 7.1)], that was pretty cool cuz you got, you have to fuse all the elements, the drawing, the writing, and they are all based off of you. (Interview, May 24, 2016)

Here, she acknowledges the utility of

multimodality, expressing her desire to

combine words and images to create meaning

based off of her own identity and experiences.

She highlights the importance of being able to

center herself in the genres that we explored and, for her, this was most present in

the multimodal projects we did. Ciara also spoke to genre, saying her favorite thing

we did in club was write our plays, explaining, as detailed in chapter 5, that play

writing allowed her to explore issues of sexual harassment and reflect on her own

feelings about it. All three of these girls show the ways that engaging genre that

allow them to explore their emotions, their identities, and the social justice issues

that affect them the most through a lens of personal experience, were significant

aspects of the Unnormal Sisterhood.

Currently, dominant writing curriculum only taps into a fragment of the

linguistic, cultural, creative wealth that youth bring with them to the classroom.

These community and cultural knowledges are not diametrically opposed to what is currently most often framed as "school knowledge" (Brayboy, 2005). In a culturally sustaining pedagogy, as conceived by Paris & Alim (2014, 2017), community and cultural knowledges would only enhance student learning, as they "teach students to be linguistically and culturally flexible across multiple language varieties and cultural ways of believing and interacting" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 96). This sort of flexibility is reflected in the ways that the girls were able to use and further develop school based practices in the space of the Unnormal Sisterhood—for instance, doing close analytic readings of poetry, analyzing craft, and making various intertextual connections—while also making meaning by engaging in poetry and other writing and multimodal productions that allowed them to break form from restrictive language use of dominant pedagogies in favor of their own tongue, their own feelings, their own theories rooted in identities and experiences.

The Unnormal Sisterhood as a Site of Freedom. Across the data, when asked to reflect on what they desired for the spaces they occupied, the sisters implied a desire for freedom. Insinuated by the girls' virulent critique of their school's controlling pedagogy discussed in Chapter 6, the sisters collectively and individually felt that their lack of freedom in educational spaces was restricting their learning. They instead, desired the type of freedom to talk and write at will about, in Ciara's words, "things [they] wouldn't normally talk about" in traditionally academic spaces.

Seraphina illustrated her appreciation for a freer curriculum when she described the Unnormal Sisterhood, saying, "Well, it's a, it's a club where you can

prewrite, predraw, this is like a creative place, where you have people trying to help you do good things. And it's pretty awesome. Because the person there who runs it is pretty awesome" (Interview, March 15, 2016). Seraphina emphasizes multiple levels of her appreciation for the club, including the process orientation, the creativity tapped, the positive aims, and the relationships built in the club. The ideas of prewriting and predrawing indicate the idea that she desires writing curriculum that is flexible and that takes time. Prewriting is part of the process of experimentation with writing, of slowly moving through ideas with out pressure to immediately produce the structured products she had complained about in her school setting. She further highlights the ability to be creative in the Unnormal Sisterhood, rather than being confined to those structured writing process. To me, creativity in writing is freedom in writing. A final source of freedom is that the club had people who "helped you do good things." The positive aims of the Unnormal Sisterhood represent both the ethic of caring established in the club. To help the girls "do good things" was to help them achieve and surmount the challenges set up for them by the various intersecting oppressions they faced.

Halsey claimed that she hoped that my research would serve "to show people that kids can actually do stuff, do strong, independent stuff and they don't need an adult all the time, that you can be, they can show strength through independence" (Interview, May 24, 2016). With these words, she points out the ways that she craves curriculum that respects her and trusts her to make choices, rather than always making choices for her. Cumulatively, the girls reflections on the Unnormal Sisterhood help clarify their felt need for curriculum that valued their knowledge

and ways of knowing, that pushed them to develop that knowledge and those ways

of knowing, that cared for them, and that trusted them.

Implications for Practice

The findings that arose from this dissertation have important implications

for writing pedagogies with girls of color. Based on my learning from the Unnormal

Sisterhood, I make numerous suggestions for a variety of literacy centered learning

spaces, including formal, informal, in school, and out of school contexts. These

implications could benefit teachers, community workers, administrators of schools

and community centers, and others invested in creating pedagogies for and with

girls of color.

Creating and Maintaining Pedagogy for Girls of Color

Primary to the creation of formal and informal academic spaces that are

responsive to the needs of girls of color is that girls of color are involved in the

formation and evolution of these spaces. Girls of color do not need programming

imposed upon them, but they do need spaces where their voices, ideas, and

knowledge are celebrated, where they can build power alongside other girls and

women of color (Brown, 2009, 2013). When programming and pedagogy are

centered on assumptions about what girls need, rather than on what girls name as

their needs, it is likely that, at best, the girls will be short changed as the specificities

of what they know they need remains unaddressed. At worst, the intersecting

oppressions they already face will be reiterated in new forms as outsiders fail to

understand what the girls are experiencing. As the girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood

demonstrated, girls of color hold extensive critiques and understandings of their

worlds made available to them as a product of their lived experiences (Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000). It is the obligation of pedagogues in formal and informal spaces to take these seriously as they co-create learning opportunities *for* girls of color *with* girls of color.

To accomplish this, it is necessary that those who facilitate and help build these spaces for girls of color centralize their relationships with the girls of color over time. This cannot be quickly implemented or designed by those who do not have knowledge of the specific contexts of the girls' lives. Further, it is not simply about the initiation of these clubs, it is about the long term work to iteratively learn from the girls. As demonstrated by the Unnormal Sisterhood, while long term goals can be set from the start, it is necessary for pedagogues to iteratively respond to the girls' developing needs both on a day to day basis as well as over time. This means curriculum should be developed in partnership with the communities it is meant to benefit.

Centering Critical Celebration

Importantly, the spaces created for and by girls of color must be spaces that critically celebrate girls' humanity. This is not naïve celebration that ends at affirmation. Rather, these spaces must affirm, but also in the process of celebration, allow girls of color to critique and speak back to deficitizing discourses about them. This sort of celebration of the unnormal knowledge and ways of knowing that girls of color possess can be a challenge to false notions of normal that tend to exclude and demean girls of color. As in the Unnormal Sisterhood, this can take form in writing, in dialogue, and in multimodal texts, as girls are invited to express their full

breadth of brilliance in literacy pedagogy. Pedagogues, then, must approach curriculum for girls of color from an inquiry stance that allows them to challenge their own beliefs and biases as they listen and affirm girls' theories. They must help girls to develop their own inquiries that grow out of the critical work the girls do as they develop control over self-representation.

Centering Woman of Color Intellectual Histories

As discussed by Gholnecsar Muhammad (2015a) women of color, particularly black women, have been engaged in literate social justice work over time and literacy pedagogues and their students would benefit from the knowledge produced by looking to legacies of Black women's writing collectives. This sentiment is highlighted by Brittney C. Cooper (2017) who explores the intellectual contributions of Black women, citing not only the knowledge contributed, but also the ways that women created spaces for themselves, how women changed intellectual geographies, to make spaces for their knowledge to bloom, their political goals to take hold. Leaning into the work of women of color across history provides both inspiration for pedagogical considerations that are rooted in the intellectual heritage of girls of color as well as texts that expose girls to feminist of color ideologies that might help them continue to grow their theorization and critiques of the world as they are exposed to new stories, new terminologies, and new suggestions for change, all rooted in women of color experiences.

Centering Girl of Color Knowledge and Ways of Knowing

By looking to these women of color lineages, one important revelation that will be made is the varying knowledge sources that girls of color bring with them.

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Not only do girls of color have unique understandings of the world based on their positionalities (Collins, 2000; Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000), they also have sources of knowledge including emotional, relational, and creative that are too often ignored by dominant conceptions of knowledge that put primacy on abstract knowledge (Christian, 1987; Edwards, McArthur, Russell-Owens, 2016; Jaggar, 1989; Mignolo, 2011). Pedagogues must challenge themselves to see past narrow conceptions of what knowledge is to create more equitable curriculum, not only for girls of color, but for all students.

It is necessary to understand, too, that this centralization of girl of color knowledge does not mean that what is traditionally considered academic knowledge is not worked upon. To assume that girl of color knowledge is in opposition to academic knowledge is an incredibly deficitizing stance that makes light of the theories and intellectual prowess of girls of color. The binaries of "school" versus "culture" that is imposed on so many people of color, and in particular girls of color as a result of their intersecting identities must be challenged. As demonstrated by the girls in the Unnormal Sisterhood, as they engaged in girl of color centered pedagogy, they were also engaging some of the work of school, including, but not limited to, close reading, studying mentor texts, engaging critical analysis, developing oracy skills, forming arguments, and so on. The implication here is that this work does not have to occur only out of school. Teachers can implement changes to their programing that not only address school based tasks, but also girl of color knowledge and ways of knowing.

Centering Stories

One way that pedagogues can move towards girl of color centered pedagogy is to center girls' stories as important intellectual resources. By allowing girls to control their stories, they are able to participate in the important resistant act of counternarrative (Ladston-Billings & Tate, 1995). When girls partake in counternarrative, they can do the work described by Gloria Anzaldúa (1983)—they can name the world as they see it, discover anew themselves and the world around them, to develop a resistant sense of autonomy from patriarchal structures. Anzaldúa emphasizes that this is especially important, even life-preserving, in the context of a world that too often erases and degrades women and girls of color. It is necessary to highlight that, as scholars like María Paula Ghiso (2011) explicate, simply centering children's voices in the curriculum will not necessarily accomplish the goals that those like Anzaldúa describe. To engage writing as social transformation, writing teachers must emphasize the connection of their stories to their cultural histories and political desires. Educators working with girls of color, then, should make shifts to centering the experiences of girls of color in their writing curriculum, offering numerous opportunities for girls of color to not only name their experiences, but also to critique the injustices they experience and narrate their resistance, power, and joy.

Centering a Breadth of Genre in Writing Curriculum

When pedagogues allow girls to engage in these counternarratives through a variety of genre, not only do girls put name to their experiences, but they can also tap into a variety of resources too often ignored by mainstream curriculum,

including emotional, relational, and cultural knowledge (Edwards, McArthur, & Russell-Owens, 2016). Working against the over emphasis of informational and argument writing so prevalent since the initiation of the Common Core Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) is an important feminist of color move. The genre currently most emphasized in public school classrooms, while important, tend to ignore the dynamism of girl of color knowledges. A worthwhile pursuit would be to not only include a wider variety of genre, but also a fluidity of genre that brings personal experience, creativity, cultural knowledge, relational knowledge, and so on into non-fiction genre that are too often conceived in K-12 education as rigid responses to texts (Campano, Ngo, & Player, 2015; Player, Ngo, Campano & Ghiso, 2016).

Decentering Product Orientations

A move away from product orientations and towards the *humans* involved in writing would provide a critical change in writing pedagogy. In the current climate, excess emphasis is put on students not only to produce, but to produce standardized products in mass quantity. The culture of high stakes testing has shaped writing curriculum such that it seems quickly produced five paragraph essays in response to a reading are the most valued writing in schools, as passing standardized exams depend on this kind of production. The work of the Unnormal Sisterhood suggests that rather than focusing entirely on the pieces of writing produced, placing attention on the processes, the individuals, and relationships behind the creation might create the conditions for deeper and more sustained intellectual and political commitments by students.

The work of the Unnormal Sisterhood highlights that a process orientation disconnected from social realities, cultural knowledge, and critical understandings, cannot accomplish the full potential of writing (Ghiso, 2011; Lensmire, 2000). A process orientation that seeks to cultivate the political and intellectual identities and action of girls of color needs to take on the realities of the intersectional identities and oppressions of girls of color. With this understanding, curriculum can be structured to create opportunities for writing to be a tool for inquiring into injustice and for reflecting and developing the resistant powers of girls of color.

Centering Sisterhood

One incredibly important resource often underemphasized in school literacies is caring relationship, the makings of sisterhood. As demonstrated by the Unnormal Sisterhood, sisterhood was an incredible intellectual and political resource that exposed girls to new understandings and new critiques. Further, sisterhood was at the root of political resistance as girls learned about one another's different relationships to white supremacist heteropatriarchy and, in turn, discovered how they might support each other through adversity. In academic spaces, these caring relationships can be a resource for developing sophisticated critiques about the world. Importantly, the desire to develop these critiques can be motivated by an ethic of caring (Collins, 2000). Understanding the importance of care and relationships can help pedagogues be thoughtful about how they establish healthy environments for youth that emphasize collaboration, trust, and understanding across difference.

Creating and Maintaining Girl of Color Spaces of Sanctuary

There are drastic changes in our schools and in most systems in our country that need to be made before the humanity of girls of color is truly valued. It is also true that we cannot wait for these changes to be made. The needs of girls of color are far too urgent. Thus, in order to provide girls with the sanctuary to recuperate, to maintain and enhance their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health that can be torn down by existing in the dehumanizing systems they encounter on a daily basis, we must create and maintain girl of color spaces in and beyond schools. As discussed by Alice Walker (1983), this does not mean that girls of color need separatism, but, rather, they need places in which to withdraw from the intersecting oppressions to be with other girls and women of color in order to heal and to experience joy with one another, to build tools to critique and disrupt those systems, and to build sisterhoods that they can rely on upon reentry to dominant spaces. Thus, it is my recommendation that schools that serve girls of color and organizations that provide services for communities of color establish the conditions for women and girls of color to create girl and woman of color only spaces in order to do the work of cultivating sisterhood.

Implications for Research

The Unnormal Sisterhood has further implications for research. This research project emphasizes the importance of decolonizing and humanizing research (Paris & Winn, 2014; Patel, 2015; Smith, 1999) that disrupts traditional research methods that deficitize, devalue, and erase local knowledges of the

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communities involved. This discussion will speak in particular to the implications

for research for and with girls of color.

Taking a Practitioner Research Approach to Research With and For Girls of

Color

Practitioner research holds much promise for research with and for girls of

color. Because practitioner research as conceived by Cochran Smith and Lytle

(2009) centers self-reflexivity of the researcher, it creates a dynamic where the

researcher does not presume to know all and, in fact, challenges themselves to

address their own biases and the limits of their understanding from their

positionality. This creates opportunities for voices of girls of color to be prioritized

as the researcher takes a learning stance to the knowledge that girls of color have to

offer.

Practitioner research can also open up the opportunity for researchers to

investigate their own practice, thereby creating opportunities to invent pedagogical

strategies that are responsive to the needs of girls of color. Practitioner research

methods allow the researcher to not only observe patterns, but to also create

possibilities for new patterns to emerge. Research that takes on this iterative stance

represents an ethical approach to research with girls of color because it refuses to

let stand harmful patterns that emerge in the research. It allows for the researcher

to engage with what is best for the research community as the research develops.

Because girls of color are subject to so many injustices, it stands to reason that a

researcher working with girls of color will observe these harmful patterns. Through

a practitioner stance, researchers are not obligated to stand by as "objective

observers," but rather, they are able to step in and, with girls of color, create new conditions that will hopefully move toward justice and wellbeing for the girls involved with the research. The practices they engage can, like the work of the Unnormal Sisterhood, create new images of the dynamic practices of girls of color.

What is most important about practitioner research with girls of color is that it reflects so many feminist values. Practitioner research allows for relational knowledge to be centered. This challenges the dominant ideologies that researchers should be emotionally and relationally distant from their research and participants, and instead allows for new ways of knowing to shape understandings of girls of color. What's more, theories and understandings can be co-created in practitioner research, as all members of the research team are valued as knowledge-producers. It is in the dialect of the practice of teaching that valuable knowledge can emerge.

Placing Girls' Voices at the Center of Research

Research about girls of color will fail to reveal the true complexities of the lives and emotions of girls of color as long as it decenters their voices. Ash, when asked about what other educational researchers and teachers should learn from the Unnormal Sisterhood said:

> I think it would help the, especially like the, um, maybe like, people that studies in the women's studies—women's history or something like that. I think it would help them more if they were to work with girls of color. Cuz I, I was like, there are colored [sic] people, then there are girls, which obviously, um, they're faced with more issues than rather than, you know, a noncolored [sic] person or white person. (Interview, June, 2016)

Ash intuits what so many ethical education scholars try to impress on their audiences: that to truly understand the many issues of intersecting racism and sexism that girls of color face, it is necessary to work *with* them. She names areas of

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study that are too often distanced from the realities of girls' lived day to day experiences—women's studies and women's history—and indicates she feels these fields would benefit from direct work with girls of color. She points to the ways that the lives girls lead are intersectional and can't be boiled down to just race or gender. And for her, to understand the dynamism of girls of color, researchers must work with girls of color.

As demonstrated by the understandings that arose from the Unnormal Sisterhood, we see that the direct work with girls of color did, in fact, reveal important insights into the historical lineages of women of color and how these have implications for the contemporary lives of girls of color. We see that the girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood developed and honed in sophisticated critiques and enactments of solidarity, topics theorized by many women of color. Work with girls of color that allows their voices and experiences to be centered gives direct empirical evidence to these theories and also gives opportunities for new theories to arise as girls' complex theorizations are honored and given time to develop.

Another important issue Ash's quote brings up is the necessity for research to center the voices of *girls* of color who are experiencing not only the intersections of race and gender and other identities that woman of color researchers might share, but they also are claim youth identities that university researchers do not. Although all women were at one time young, it is impossible for us to understand the unique experiences of being young in this day and age, or any day and age in which we did not exist as girls. Thus, although women of color can offer unique and important insights and frameworks to studies on girls of color (Evans-Winters &

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Esposito, 2010), their positionalities in relationship to *girls* of color are limited by their age. This doubly impacts the need for researchers to conduct girl of color centered research that highlights and elevates the theories and ideas of girls of color themselves. As long as a distanced approach is taken, as long as researchers continue to work on, rather than with, girls of color research will only illuminate a small set of understandings. Ash's intuitions here iterate that abstract logics that try to make meanings from a distance will not do justice to the complexity of the issues that girls of color face today.

Directions for Research

The work of the Unnormal Sisterhood is still incomplete in many ways. It is work I hope will continue to blossom across my career as a literacy researcher and in the hands of other ethical literacy researchers. As my first attempt at doing coalitional writing research with girls of color, the Unnormal Sisterhood offers a platform off of which to build the future directions of my research.

The Unnormal Sisterhood gives only one image of what critically celebratory work looks like in a specific context, with specific girls. In my design of the curriculum, I so heavily relied on following the girls' lead, which in this context and for these girls, was often aimed at playful interactions and at connecting through conversation. Often times, the conversations that reflected on women of color writers and on exposing the girls to additional theories and terminologies to help them describe their experiences did not hold the girls' attention and thus, we moved on in different directions. What's more, the girls did not usually stay focused on writing for long stretches of time, usually becoming quickly absorbed in their

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phones or in each other during writing time. This is not to say that in their play and

socializing there were not powerful moments of discovery and connection and,

further, literate acts in and of themselves. This is also not to say that the girls were

not capable of more sustained traditionally academic inquiries, but as I followed the

lead of the girls, the curriculum developed in a way that did not necessarily

incorporate to the degree I had expected the new theoretical perspectives derived

from the women of color scholars I had hoped to introduce them. This is not to sell

short the work of the Unnormal Sisterhood. As the data shows, there was a

multitude of valuable moments for the girls in the Unnormal Sisterhood. However, it

is only one image of how work toward solidarity could be developed in a girl of color

centered curriculum. My questions going forward surround the issue of how to do

both the informal relational work that gives rise to so much and the more

formalized and organized work to inquire into the ideas, the creations, and histories

of women of color writers and artists. I wonder what it would mean to establish

different contexts that had more concrete goals of exploring with girls of color their

differences and connectedness through literacies and in service of social action.

I hope that this first step opens possibilities for future work with multiracial

groups of girls. I hope that practitioner researchers and others continue to

investigate how girls of color are able to form solidarity across differences and,

further, what role their literacies play in this work. There is so much more left to

know about how girls of color come to theorize their differences and their

connectedness. There is so much left to know about the possibilities for new

socialities like the Unnormal Sisterhood that simultaneously celebrate otherness and promote the creation of togetherness amongst girls of color.

In the development of these future studies, it is imperative that we understand that "girls of color" is a broad term that describes so many girls, with so many different intersecting identities. Collectives that inquire into these differences across many unique contexts are necessary in order for the field to paint a rich image of possibilities for solidarities across differences. Research that adds more voices of girls of color will help the literacy field understand their complexity and their worthiness of pedagogies that celebrate and honor those complexities. Girl of color centered literacy research will create new possibilities for girls of color, their unnormality, their sisterhood.

Final Words

I want to conclude with a poem written by Diamond. This poem captures the girls, their critical insights into the world, their hopefulness, their fight, their sisterhood, and their joy through it all. I leave you with Diamond's words in hopes that you'll follow her call, follow the voice of this young girl of color in her cry for joy centered action toward freedom. Whether as an educator, a researcher, or citizen, I hope you'll follow her advice to break chains, to heal hearts, to work in coalition toward justice in the spirit of the Unnormal Sisterhood.

> *Free at last…. But were really not…. Can the Earth be free at last…. War; fights; racism it has gotten worst…. Why shoot when you can shoot a basketball…. Why make fire when the sun rises!..... But its 2016 lets try and make it good…. Lets fight but over good….. lets not break hearts lets break the chain….. last, lets do it together….. now smile….*
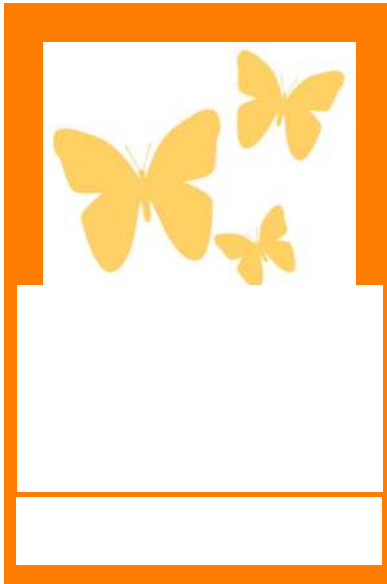
What We'll Do

- Topics will include various aspects of girlhood including: identity, friends, community, school, and planning and imagining the future.
- Genres explored will include essay, journaling, poetry, story, song, and drama.
- We will use a variety of materials to create photographs, drawings, audio and visual recordings, spoken word, and written texts.
- Girls will practice critical digital media literacy and explore how to discuss how to use social media safely and wisely as they create a private social media account for the purposes of the club.
- Academic skills explored will include writing, reading, critical literacy, historical study, computer skills, presentation skills, debate, and more!
- This work is part of my dissertation research. If you have any questions about this, please email me, Grace Player, at gracedplayer@gmail.com.

Who We'll Be

This club will be an opportunity for girls in grades 6-8 to shine together! We will write, draw, take photographs, and talk about the issues, ideas, and stories that matter most to them.

We'll also read poems, books, and other pieces by women writers, listen to music by female artists, and think about the importance of women across history. In all, this club will be a celebration of girls!

APPENDIX B
Biographies of the Unnormal Sisters
The Girls of the Unnormal Sisterhood

My research partners in the Unnormal Sisterhood included eight girls who regularly came—four seventh graders and three sixth graders and a tenth grade volunteer—all of whom identified as Black or Asian.
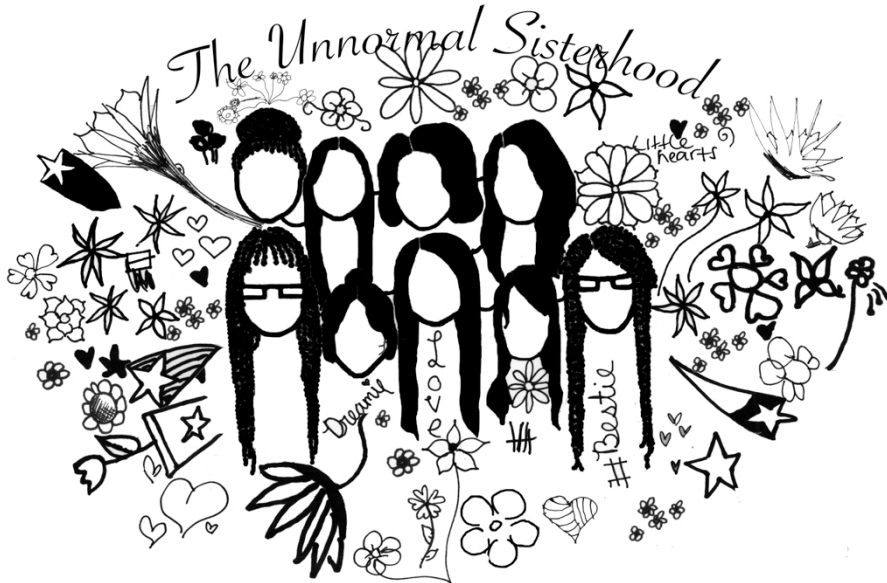
Diamond

Diamond often enters a room dancing. Lips pulled into an exaggerated sneer, weight resting in her swiveling hips, and heels off of the ground as her feet and knees rhythmically bounce, she'll glide gracefully, yet comically, across the room. Sometimes, she'll enter the room, head down and silent, toss her jacket and bags down, and slump in her chair, wordlessly staring into her phone, revealing later that she's had a bad day at school, that she was yelled at by a teacher, that a teacher "lied on her." Diamond often leans in for hugs, often rolls her eyes, often laughs, often calls out unfairness, often writes, often yells at other girls to "shut up." She tells me her teachers are always telling her to "stop being smart." Diamond is someone who I've gotten to know as deeply emotional and perceptive, unwilling to settle, sharply humorous girl.

During the months of our club, Diamond was in sixth grade. She chose her pseudonym in honor of her best friend from her old school. She identifies as alternatively African American or Black, and also asserts that she is "a little bit" Jamaican, Dominican, and White. She lives with her father, who is the assistant to a dean at a well-known university in Philadelphia, her grandmother, and aunt. She speculates that her father will soon get married to his girlfriend, who she likes a lot. She also stays with her mother—a nursing student, her stepfather—a police officer, and her half siblings, in North Philadelphia on the weekends.

Diamond shows great emotional vulnerability and responsiveness. She speaks of her smile as being a core part of her identity, as it favors her mom and helps her move through the world. Complexifying her emotional identity, she also claims to be "bipolar," siting her moodiness and her tendency to move from happiness to anger rapidly and unexpectedly. She also claims to be "different and unique person, an individual."

Importantly, Diamond, for a long while, self-described as a poet, finding poetry to be an outlet to her variant emotions. She used poetry, as will be explored in subsequent chapters to discuss her experiences in the world at a both very personal level as well as some of her more universal observations about social issues, such as racism. Her skillfulness with words and emotions is also evident in her personal interactions. She is quick witted and clever. Her way with words wavers between sharply droll to poetically lucid as she draws smartly from the many discourses with which she is entangled.

It is crucial to note that Diamond is not always received well by teachers and administration. She is the girl I witnessed being reprimanded most frequently in school. She is also the student who came to club most frequently upset about getting in trouble at school. Diamond, though, astutely interprets the ways that she is being disciplined as unjust and coming from a place of misunderstanding and even a unwillingness on the teachers to listen.

Emily

Social media plays a central role in Emily's life. Emily often retreats to a corner of the library to set up her iPhone on the floor to video tape her dancing, using the app MusicAlly or DubSmash. Tossing her dark hair, her skinny knees banging, she'll tape and retape herself until she feels she's gotten the dance just right. Sometimes Diamond will pop into the videos and they'll coordinate dances together.

Emily is a sixth grade girl. She chose her pseudonym in homage to her favorite character on the show *Pretty Little Liars,* a favorite show of hers. The character is a queer Filipina high schooler Emily describes as a "chill person" who "likes the same things I do."

If asked about her racial identity, Emily first mentions that she is Vietnamese. She adds that her father is White, but also mentions that she is part Black, Cambodian, and Chinese. Her Black identity, it seems, comes from her identification with her Cambodian family, who she reports were "Black in Asia"[14]. She is bilingual, speaking primarily Vietnamese with her mother and some family members. When speaking about her father, she seems a bit distant. She met her father for the first time this year, but claims not to really want to talk to him. A bit

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[14] After discussing this with Emily, she was steadfast that she is part Black, but was not sure of the exact origins of her Blackness. I rode a tricky balance of not wanting to disbelieve her self-identification, but also not wanting to feed into any sort of appropriation of an identity I was pretty sure was not hers. Through my personal research, I have come up with very few examples of Black folks living in Cambodia, especially at the time Emily's family would have lived there.

transient, she describes herself as "living in a lot of places" but she primarily lives with her grandma and uncle. She says she sees her mother often, but her mother has decided to have Emily live with her other family members because she works such long hours in a nail salon.

Emily describes herself as "weird, funny, kind of crazy." When asked to clarify she explains that she is weird "in a good way…I don't like to be boring. I like get up a lot and I would like to go places." She further describes herself as "friendly, as long as people don't get on my nerves." She adds that she is also "polite" and has brought up at other times that she is nice. This self description is reflected in the ways that she relates to the other girls and to me. Emily is the type of person who always shares. She would, whenever she would run to the store to pick up snacks before club, ask me if I wanted anything. Even though I always declined, she would come back with an offering of some sort of candy or chips for me and all of the other girls.

This thoughtfulness translated into her friendships in a very visible way. Diamond described how Emily was her first friend "because Emily was so nice." And that niceness persisted, it seems, over the course of these friendships. Whenever one of the other sixth grade girls expressed pain or anger, Emily was the first to back them up and legitimize their feelings. As gentle and loving as she can be at times, with a cock of her eyebrow, a roll of her eye, and a bob of her head, she does not hesitate to let her annoyance show.

It is important to mention that Emily was the last of the girls to join the group, not arriving until late February. On the recommendations of her friends, Diamond and Ciara, she decided to asked me to join. She was a member of the robotics club I'd conducted the year before and we had cultivated a nice relationship then, so it was with comfort and familiarity that she requested to join.

Ciara

Ciara is a vibrant sixth grader. She is a person full of joy and humor, finding inspiration in music, especially Beyoncé. She often has her headphones in her ears, playing, too loudly, her favorite tunes. She swirls in her chair, crooning along with her idols. She'll take out her ear buds and share some tidbit about Beyoncé's relationship with Jay Z, her analysis of who Becky with the good hair might be, her speculations about whether or not Jay Z was actually cheating on Beyoncé.

She chose Ciara as her pseudonym because of her love of the pop singer by the same name. She wavered between Beyoncé and Ciara and had a bit of a preference for Beyoncé, but for the purposes of this dissertation, I settled on Ciara ultimately to avoid confusion when the artist Beyoncé ultimately comes up throughout many conversations that will be illustrated in the body of this dissertation.

Ciara identifies as Black, at times bringing up that she is mixed with a little bit of white. She lives with her father and stepmother. Her father is currently unemployed but is a war veteran and, thus, receives a pension. Her stepmother works at a candy factory. Her father has one other child, a son, who is significantly older than Ciara. She has often described her relationship with her stepmother as being tense. She says, though, ultimately she prefers living with her dad and

stepmom because she gets more attention than at her mother's house, where a number of her eight siblings live. Her mother is a security guard who toward the end of the semester had just returned to work after suffering an injury. She is closest to her fourteen year old sister with whom she claims shares everything.

Ciara dreams of being an actress. It seems that one of her routes for experimenting with performance is social media. She is the most frequent poster on our joint Instagram account. Most often, she'll post selfies or videos of herself lip syncing and dancing to songs using the Musically app. Additionally, she has a YouTube channel which she frequently brings up in conversation, especially when meeting new people.

Seraphina

The most consistent attendee of the group, Seraphina, is an African American seventh grader. She hovers several inches above me, tall and lanky, a self described "string bean." She often holds an amused smile on her lips, seemingly laughing at some of the ridiculousness unfolding before her. She doesn't engage in the silliness that some of the other girls do, but this doesn't mean that she does not have a sharp and incisive sense of humor. She does and her clever joking often centers on the political conversations on of the day.

She was indecisive about her pseudonym. She originally chose the name "Malala," as she identified with the young activist Malala Yousafzai. Additionally, I had briefly chosen a pseudonym for her for a presentation of my data to a class I was TAing. I chose the name "Janelle" after the singer and activist Janelle Monae. When I asked her if she liked the name, she rejected it, telling me it sounded too much like a "stereotypical Black girl name." In the end, she chose Seraphina because she told me she wanted a longer name with a lot of syllables. Together we googled "long names" and she picked Seraphina, meaning "fiery one," which seemed appropriate for such a passionate and politically aware young person.

Seraphina identifies as a Black girl. She claims no religious affiliation, although claims to wish that she was religious because it would be "easier" to make choices about her faith. She lives with her mother, who is currently studying early childhood education, and older brother, to whom she is close, but often makes fun of. Her father also lives in Philadelphia and has what she describes as a "blue collar job" working for the city.

Seraphina is spirited, especially passionate about the politics and social justice. When introducing herself to new people, she would sometimes describe herself as "concerned with race and gender." Over the course of the club, she became increasingly passionate about the 2016 primary elections, taking on a robust anti-Trump stance. Rarely was she shy about stating her anti-racist and anti-sexist stance. What's more, she craved more information and ways to analyze that information. She asked questions, wanted to engage in sophisticated conversations about the social construction of race, and attempted to understand privilege and injustice to the best of her ability. In these conversations, she would listen carefully and respond thoughtfully, then carry what she'd learned forward into future conversations, making her ever more sophisticated and critically informed

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In addition to her political passions, Seraphina is also very involved in school, one of the highest performers in her grade according to school standards, a member of student council (and in 8th grade, the student council president), and a frequent attendee and participant in various school activities. She strives to learn, and you can very visibly see her efforts towards shifting her ideas and opinions as she receives and processes information. She sees herself as high intelligent and sometimes, this confidence can read as condescension towards others. Subtle, but never hesitant with her opinions, she will make both adults and peers aware of her feelings toward them, both positive and negative.

Halsey

Whenever I see Halsey, she runs up to me, excitedly calling out "Ms. Grace!" and throwing her arms around my waist. There is something about her that vacillates between childlike and mature. While she maintains an air of innocence in her playfulness and affection, she is also one of the first girls to directly call out sexism and racism as she sees it. Especially passionate about her feminism, she often shakes her head, eyebrows wrinkled in disgust, saying "That's sexist" or "That's sexual harassment" or "That's not right…"

Halsey is a seventh grader. She chose her pseudonym to pay homage to a pop singer she admires. The singer has described herself as "tri-bi"—biracial (Black and White), bipolar, and bisexual. I believe these identities expressed by the singers are curiosities to Halsey, who has often expressed interest in celebrities that claim queer and non-binary gender identities. Additionally she brings up her own curiosities around the relationship of her own Vietnamese identity with relationship to activism around race. She questions media representations of women and advocates for more diverse representation. Further, she is outspoken about issues of sexual harassment. She was the first of all the girls to really firmly identify as feminist.

Halsey is the child of Vietnamese immigrants. She lives with her parents, her grandparents on her mother's side, and her baby brother. She, her brother, and second cousin are the only people in her family to have been born in the United States. She speaks a mix of English and Vietnamese with her father while she speaks primarily Vietnamese with her mother and grandparents. Her father is a pharmacist and her mother is an engineer, who both work full time. Across the course of the club, her family obligations were multiple. For the last month and a half of our club meetings, she was not able to attend because she had to help her family doing things like take care of her baby brother.

Part of Halsey's identity was deeply tied to her friendship with two of her classmates, one of whom was in the club, Giselle, and one who was not, but who I'd worked with the year before. Their trio of friends, which they named "Bish Bros" came together around humor, music, and a general deep love for one another. She and Giselle were attached at the hip during club. They would interject inside jokes with regularity, sending each other into fits of giggles, ending with them collapsing into one another. They had that kind of friendship that brings you to another wavelength no one else can quite tap into and, in fact, drives others a bit crazy because the jokes seem distracting and nonsensical, but it makes too much sense

and brings to much joy to you. The other girls in the club, in fact, would sometimes try to manipulating seating arrangements so they wouldn't be next to each other and, I admit, I even tried this on certain days when I knew I wanted to have a more focused conversation.

Giselle

Giselle has a melodic, tinkling laugh that bursts forward often, almost after every thing she says. It seems that sometimes this laugh is out of nervousness, other times it is because she oes genuinely fine humor in life. She and Halsey lean into one another laughing through convessations, recapping their favorite Vines or YouTube videos and bursting into laughter. Her long, thick, gold-streaked hair, falls over her face as she convulses in laughter as the ridiculousness of her conversations with Halsey escalate.

Giselle is a seventh grader. She chose her pseudonym after a character in the film series *The Fast and the Furious*. The character, played by Israeli model and actress, Gal Gadot, is a member of the central crew in the films who, ultimately, sacrifices her own life to save the life of her boyfriend in a gunfight.

Gisele identifies as Asian, specifically Filipina. She lives with her mom and her eighteen-year-old brother. Her mom is a nurse at a large hospital in central Philadelphia and her brother currently works at a children's hospital as he considers applying for colleges. She also mentions that her sister lives in California and has a "good job," but she's not sure what it is beyond her sister reporting that she is "doing good."

While Giselle is joyful and extremely expressive with her closest friends, she is also a bit more reserved than the other girls, more hesitant to speak her mind, in whole group conversations. She will, from time to time, pour forth stories and ideas, especially when she has an anecdote to share or when Halsey is especially engaged in the group conversation. However, she generally seems content to listen, or drift into side conversations.

Giselle is an artist. She, more often than writing, will fill her notebooks with sketches, frequently of girls faces with dark heavily shadowed lids. Frequently, her fan girl comes through her drawings, detailing with precision depictions of her favorite pop stars.

Importantly, Giselle's friendship with Halsey seemed to be one of her main motivations for coming to the club, although she always claims to enjoy it immensely. Whenever Halsey had to skip club for one reason or another, she also skipped. Thus, for the last month or so of club, she was not in attendance.

Kathleen

When Kathleen talks to you, she looks you in the eye. She nods, smiles, and laughs, reaching out to gently touch your arm. Everything about the way she has a conversation draws you in. Although she is only in seventh grade, something about the way she relates to others through conversation feels different from other young people. She has the affect of someone far older than a thirteen year old.

Kathleen is additionally aware of activist African American histories. She chose her pseudonym after Kathleen Cleaver, a Black activist and member of the Black Panther Party, as well as her grandmother, also named Kathleen. She had

previously considered Dorothy in homage to Dorothy Dandridge, the first African American woman to be nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress.

Her interests in activist histories translated into her everyday life, as she thoughtfully engaged in the various social justice aimed conversations during the club. She was quick to respond to our conversations and always had many opinions she would share proudly with the group. She was also a great listener and willing to concede her points if someone revealed to her information she wasn't privy to before. It was never braggy or over played. Rather, it was understated, friendly, and

Kathleen was a more infrequent attendee of the group. She indicated to me that she was very busy, although Seraphina told me once that Kathleen revealed to her that she simply found it boring. When I asked her about this in person, she denied feeling this way, saying she appreciate the opportunity to learn about strong women across history. However, she did say that she wished for more hands on activities than we had done.

Ash

Ash is a tenth grader, holding a special position as a sort of mentor in the club. She presents herself with honesty and vulnerability, a complex mix of confidence and insecurity. While she powerfully discusses her political views, she still walks with her back slightly hunched, as if unsure how the world will receive her physically. She speaks of her self doubt, but also has laughingly recalled to me the ways that she has bravely called out boys in her life for their sexism and her classmates for their racism. She writes poem after poem about her fantasies and desires for romance, and admits a confidence in her flair for wordsmithing, but also laments her lack of confidence and feelings of loneliness and undesirability.

A member of other research projects with other Penn students, she has been written about in various articles and chapters by colleagues. When I asked her what she'd like her name in my writing to be, she expressed she wanted an androgynous name, more like her own name, as she felt the name used to describe her in other articles did not fit her in the least. She perceptively described her discomfort reading about herself, but assigned a name she felt was too stereotypically feminine to capture her spirit.

Ash is an Indonesian immigrant, born in Jakarta. She moved to the United States in 2011, as did many other ethnic Chinese Catholic Indonesians. Her parents both work at 7-11s; her father works a night shift and her mother a morning shift. She has an older college bound sister and a younger brother, who she often cares for.

Ash is passionate about issues of mental health and self care. She has recounted with me and some of the girls her experiences with contemplations of suicide, deep depression, and her healing process with her community. In ninth grade, after writing in confessional in church that she wanted to kill herself, the community was able to figure out who had written the note and address the issue. Ash entered a crisis center for teens and remained there for 20 days. As part of her healing process, she has taken up activism around issues of self care. Taking on leadership roles has seemed to be a route for her to build confidence and purpose in a way that combats her depression.

Ash is someone who takes issues of racism and sexism very seriously and is working through the ways she will combat these issues in her own life. Over the summer after the first year of the club, I had a conversation with the head of the St. Frances community center, where Ash also participated in a club called Youth Voices. Bethany let me know that that summer she became what Bethany described as very resistant to any men and, in fact, angry with them. Apparently, as Bethany told the teens in the group that she was potentially transitioning out of the leadership role for Youth Voices, Ash vehemently stated she would no longer be part of the group if there was a male leader. (Because Ash is not working with us this year, I have yet to catch up with her about this and find out more from her opinion her feelings and thoughts about her resistance to the men and boys in her life. I still often see her in passing so hope to schedule a time to sit down with her and chat soon)

The Other Girls

There were two more seventh grade girls who only attended the club for the first month or so, even before I had officially started collecting data. Although one of them was initially thrilled with the club and claimed to find a deep connection to the poetry we read, she ultimately decided the club was not for her. Both girls would always greet me cheerfully when I would run into them in the halls, but decided the club itself was not of interest to them.

Additionally, I continued the club into the following year and the number of girls has increased. Five sixth graders, one seventh grader, and a new high school mentor have joined us and have brought a new energy and dynamic to the group. The group powers on. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, my focus will remain on the original girls in the group, although these other integral members of the new iteration of the club may pop in and out of the narrative.

APPENDIX C
Example of Coding Memos Over Time: Sexual Harassment

Date	Memo
2/2	Fieldnotes: This is the first time sexual harassment came up in my notes. The girls mentioned that the opening line of Lucille Clifton's poem "for prissily" which reads "Girl, looking like a wild thing.." reminded them of cat calling. **Analysis:** There wasn't much critique beyond that, simply a naming of the phenomenon
3/9	Transcript from group interview: In an interview, Halsey claims that her biggest fear is rapists. She goes on to explain that she has been catcalled in the street. When Ash asks if she fears rapists now or when she is older, she says she is "paranoid" but she has been cat called in the streets. I mention an article I had just read that when surveyed, girls report that they have experienced sexual harassment as early as age 7. Later that day, Ciara asks the group, "Do I look older than I am?" She then comments that 16 and 17 year old boys are constantly talking to her in the streets when she walks to school in the morning, but that she just keeps walking. I comment that it isn't fair that she felt like this and that they should know better. **Analysis:** In both these situations, girls are naming sexual harassment/sexual violence as at least annoying, at most a cause for fear. In both these conversations, I bring up more information about the phenomenon and also try to hold boys accountable for their actions, rather than just putting it on girls. I attempt to legitimize girls stories, make it a safe space for them to discuss these topics, and also start to unpack that this is a phenomenon rooted in boys' behavior.
4/5	Fieldnotes: Diamond reports getting inappropriate DMs from a boy she didn't know. She tells this story while burying her face in her arms, and when I react in horror and disgust, she laughs at me. She tells me she changed her account and deleted and blocked him so he can no longer have any contact with her. Still angry and dismayed, I repeat that she did not deserve to have anyone do this to her. I explained here and in a later post on Instagram, that this is sexually violent behavior that is demeaning and sexist and no one should ever approach you sexually without your consent. I also talk about

	consent culture, explaining the necessity of people always asking permission before proceeding with any sexual advances.
	The girls bridge this into a new conversation about how men in the streets talk to them all the time. Diamond shares about how some man recently was licking his lips at her and Ciara talks about being looked at inappropriately by a man while she was with her mom.
	Analysis:
	This day, the girls name situations they are in, but also talk about ways they are resisting, by blocking and unfollowing their harassers on social media, for instance. This is first time they speak of having a bit more agency. It is still concerning that the girls hare having so many instances. I am curious what Diamond's laughing meant—was it nervous, or is it so normalized that the girls encounter this behavior that my outrage seemed ridiculous. Again, through this conversation, I tried to introduce them to new concepts like consent and accountability. Additionally, I'm sure that my emotional response carried meaning for them.
4/6	**Fieldnotes:**
	Picked up from the conversation the day before and continued to discuss consent. We talked about always feeling ok saying "no." We practiced shouting the word "no" with ferocity and strength.
	Halsey comments, "you know there is a word for boys who just ask for nudes?" She continues, "FUCKBOYS!" Ciara comments, "That is what my post was about!" (I unfortunately deleted this post before taking a screenshot. I explained to the girls I deleted it, not because it was inappropriate, but because I wasn't sure if parents would look at our account ever, and I wanted to make sure it was kept relatively PG so we wouldn't have it or our group taken away.)
	Analysis:
	Here, we focused a lot on consent culture, enforcing that they were always allowed to say no, and this wasn't something shameful. The girls also start, here, assigning more accountability to boys, even if in a mocking way, using the term "fuckboy." This is a term to describe a certain type of boy, not all boys, which I think is important to note, that they are distinguished that not all boys do act this way. However, they are not yet attaching this to systems of power, but rather individuals.
4/12	**Fieldnotes:**
	Ash brings up that sexual harassment could be a potential area of study for the social justice issues unit. The girls talk about how the

	boys often touch the girls inappropriately, especially their butts. Kathleen says she never has had her breasts grabbed, but her put gets touched by boys frequently. The girls say they report this at school, but the principal tends to side with the boys not the girls, especially if a girl lashes out at the boys in response, leading her to get in trouble, but not the boys. The girls also mention that some girls seem to "like it." They describe that some of the girls laugh when the boys grab at them. We talk about why people might laugh at something even if they don't like it. I talk about how I nervous laugh sometimes when I am especially uncomfortable but think I'm supposed to act friendly. Seraphina insists that when some of the girls say "no" they don't mean it. I repeat that even if you are laughing and say no, it still means no, reinforcing ideas about consent culture. I repeat that boys need to learn these issues of consent so girls aren't always having to say no. I told Seraphina this is something I am very passionate about and that No definitely means no, no matter the tone. I also mention that there are ways we can stand up for one another like asking each other if a girl is OK when getting treated that way or believing them when they report that they are harassed. **Analysis:** In this conversation, the girls are delving more into their personal experiences. They are still assigning girls blame for some of the actions, rather than thinking about why boys feel like they can do whatever they want. I enforce firmly that consent is important and that no always means no.
4/20	Fieldnotes Seraphina says sexual harassment happens a lot. She says she's "not sure" whether some girls like it or not, but she still thought some of them did. **Analysis:** This day reflects ongoing questioning into "liking" sexual harassment. Seraphina shifts from saying without doubt that girls like it, to she feels like they do. Ciara mentions her confusion about whether they like it or not.
4/26	Fieldnotes: Ciara says she thinks it is confusing because some girls seemed to like it. She claims that she, on the other hand tends to "react quickly" when someone does it to her. She brought up an incident when some boy in her 1st grade class says she was going to get raped. She said that he took something from her and would only

	give it back if she would have sex with him. She says "I don't like when that happens" She also told a story about how Emily had a rumor spread about her that her brother raped her. Emily remained quiet, so I did not push her to talk about this sensitive issue. I responded with a listening ear and, per usually, support for the girls and how terrible it was that they had to experience these things. Artifacts: They later wrote about these incidents in their notebooks. Ciara narrated how it took calling her dad, him calling the cops and coming down to the school for the school to finally do something, which only involved them talking to each other. Emily wrote about the pain of having the rumor spread about her. She wrote about how mad she was and how she yelled and threw her phone. Diamond writes that in third grade, boy hit her butt, didn't say anything, tried to touch my front and I told and he got kicked out of school. She writes a poem to follow Ciara brings up that a boy in the grade above her always licks his lips and says "hey sexy" to her in the lunch line. Diamond replies, "it's not correct to do that." **Analysis:** The girls share more of their experiences Emily delves very specifically into the anger that having stories about her spread invokes, mentioning her emotive outbursts of yelling and throwing her phone. This indicates a new level of sharing—the ability to express specific outrage at being treated in this way. Diamond also responds emotionally with poetry, a new mode of addressing this subject The girls share more of their experiences Emily delves very specifically into the anger that having stories about her spread invokes, mentioning her emotive outbursts of yelling and throwing her phone. This indicates a new level of sharing—the ability to express specific outrage at being treated in this way. Diamond names specifically that boys are not right to act in ways that are sexualized to girls.
5/3	Artifacts: Emily and Ciara start their play on sexual harassment. They write the same play but in their own notebooks. Each, though, writes their own soliloquy in response to the sexual harassment in the

	play, both of which reflect their disdain for sexual harassment. Ciara's specifically talks about the ways that she reassigns blame from labeling the girl a "slut" to blaming the boy. **Analysis:** Both of these plays show girls explaining their experiences with sexual harassment and how it effects not only the person targeted, but the people around. The play that Ciara writes also holds teachers accountable for not doing enough to protect the girls Ciara's soliloquy not only addresses that it is boys who are blame for this behavior, but she also traces how she has readjusted her opinions
5/18	Fieldnotes: Ciara comes into club flustered because she has just encountered an older man when she went out to get a snack before club at the "Chinese Store." The man said some very inappropriate things to her, knowing that she was young. She lied about her age and having a boyfriend as if to protect herself, but the man persisted. She said she just nervously laughed a lot during the encounter. Emily, who was with her, said she didn't know what to do. The girls also talk about a classmate as being "so hype" describing how he constantly licks his lips at them in class in a sort of affected way, the sort of flirtation you see in pop culture. **Analysis:** The girls' description of Ali is less harsh than their description of the man in the Chinese food store. It is still addressing that this flirtation is inappropriate, although not directly saying so, but also does not come down on it as being sexual harassment. The girls in telling about the story at the Chinese Store are again recounting their experiences with sexual harassment. Emily says she doesn't know what to do, but this is an acknowledgement that there is the possibility for action in this situation, although she hasn't yet figured it out. Ciara speaks to some of the ways she has learned to try to protect herself by lying. Unfortunately, these lies are tied to patriarchal institutions and still have no effect on the man persisting and scaring her.
Giselle Exit	Transcript: Giselle names that girls experience the world differently than boys

Intervie w	do and specifically names that boys cat call and "flirt with you inappropriately" and that this makes her feel "just wrong" She also, when asked if she thinks they can change things as girls of color, she says she thinks that they can tell boys to stop. "Like it's not ok. Like say if we do that to them. They are gonna be the same way as us, like, ew." **Analysis:** Here Giselle names both the behavior of boys and how it makes her feel, using the words "just wrong" and "ew." Her analysis really addresses her feelings, especially with the visceral "ew'
Ash's Exit Intervie w	Transcript: Ash describes the way that she saw how conversation and writing opens up opportunities to describe issues. She says that it is more than just writing about arts, "which is a good thing" She also addresses the way that seism effects her. She talks about how her sister told her a story about how some man on the street took a picture of her sisters boobs one time and another a man followed her down the block saying lewd things to her. She describes that she is ANGRY about this. She said she wishes she was there, but, also knows, that she would probably just be super surprised. She addresses how rude she would tell the man he is and says she would ask questions like "did your mom raise you that way? Your mom actually told you to do that to girls? She uses the word angry to describe her emotions again, especially talking about how she feels like she would say one thing, but doesn't know if in reality she would actually say something in a situation.

Ciara Exit Interview	Transcript:
	Ciara talks about how even if sexual harassment is just words, it doesn't matter, it still offends her.
	She retells the story about the Chinese Store. She says "it really weirded me out because if I told you that I was thirteen, you should already know stop talking to me."
	She says she doesn't know how exactly to change this
	She talks about her play, saying that the boys in the 7th grade are always smacking girls butts, and "looking at the girls… it makes it seem like they like it, but you don't actually know if they do."
	Analysis:
	Ciara notes that sexual harassment works at many levels, a sophisticated understanding. She note that words can really hurt girls
	She addresses that the man sexually harassing her should "know better" indicating her understanding that she knows better than some elders when it comes to issues about sexual harassment. She shows her understanding that sexual harassment is an issue that men, especially older men, should be held accountable for knowing.
	She directly addresses what I had noted in her play, that she is unsure about whether they like it or not, so she shouldn't make assumptions about them. Their actions might conceal what they are actually feeling.

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."
- Audre Lorde

"We can begin by doing small things at the local level, like planting community gardens or looking out for our neighbors. That is how change takes place in living systems not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously."
-Grace Lee Boggs

"When we **speak** we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So it is better to speak."
                    -Audre Lorde

"You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it, unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it."
-Grace Lee Boggs

'The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move toward freedom. To act in ways that liberate ourselves and other. That action is the testimony of love as the practice of freedom.'
-bell hooks

"A revolution that is based on the people exercising their creativity in the midst of devastation is one of the great historical contributions of humankind.
-Grace Lee Boggs

"Sisters are more than the sum of their relative disadvantages: they are active agents who craft meaning out of their circumstances and do so in complicated and diverse ways."
- Melissa Harris-Perry

"Life is not what you alone make it. Life is the input of everyone who touched your life and every experience that entered it. We are all part of one another."
-Yuri Kochiyama

"Revenge only engenders violence, not clarity and true peace. I think liberation must come from within."
-Sandra Cisneros

"We do not sweat and summon our best in order to rescue the killers; it is to comfort and to empower the possible victims of evil that we do tinker and daydream and revise and memorize and then impart all that we can of our inspired, our inherited humanity." -June Jordan

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