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# Creating Crescent: Using Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) And Public Media to Promote Epistemic Agency Among Black Girls in South Carolina

Salandra Bowman

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CREATING CRESCENT: USING YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (YPAR) AND  
PUBLIC MEDIA TO PROMOTE EPISTEMIC AGENCY AMONG BLACK GIRLS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory of Grandma Mary, who made the way for me, but I never got to see; Grandma Gert, my muse for thick love; Aunt Liza Ann, who reflected back to me at an early age that I am light; and Aunt BB, teacher of audacity, courage, and the best example of what it means to love other people's children. Your seeds bloom in my life at just the right time. I love you forever.

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To all Black girls in South Carolina, know and remember Crescent. She is offered with love, from me and the co-creators to you.

## ABSTRACT

This study uses womanist methodology and youth participatory action research (YPAR), centering the ways of knowing of Black girls, with a focus on epistemic agency, to engage Black girls in the production of educational media. Such a study is necessary because Black girls are underrepresented in educational media, overrepresented in cases of school discipline, and overrepresented in reports of physical violence in schools. As public media is recognized as a transformative intervention in improving learning outcomes for children, addressing the underrepresentation of Black girlhood therein creates opportunities to address these intersecting issues and create humanizing educational media for all students. To achieve these ends, I, a scholar practitioner and local leader in public media, engage a group of Black girl high school students participating in Upward Bound, in creating standard-aligned learning media that is appealing to and effective among youth audiences. Collectively, we worked together through the preproduction, production, postproduction phases to create and build a world around Crescent, an animated Black girl character representing Black girlhood in South Carolina.

This study is significant in its methodology and results. It offers critical insight into the use of digital platforms, creative tools, and equipment in creating a harmonious and productive multi-modal environment for problem solving and creativity. It also offers insight into the educative experiences of the Black girl co-creators and the ways in which these experiences inform their perspectives and worldviews. Study outcomes show that



when operationalized in service of teaching others and personal growth, the experiences and perspectives of Black girls produce vibrant, rich, multi-layered educational content.

Keywords: Black girls, curriculum content development, educational media, epistemic agency, feminism, public media, womanism, youth participatory action research

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I love it. This is Black girl magic. I want to watch it over and over! (Koya)

I never thought I'd be doing voiceover work. (June)

We legit worked really hard on this. I'm excited to see my name in the credits. (Mari)

I loved everything about this experience. I hope I can keep participating and creating videos. (Asia)

My mama has been in here the whole time. She wants to know if we can get a link to share this with my family and her friends. She been telling everybody. (Alexandria)

I'm really excited about this project. It's been cool to create content that can help teachers see things from our point of view. (CoCo)

On October 17, 2021, I sat on the steps leading to my back door looking at the night sky and reflecting on the final comments made by the Black girl geniuses joining me in bringing Crescent to life, in building her world, and in addressing issues of importance to them. I was overwhelmed by the feeling that my head, heart, and hands had come together to produce an experience and a set of educational products that made Black girls smile, feel a sense of belonging in educational media, and see their own inner light. I was undone by a colleague's position that the outcome of this study was the creation of a universe. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, a universe is defined as all existing matter and space considered as a whole. As I sat gazing at the patterns in the night sky, I agreed that a universe was a helpful construct for thinking through the multi-

dimensional nature of the experience. Indeed, it produced an environment or universe that includes matter, time, space, and energy.

I start with matter as human beings are a critical component of the universe. In the Universe of Crescent, the Black female body is celebrated for its value to humanity. It is also the embodied physical matter of the majority. All human beings in the universe use physical matter like material resources in the creative process, which generates more physical matter. In the Universe of Crescent, the meanings attached to matter in the universe are determined by the human matter in the universe. When I interviewed for my position in public media, I introduced myself as a “carrier and creator of galaxies.” Sitting under the stars thinking about the universe I created, I gave thanks to my Creator and to my cloud of enlightened witnesses for manifesting a universe from my speech act.

In the Universe of Crescent, time is both synchronous, asynchronous and space is multi-dimensional. Using synchronous scheduling and the resources available to me in public media, I created physical and digital space with Crescent, a Black girl, as the hydrogen-like element. Within this universe, I liken *Conversations with Crescent*, the product created through this process, to a world. This series is a world, a co-created planet with its own asynchronous clock, life sustaining components and collective creatorship – Black girl geniuses. As viewers visit the planet with Crescent at its core, it is my hope that the energy of my passion and intent is well-received and shared with others.

As Einstein argues in his law of conservation of energy, it can not be created or destroyed, only converted from one form of energy to another. In our initial meeting, I



energized the space with a passionate explanation of my inspiration for Crescent, my rationale for creating the space and for making Black girls as its centrifugal force. Using voice, sound, and dialogue, I offered the following questions and responses. It is the sincerest articulation of my personal, passionate, participatory stances for this study.

### *Why Crescent?*

*The moon teaches us that total darkness does not exist. As the sun sets the moon rises as a guiding light when the opacity of night obscures vision. I want to see Crescent come to fruition because I believe Black girls to be that light. As suns set, Black girls being light and energy that revitalizes networks like UPN, CW, and Bravo. As movements ebb and dissipate due to exhaustion, violence, apathy induced darkness, Black women and girls like Darnella Frazier come with courage, audacity, ethic, love for our people, and a camera to shed light on injustices that persist.*

*History tells us that the lights in the night sky have always been a roadmap. We grow up learning that Harriet Tubman used the North Star to navigate her emancipatory quests. Work songs of the enslaved and negro spirituals remind us that the liberatory tool, the “drinking gourd” was located in the sky. We know that the enslaved and agrarians used the stars and constellations to track planting and harvesting seasons. And, faith-based narratives tell us that wise men followed a star to participate in celebrating the personification and embodiment of light. In the same way that the moon teaches us that total darkness does not exist, it also functions as a guide. Black girls lead, regardless of acknowledgement. Crescent is acknowledgement.*

*Black girls are underrepresented in educational media. Though overrepresented programming and urban media markets, Black girls rarely see themselves recognizably reflected in educational media. Because Black girl ways of knowing are instructive, I believe Black girls to be great educators.*

*The crescent moon is a part of South Carolina's revolutionary history. Against the backdrop of an indigo blue banner "derived from Indigo cultivation in the South Carolina lowcountry," a crescent "inspired by the cap badges of the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina Regiment" and a "historic palmetto" tree characterize the light and rootedness I recognize in Black girls. Predating a continental flag, as shown through the production and use of indigo, the genius of Black women creates, adorns, and sustains.*

*Moreover, no matter the moon's angle, it illuminates. Such is the same with Black girl ways of knowing. No matter the angle, their knowledge illuminates the "taken for granted," the dismissed and the unimagined. If South Carolina is to once again function as a revolutionary state, Black girls must be at the table. And when the moment arises, it is my hope that Black girls will look at the South Carolina flag and know that they do and have always belonged.*

#### *Why You?*

*Because Black girls are from the future. Black girls create trends before they are recognized as trends. What often appears to be coming from behind, is a subsequent lap, round, cycle.*

*Because your creative potential is limitless. Black girl experiences, produce creative methods of problem solving. The issues that you all will identify and the solutions you propose, because of your experiences, have far reaching potential.*

*Your voice matters and your input is essential if I want you to see you reflected in the content. While Black girls are represented in public media or PBS children's media, a show with a Black girl protagonist does not yet exist. The age range of the audience for the media we create will be determined by the group, but if Crescent is a Black girl from South Carolina, Black girls from South Carolina must take part in bringing her to life and beyond.*

*Because you are present and what is, is meant to be! The opportunity to do this work is upon us, now. We have all expressed commitment to this work and I know that what comes of this is going to be great. What we learn from this will be transformative.*

(Preproduction Session One)

I invite you, the reader, to walk with me through the experience of inviting a group of audacious, cool, and creative Black girl teenagers into a creative universe, to collectively create a world that meets their needs or addresses and issues that matter in their lives, in and out of school.

### ***Nature and Scope of Problem***

*"I'm always shocked by the girls who have so much to say. It's like they were just waiting to be asked...they were waiting on their moment!" (Ruth Nicole Brown in SOLKit).*

As will be explored in the context of the US South, school environments often disaffirm the epistemological orientations of Black and Brown students (Woodson, 1933;

King & O'Brien, 2002; Ladson Billings, 2003). Within these same environments, Black and Brown girls often contend with racialized and gendered experiences that further negate their epistemic orientations (Collins, 2000). While knowledge is often accessed and produced within schools, for Black and Brown girls, schools are more often sites of violence – physical, mental, and/or emotional (Love, 2019, Crenshaw, 2015). There is no shortage of proliferating narratives of physical violence against Black and Brown girls in schools, hypervisibility in punitive discipline, synchronous with general invisibility. Manifesting as social and political oppression within schools, these forces precipitate epistemic oppression (Dotson, 2014). Here epistemic oppression refers to “persistent epistemic exclusion that hinders one’s contribution to knowledge production” (Dotson, 2014, p. 113).

In this study, I challenge epistemic oppression among Black girls and offer a transformative and intersectionally-just methodology for advancing epistemic agency. For this study, epistemic agency is defined as “the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources within a given community of knowers in order to participate in knowledge production and, if required, the revision of those same resources” (Dotson, 2014, p 115). In promoting epistemically responsible agency (Townley, 2006), one must ask what prohibits such participation in knowledge production in formal, and in-formal education. U.S. schooling environments, like others impacted by colonization, tend to position youth students as consumers of canonized curricular content, to include subjects, activities, and invisible structures, in route to creating a workforce to produce the consumables of the future (Greene, 1982 & Apple, 2004). Contrary to Deweyan ideals, current policy supports education and innovation for global competitiveness (No Child

Left Behind, H.R. 1, 2001; Race to the Top, S. 844, 2010; Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2016) which leaves little room for (re)imagining curricular possibilities (Greene, 1982, Stromquist, 2015).

However, the temporal context of this study affirms that urgency of such a (re)imagination. This study takes place against the backdrop of a global public health crisis, the COVID 19 pandemic, and a racial reckoning motivated by a violent 2017-2021 presidential term and the state-sanctioned murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. The COVID 19 pandemic challenged the necessity of standardized testing (Starr, 2021), confirmed the necessity of flexible pedagogy (Nerzntzi, 2020), highlighted the gaps in technological proficiency in teaching and learning (van der Spoel, 2020), and highlighted inequities in education (Hanes, 2020). This study takes place during a second summer wear personal protective equipment in public spaces, after a year of remote learning, and adds to the data documenting this historic moment wherein fundamental alterations to the epistemic system are expected.

Revelatory outcomes from a year of remote learning suggest that that technology has advanced at a much quicker pace than public policy, digital literacy, and professional development (Twardzik, et. al, 2021; Ferdig, 2020). In education, these conditions revealed inequities in access to digital educator resources and equipment, particularly in rural and Title 1 schools and districts. As a result, many companies offered limited-time free subscriptions for educational content and services. Such a need for learning supports also created space for public media to re-engage educational agencies as a viable stakeholder in the long-term provision of resources, as educational development is endemic to the very establishment of public media (Rauf, 2020).

Yet the broader availability of resources for teaching and learning within this push for inclusivity and accessibility, is insufficient in and of itself. The current moment calls for anti-racist learning and professional development supports with the goal of improving educational outcomes for all students, in addition to cultivating an overall more informed, inclusive, and civil citizenry. Without these learning supports, the development of a sense of belonging for Black and Brown students and critical competencies in general, is less optimal as epistemicide is highly likely.

Taking gender into account I argue for the necessity of the development of learning supports that promote a sense of belonging among Black and Brown girls in schools. Parallel with increasing disparities in gender related discipline for Black girls, the narrative of the endangered Black male pervades (Santhanam, 2020). Indeed, efforts to affirm and protect Black men is both necessary and in alignment with womanist ideology. It is also equally necessary to take into account racialized and gendered experiences of Black women and girls who struggle to hold center when race and gender are compartmentalized (Crenshaw, 2014). Black woma(femi)nism and girlhood often critique standard curriculum as “space[s] of death” for Black and Brown girls (Love, 2019 & Ohito, 2016) and implore educators to employ curricular practices that “privilege cultural nuances, historical traditions, and the legitimacy of Black girls’ self-representation and lived experiences” (Greene, 2016, p. 285).

As the current calls for the audacity to reimagine what is essential for those who will inherit the future, I position Black girls as essential stakeholders in offering solutions to meet present day challenges and in creating the worlds they will inhabit. As Regina Jarmon (2013) argues, “black girls are from the future” and the introductory quote

exclaims Black girls have something to say and they are “just waiting on their moment” (SOLKit).

I ask, who will create the conditions for the moment and when? I respond, if not me then who and if not now, when? Because the need for affirmative and relevant learning environments, experiences, and resources remains, I offered my positional power as a co-conspiratorial force in Black girlhood celebration, with the goal of promoting the survival of a whole people.

### ***Research Questions***

Articulated differently, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What conditions must be present to create informal educative environments that take seriously the epistemic contributions of Black girls?
2. What kinds of media content might materialize when Black girl creativity is centered in production processes?
3. What might we come to know about public media as an educative site by creating these conditions and centering the radical imaginations of Black girls?

### ***Purpose***

One purpose for this study is to examine the intersection of education and public media. While education is foundational to public media’s existence, traditionally system content disproportionately targets early learners or adult learners. As a result, the highlight of the Commission for Public Broadcasting’s 2020 Thought Leader Forum was a commitment to target the 8-18-year-old audience in both content development and engagement. I take Harrison’s (2020) sentiments that today’s teens and preteens are

“overserved by media and underserved with content that matters,” and engage them alongside Jarmon. Moreover, I aim to expand notions of what transformative spaces, beyond formal schooling, can look like for Black girls and to consider public media as a site for promoting epistemic agency.

In this way, the second purpose of this study is to bridge concepts of research and application through participatory action. Beyond engaging participants for the purpose of filling knowledge gaps, the results of this study will fill educational content needs gaps for the participants themselves, their peers, and the public media system at large.

The third purpose of this study is to address representational equity in public broadcast and digital media. Black girls are underrepresented in commercial and non-commercial media and overrepresented as stereotypes that align with Collins (2000) controlling images of Black women.

### ***Organization***

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. What follows this introduction is the chronicle of a problem-solving journey embarked upon by a Black woman professional and seven Black girl student co-creators who seek to build community and cultivate conversations. In Chapter 2, I bring into discussion theories of epistemic agency, Black girlhood celebration and woma(femi)nism to highlight transformative opportunities for public media. These transformative opportunities become available when centering the ways of knowing of Black girls.

In Chapter 3, I discuss womanism as the methodological framework for the study and YPAR as the problem-solving method used to achieve epistemic agency. The chapter



begins with a definition of womanist methodology and discussion of harmony and dialogue as the methodological values that undergird this engagement with womanish sensibilities. Establishing these values, I examine YPAR as the problem-solving method best suited for intergeneration engagement and detail the specific process by which I conducted this study, the techniques used in analysis of the data collected therein, and process by which the material outcomes were created.

In Chapter 4, I explore the methodological quest to identify the conditions in the study that contributed to the manifestation of the material outcomes. These conditions are both technological and organizational. The work of this chapter is important because it presents a set of tools that are effective in organizing groups to collectively solve problems and express creativity in hybrid environments. It is also important because it outlines advantageous organizational characteristics conducive for creating transformative environments that support marginalized citizens in participating in epistemic systems.

In Chapter 5, I analyze the dialogue from the preproduction, production, and post-production phases of the study. These findings speak to the educative experiences and desires of Black girls in South Carolina's schools, their use of hair as literacy, and their collective decision making. This chapter is important because it provides a window into the meaning making of Black girl adolescents and youth, an underserved group in education and public media.

In Chapter 6, I introduce Conversations with Crescent, the pilot episode and supplemental learning materials. These products are the material manifestations of the work of the co-creators and collaborators in this study. They reflect what is possible when

Black girl onto-epistemic contributions are invited and taken seriously. I contend that the womanist work of Black girls makes the whole world better. In conclude this chapter by discussing the ways in which these resources have the potential to achieve that end.

The study concludes with Chapter 7. In this closing segment, I speak to the ways in which the documented developmental capacity of public media, when combined with the promise of centering women and girls in global developmental commitments call for Black girl representation in public media. Considering global demographics, public media as an initiative in accessibility, and the power of U.S. media, a Black girl character like Crescent has the potential to be globally transformative. I also articulate the value of womanist methodology in education and media studies. Before the fade to black, I present the future I imagine for Crescent.

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter explores gender, education, and public media discourses in academic literature. Guided by concepts of epistemic agency, Black girlhood celebration, and woma(femi)nism, I present a review of gender, education, and public media scholarship that 1. locates Black girls within the knowledge production system of education 2. unpacks epistemic oppression through the lens of curriculum, 3. Considers public media as an flexible learning site well-situated to support critical educational goals and larger lifelong learning goals simultaneously. As in the U.S. context, global education is a key factor in development and gender equity is a rigorous indicator of progress, it is important to begin with the experiences of Black and Brown girls in schools.

### ***Conceptual Framework***

#### *Epistemic Systems and Epistemic Agency*

This study is a transformative intervention in the systems of knowledge production that reinforce the maintenance of the status quo in education and media. Epistemology refers to ways of knowing, how they are produced and how they are validated. Epistemologies are not universal, often contested, and unduly ranked. Dotson (2014) defines epistemic oppression as “persistent and unwarranted infringement on the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources that hinder one’s contribution to knowledge production” and argues that epistemic oppression is, though varying in

degrees of permeability, is as pervasive as and often entangled with social and political oppressions (pg. 116).

Whereas reducible epistemic oppression is most often entangled with and addressed by social and political power relations within the epistemological system; irreducible epistemic oppression requires recognition of the limitations of an epistemological system. Articulated differently, reducible epistemic oppression is exclusion based on sociopolitical power relations addressed when internal inertia causes reform and/or revolution. Irreducible epistemic oppression occurs when external epistemologies challenge epistemological systems as inadequate. Though these external epistemologies often have similar sociopolitical situatedness, they exist outside of the epistemological system and would require acknowledgement of its limitations to address them. In many cases, sociopolitical power de-motivate change and redress, resulting in the perpetuation of the status quo (Dotson pg. 132).

Within the layered concepts of epistemic oppression, I understand language to be the “shared epistemic resource” used to transact access into the arena of knowledge production. In first-order epistemic oppression, the agency of the knowing subject is compromised by a “credibility deficit” (Dotson, 2014, pg. 125). In cases of first-order epistemic oppression impacting Black women and girls, testimonies or experiential knowledge are misinterpreted, misrepresented, or mishandled along gendered and racialized lines.

Guided by Townley’s (2003) unpacking of the myth of Cassandra and Renina Jarmon’s (2013) positioning of Black girls as from the future, I understand Black girls to be taken for granted prophets, denied participation in local and global knowledge

production (Garner, 2018). According to Greek mythology, Cassandra was endowed with the gift of prophecy, but because she agentically refused the sexual rouses of Apollo she was cursed by the loss of credibility and marginalized in her community. While I wrestle with notions of Black girls as cursed, data support claims that Black girls have similar experiences as Cassandra in that their “assertions gain no purchase, they are overlooked, dismissed, disregarded, as though she did not speak at all” (Townley, 2003, pg. 106) in and beyond schools (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000).

One high-profile example of first-order epistemic oppression would be the longstanding series of sexual crime cases leading up to R.Kelly being found guilty of sexual exploitation of a child, bribery, racketeering and sex trafficking (Tsioulcas, 2021). For more than two decades, R.Kelly has navigated popular culture and discourse as a musical genius, even in light of public knowledge of such egregious violent claims toward Black women and girls (Cooper, Black News Tonight). As in the curse of Cassandra, the testimony of his victims in criminal courts and the court of public opinion, were deemed unbelievable. Before the reckoning taking place in the popular context of this study, controlling images and stereotypes of Black women and girls supported narratives that the victims were culpable in their own victimization (Collins, 2000). In this example, the adjudicatory process privileges hearer interpretation over witness testimony. Herein, measures to limit implicit or explicit bias that do not address the epistemic inequities of the adjudicatory process, are sub-optimal.

Second-order epistemic oppression occurs when shared epistemic resources operating within the system are insufficient in facilitating participation. Within this order, epistemic oppression is recognized by the necessity to invent “schemata” (Dotson, pg.4)

grammar or language to name the realities that obfuscated by the limitations of the language of power (Kaschula, 2015). An example of second-order epistemic oppression is Moya Bailey's (2010) etymological offering of the term *misogynoir* as the experiential intersection where racism and sexism intersperse. Though Black women and girls reported experiences of *misogynoir* well before Bailey's use of the term, no terms existed to name the specific anti-blackness experienced by Black women and girls. Addressing the limitations of language as a shared epistemic resource and revising that language to more fully represent other knowing subjects does promote epistemic agency, but it is an agency that remains confined within the existing language system.

Building upon first and second order epistemic oppression, third order epistemic oppression is not reducible to social and political injustice; it goes beyond it. Third-order epistemic oppression is the highest order because it is tempered by the "character of the resistance to change" or "differing causes of inertia" (Dotson, 2014, pg. 3). Per Dotson (2014), although shared epistemic resources may not "shed light on why they are incapable of accounting for the farthest left-fettered person's insight," they have been sustained over time and often function as a bulwark for dismantling epistemic systems.

As Patricia Hill Collins (2017) points out, when Black women and girls have introduced new concepts within an epistemic system, those very concepts have been accepted within the epistemic system while Black women and girls' authority as knowing subjects is questioned (pg.123). This is the case with the circulation of intersectionality within academia. The conceptual framework used to describe the peculiarity and particularity of experiences situated at multi-axial intersections has been taken up by academics as a flexible framework for examining identity. Per Collins (2017)

“standpoint epistemology asserts the right to be an equal epistemic agent in interpreting one’s own realities within interpretive communities. Standpoint theories claim, in different ways that it is important to account for the social positioning of social agents. Within standpoint epistemology, the process of approximating the truth is part of a dialogical relationship among subjects who are differently situated” (pg. 119).

Collins’ unpacking of standpoint epistemology highlights the third-order injustice therein. In this case, the language created to make the epistemic system more accessible to Black and Brown women has been co-opted by other groups with the support of generally understood norms of academic production and had the effect of rendering Black intersectionality scholars “silent.” To bring back Dotson’s understanding of “inertia” as the showcase variable of third-order epistemic oppression, in the example of intersectionality, the conventions of scholarship and publication as the epistemic system of academia are a super force in the face of such subversive efforts.

What I find hopeful in the mythology, is the fact that Cassandra’s gift of prophecy is never lost. What is diminished is her relationship with her epistemic community. She is not perceived as a credible source and such exclusion impacts her socio-emotional well-being and her sense of belonging in her community. Heeding Townley’s arguments that relationships of trust are a fundamental part of epistemic and social life, I conceptualize this study as a relationship of trust between myself, the researcher, and Black-girl prophets (Garner, 2019).

In building this trusting epistemic relationship, I employ Dotson’s (2014) definition of epistemic agency as a conceptual and methodological guidepost. Per

Dotson, epistemic agency is “the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources within a given community of knowers in order to participate in knowledge production and, if required, the revision of those same resources” (pg. 115). I liken the curse of Cassandra to the persistent state and/or institution sanctioned harm inflicted upon Black girls that motivates shrinking and assimilation. To counter that harm, I call upon the guidance of Toni Cade Bambara in asking, “people what are we pretending not to know today? (Bambara, 2000) and accept the call of Alison Bailey (2014) who argues that third-order epistemic oppression necessitates “affective, creative, or other non-cognitive responses” (pg. 68). If we are to break every destructive chain, we must take seriously, Black girls’ courageous and audacious testimony of their lived experiences. And in this battle, the power lies in the freedom of Black girlhood, its creative potential, and the enlightened witness of adults within the epistemic system.

### *Black girlhood celebration*

Taking up Dotson and Townley’s charge to interrupt epistemic oppression, I employ Black girlhood celebration as an apparatus of epistemic agency. Epistemic agency is only possible when members of a given community are valued as knowledge producers. Rather than a concept or theory, Black girlhood celebration is a praxis, a work, a build, a birth. I use these descriptors to emphasize the notion that Black girlhood celebration connotes collection, as these are celebratory spaces that:

1. are created against a sociopolitical backdrop that polices Black and Brown girls into status quo conformity.
2. Require collective deconstruction of white supremacist, capitalist, and patriarchal power relations in service of justice and liberation.



3. Build new relationships where power is made and shared. And,
4. Create new ways of being, rules of engagement, celebratory narratives, and new selves (Brown, 2009).

In *Black Girlhood Celebration*, Ruth Nicole Brown offers *Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths* (SOLHOT) as one manifestation of the work of Black girlhood celebration. In as much as Black girlhood celebration is a praxis, not a concept, SOLHOT is not a program it is a “way of being together, a utopia of Black girlhood celebration” (Brown, 2008, pg. 25). I rely on the praxis of Black girlhood celebration, guided by SOLHOT in characterizing the environment I seek to cultivate in this study.

In educative spaces Black and Brown girls are often problematized when not meeting standards of white femininity (Morris, 2007). As opposed to, and sometimes in conjunction with, addressing the structures that dishonor and harm Black and Brown girls, the corrective action taken is most often girl-centered and antithetical to celebration. It aligns with Fordham’s (1993) observation that Black girls are too often deemed too loud, too attitudinal, or too defiant, although they exhibit these behaviors at similar rates to their racial and gendered counterparts. What Fordham finds is that Black girls who experienced this type of mischaracterization often engaged in practices of “passing” that equate to silencing for the purpose of fitting molds of white femininity (pg. 3). These practices of dehumanization can be countered by Black girlhood celebration, one that takes its cues from audacious womanist - feminist foremother Zora Neale Hurston and “appreciate[s] us, in any case, *as we fashioned ourselves*. That is something. And of all the people in the world to be, she chose to be herself, *and more and more herself*. That, too, is something” (Walker, 1979, pg. 4). It is in these resistant practices of self-

fashioning that Black girls enhance their power analyses (Collins, 2001) and capacity to “talk back” (hooks, 1989) to the systems that insist on their marginalization.

What my personal engagement with SOLHOT and Black girlhood celebration has taught me is that much of the transformation resulting from engagement takes place amongst the adults. Due to normative age-based power relations, adults often lean into power-over frameworks. A Black girl-centered celebration requires a reflexive unlearning. Consider Ruth Nicole Brown’s (2009) musings on Black girls and voice:

Black girls are “TOO LOUD” To Be Told To Quiet Down – So do not do it. In SOLHOT we have a rule for the grown folk: You cannot tell the girls to be quiet. This requires us to become comfortable with Black girls’ voices- whether they are loud or silent. It is not about Black girls coming to voice. It is all about listening to and loving Black girls’ unique articulation of voice and silence” (pg. 80).

In creating space for Black girls to share in world building efforts, it is imperative that Black girls be given the floor to share their ways of being and knowing. That they not be silenced into white femininity, rather given the space to fashion themselves and then the prerogative to change their minds (Walker, 1976, pg. 25). It is also important that adult stakeholders learn to hear and see Black girls differently, to adjust our lenses, equalize our audio and be open to the transformation. Certainly, Black girlhood celebration is not intended to be a romanticization, yet it is grounded in a woma(femi)nist love ethic centering Black girls and a vision of a utopia that allows room for contradictions and complexities that affirm Black girl humanity (Brown, 2009).

## *Woma(femi)nism*

Womanism existed in the everyday lives of Black women long before it was a word. First used in 1979, Alice Walker argued that “a womanist is a feminist only more common” (Walker, 1979, pg. 100). In 1983, she started *In Search of Our Mothers Garden* with an updated definition,

Womanism: 1. From *womanish* (opp. of “girlish,” i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, “you acting womanish,” i.e. like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: “You trying to be grown.” Responsible. In charge. *Serious*.

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter) and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally a universalist, as in: “Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?” Ans. Well you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.” Traditionally capable, as in: “Mama, I’m walking to Canada and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.” Reply: “It wouldn’t be the first time.”

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (pg. xii)

Womanism has been taken up by scholars across disciplines and folks beyond academic audiences, as a theory, framework, and lifestyle, (Cannon, 1995; Maparyan, 2012). In the contemporary moment, womanism is “embraced in popular culture in the language, music, and writings appealing to millennial Black women such as those found in the Crunk Feminist Collective” (Brewer, 2021, pg. 93). I also understand themes of self-care, voice, and empowerment are often reflected in feminist discourse as intentional womanist citations. Moreover, I find Brewer’s observation a very helpful illustration of Walker’s understanding of the relationship between the two problem solving frameworks, womanism offers Black feminism a self-determined and caring refuge – a space of inherent “undisputed dignity” (Cooper, 2018, pg. 5). It also aligns with stances that affirm the value of Black women’s experiences in facilitating her process of becoming more democratic. (Cooper, 2018).

For Maparyan (2012), womanism is “spirit,” a “walk,” and “a way of being in the world” (pg. 33) defined as “a social change perspective rooted in black women’s and other women of color’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces extended to the problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension” (Phillips, 2006, p. xx). Unlike feminism, the “walk” values energy over logic, wisdom over knowledge, and collectivity over individualism. Hudson Weems (2019) argues for the use of Africana Womanism to

further distance the “walk” from feminisms white supremacist adjacency. This non-Western foundation powers womanism’s nimbleness as an intergenerational framework and it positions the spirit-filled epistemology as a harmoniously subversive agent within the epistemic system.

Phillips (2006) offers five characteristics of womanism. Womanism is anti-oppressive, vernacular, communitarian, non-ideological, and spiritual. These characteristics reflect a commitment to the individual and collective endeavor of dismantling oppression; an identification with and value of local, personal, and everyday experiences; a departure from legitimizing knowledge on the basis of rationality; a commitment to commonweal or collective wellbeing as the transformative goal; and an engagement with the cosmos or spiritual realm (Maparyan, 2012, pg. 45). These characteristics exist across space, race, and ethnicity making room for women, particularly women of color, interested in problematizing the mainstream and enlivening the planet.

In education research, womanism is nurtured within discourses on ethics of care. To these discourses, scholars like Tamba Beauboef-Lafontant (2002; 2005) offer womanist ethics of care as relationships with students in recognition of their role in restoring and sustaining the planet. Womanist caring as a practice is primarily conceptualized from the subjectivity of a teacher. Per Beauboef-Lafontant (2005) womanist caring is a risky act. One goal of this study is to expand the documentation of womanist methodologies employed in education research to include other professional risk takers for the cause of transformation and liberation. As studies show that education

is a fruitful site of return for womanist caring, in Chapter 3, I will discuss the womanist methods used to facilitate local transformation in education.

### *Womanism and Black girls*

Beyond womanism's distinction as a non-Western epistemology that ascribes value to the wisdom of racialized and gendered experiences is its conceptual engagement with time or age. Based on Walker's positioning of girls of color as essential to the foundations of womanism, I understand girls of color, particularly Black girls, to be essential invitees to the table designed to create products that address an epistemic gap in local knowledge production. This decision is conceptually undergirded by ecological sustainability which involves exposing everyday people to the various elements of the systems and tools of society and inviting everyday people to engage in problem solving with and therein.

Within Walker's definition of womanism the unique racial and gendered situatedness of Black women and girls produces a standpoint that informs the way Black women and girls exist in and navigate life. As an "audacious" and life-affirming onto-epistemology, womanism problematizes the mainstream in service of the folk or vernacular and collective survival. In this way, I understand womanism as a critical and constructivist intervention.

Because this study centers the experiences of Black girls, it is also important to unpack the "womanish" as a contested characteristic when employed with intent to discipline. Such positions reflect adultification. Whereas adultification is grounded in an outsider gaze and desire to restrict Black girl being, womanism is insistent that dominant

Western perspectives are insufficient frameworks for understanding the ontological assertions of Black femininity. Frameworks of adultification position Black girls as more mature and less innocent, however identification of womanish behavior reflects Black women's understanding of the desire to be taken seriously and also the importance of protecting Black girlhood. Wherein Black women perpetuate adultification, particularly when using womanish labels, also present is a perceived survival strategy.

Tsuruta (2012) argues that womanish describes a “social practice of Black adults, especially Black women setting boundaries for Black girls, but simultaneously recognizing their coming into their own as women, making clear and steady steps toward maturity” (pg. 3). Walker is clear that womanish is not to be confused with acting “girlish,” irresponsibly, frivolously, and not seriously” (pg. xii). According to Nichols (1990), “a womanish girl has spunk and pluck to go along with smarts. And the same goes for the grown-up Black woman, who is self-defined, self-identified. She is a woman of complex moods who articulates her situation with vision” (pg. 288). Phillips (2006) argues that “a womanist has the freshness and zest of a womanish girl, and the maturity of mind and emotion of a woman” (pg. 4).

Womanism is a fitting element of this conceptual framework because it provides a language for my personal, passionate, and participatory commitments. It is concerned with expanding structural and ideological constructions for Black women and girls (Phillips, 2006) in the ways that only we do it because our everyday lives produce such practices. Maparyan (2012) contends that the womanist perspective is a gift that that helps everybody (pg. 127). To engage this “bifocality of being both female and of color”

with the exponential value added by engaging the womanish makes this study the gift that keeps giving (Beale, 2008, pg. 52).

### *Womanism and Black Girlhood Studies*

Black girlhood studies is widely circulated or understood as an extension of Black Feminist Theory. To the unique racialized and gendered standpoint, Black girlhood studies necessitates the additional consideration of age to intersectional studies on race and gender. Also, the culturally responsive nature of hip-hop feminism (Pough, 2015; Brown, 2009) or works well with Black girlhood studies (Brown and Kwakye, 2012; Love, 2012). Because it is a theory that engages popular discourses, to which Black girls significantly contribute; “fucks with the grays” (Morgan, 2000); and moves to an interiorly percussive beat (CFC Mission Statement) is effective in engaging Black girlhood. I argue that the grammar of intersectionality as a framework for adding age to studies on race and gender, during the period of its development explains the prevalence of feminist studies in Black girlhood studies. Fewer representations of womanist scholarship in the field, does not nullify its presence therein.

While intentions like luxocracy create the deeper saturation that distinguishes womanism from feminism, for me the demarcation between the two theoretical constructs is thin (Maparyan, 2012, pg. 3). When considered in terms of the distance on a color spectrum, one may conclude that womanism and feminism are light years apart. If I am to consider womanism as linear, it must consider a womanist love of “roundness.” That said, I understand the spectrum to resemble a tube of layers with varying amounts and placements of purple that reflect, bend, and refract different hues based on the prism with which it engages. If womanism is purple and feminism is lavender, then woma(femi)nism



is the prism. It is a location within the “grays” that Joan Morgan (2000) speaks of in *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*. In this work, Black feminism guides my critical perspective and womanism guides my constructivist sensibilities or methodology. Both vary in their degrees of saturation. Moving forward, this literature review will present a critical examination of schooling at the social location of Black girlhood and public media’s location within those educational systems.

### ***Review of the Literature***

This section begins with a contextualization of Black girlhood and education using viral media stories reported from South Carolina to frame one narrative of Black girlhood and education that circulated in the digital media landscape, supported by digital algorithms. Following these stories, I discuss Black girl school, curricular, and beyond the classroom learning experiences. These bodies of literature report challenges, potential, and success within research and pedagogical endeavors. Before concluding, I engage the literature exploring the function and impact of public media in education. Using the opportunities presented by aligning gaps in the literature on pedagogical approaches for engaging Black girlhood and the relationship between public media and education, I continue the journey in creating space in the epistemic system for creativity and agentic youth participation.

### ***Viral Representations of Black Girlhood in South Carolina***

On October 26, 2015, video of a Spring Valley High School student resource officer flipping, Shakara, a Black girl student who failed to comply with his orders, out of her desk to arrest her for disruptive behavior. In the video that went viral, the officer is

seen attempting to remove Shakara from her desk before flipping it over and dragging her across the floor. In the video, students can be seen moving their desks out of the way, bracing themselves, covering and covering their faces, with the exception of one student, Niya Kenney. Niya reacted and when asked why she advocated for Shakara, an audacious Niya responded, “I know this girl don’t got nobody” (What Kiya Kenny Saw, 2015). Niya’s response revealed a reality that many Black and Brown girls experience in schools, a reality that like Cassandra’s could have easily been discredited without video evidence. That reality is that within educational settings, Black girls are often without an advocate. Even beyond the schoolhouse, support for Shakara was faintly existent. In public discourse Shakara was characterized as problematic student who was finally adequately disciplined for being disruptive; she was faulted for the actions of the officer because she failed to comply and her life’s trajectory was trivialized in comparison to the officer who ultimately lost his job in law enforcement.

Neither criminal or civil rights law protected Shakara and Niya. They were arrested for a vague and subjectively applied “disturbing schools law<sup>1</sup>”, action which was supported by the county sheriff. In his press conference on the incident Sherrif Lott states,

My job and our job is to give a complete picture...this incident started with a big disruptive student in a class. The student was not allowing the teacher to teach

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<sup>1</sup> (A) It shall be unlawful:

(1) for any person wilfully or unnecessarily (a) to interfere with or to disturb in any way or in any place the students or teachers of any school or college in this State, (b) to loiter about such school or college premises or (c) to act in an obnoxious manner thereon [SC Code 16-17-420 (2012)]

and we not allowing the students to learn. She was very disruptive. She was very disrespectful, and she started this whole incident with her actions. She refused to leave the class as directed by the teacher. She refused to follow his instructions. He called for assistance from the school administrator. The school administrator got there. He was African American and he attempted to get her to leave the class also. She refused his instruction and was very disrespectful to him...I will note that the teacher and school administrator in those statements, both fully support the actions of Ben Fields. They said that he acted appropriately and that he didn't use excessive force. He did what was necessary...Once he put his hands on her, he was allowed to do that. He placed her under arrest...I did not feel that proper procedure was used at that point....He threw her across the room and that was improper technique...We must not lose sight that this whole incident was started by this student. She is responsible for initiating this action...She had to be held accountable. [The State Newspaper]

Lott's support, particularly as his stance is based on reports from two male authorities, reflects colloquial sentiments that subjectively evaluate execution instead of the nature of the action action and rings eerily similar to the outcomes of the Breonna Taylor case wherein the only officer charged with her senseless murder was found guilty of wanton endangerment (Bogel-Burroughs, 2020).

In addition to the harmful experiences by Shakara and Niya Kenny at Spring Valley and narratives of Black girls like RaNiya Wright represent South Carolina in national media. RaNiya Wright is worth knowing and remembering. RaNiya was a fifth-grade student who died after a classroom fight with a bully. According to reports 10-

year-old RaNiya, died of natural causes related to a rare condition and such investigative outcomes hold no one or no institution liable for RaNiya's untimely and preventable death (Malkin, 2019). RaNiya's mother, reported that bullying was a consistently unaddressed issue in the school and although the school had a resource officer present on the day of the fight, he was unaware of the incident until a school staff member placed a call for medical assistance (Mayo, 2019 April 19). Mayo's article also maintains that surveillance cameras were installed only in common areas, not classrooms. RaNiya had no safety, advocacy, or protection of accountability in her school. RaNiya, Shakara, and Niya all attended surveilled schools with resource officers on staff and were still victims of physical, social, and emotional harm (Mayo, 2019 April 19; Malkin, 2019).

Beyond schools one must ask, how do the beautiful places and smiling faces of South Carolina impact Black girls? Kamyiah Mobley's story suggests that they are veils. In 2017 Kamyiah Mobley, born Alexis Manigo, learned that she had been abducted at birth and raised in the same South Carolina county as RaNiya, under a different name. For 19 years, Kamyiah lived as a Black girl from South Carolina. The goal here is not to deliberate the details of Kamyiah's life, but the conditions that facilitate such a long-term hiding in plain sight. I argue that the beautiful places and smiling faces of South Carolina, as in Kamyiah's story, cover up the messiness of life and perpetuate the lack of truth telling needed for transformation. As the entry point for nearly forty percent of enslaved Africans the trees, streams, mountains, and swamps have much to testify about Black girlhood in South Carolina (Hansen, 1997; Washington-Williams, 2005). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, this study uses womanist methodology to engage Black girls in the kind of transformative dialogue that harmonizes and balances human life and nature.

### *Black Girl Truths in School*

Schools are indeed a microcosm of society and the same lack of protection that makes Black women and girls vulnerable in larger society, are also present in schools. The school-to-prison pipeline is an exhibit of gendered racism for girls of color. Studies show that Black and brown girls experience harsher discipline because they are perceived to be attitudinal, loud, unmanageable and less feminine than white girls (Crenshaw, 2015; Fordham, 1993; Morris, 2015; Wright, 2015). Moreover, studies show that Black girls experience harm due to adultification. Because Black girl bodies and ways of knowing are markedly different than normative white femininity, Black girls are often perceived as older and less innocent (Epstein, 2018).

Often adultification works in conjunction with other discriminatory practices. Cox (2016) argues that Black girls can be hyper visible and hyper vulnerable when they are primarily seen as Black bodies, and yet remain hidden agents of potential danger when mainstream society attempts to engage them as human beings, beyond the flesh. Here, Cox (2016) points to the complex relationships Black girls negotiate as they navigate childhood and adolescence and as they transition into adulthood. Winters (2005) notes that white teachers “are more likely to perceive their Black female students as socially mature and white female students as intellectually competent” and give to Black female students “more praise for behavior than another other subgroup of students” (pg. 26). Other studies confirm similar assertions that white teachers are more often concerned with the maintenance of the status quo by policing the bodies of Black girls and promoting academic dexterity among white females (Morris, 2017). Such invested

energies relying on white standards of femininity often provide little assistance to Black girls navigating their lives inside schools or beyond.

If we consider schools as an epistemic community, the documentation supports the argument that Black and Brown girls experience a reducible and irreducible epistemic oppression. In addressing schools as epistemic systems, it is important to address the systemic apparatuses that intend, though as with Shakara fail, to provide equal protections and access to epistemic agency. Black girls occupy a unique social location that obfuscates accountability for equal protection in education. Attending to educational equity for Black girls and girls of color necessitates an interarticulation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Via these amendments, federal guidance treats identity as compartmentalized, as opposed to intersectional and leaves Black women and girls outside of the circle of safety (Crenshaw, 1991; Wun, 2018). When needing to use these legal constructs for accountability's sake, Black Women and girls are left to determine if the infractions in questions are due to race or gender. This is reality that their racial and gendered counterparts less often encounter (Hull et. al, 1993).

Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 states that,

“no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (United States Department of Education).

Whereas, Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any program or activity that receives Federal funds or other Federal financial assistance. The combination or overlap of these federal authorizations should provide a structure for accountability that prevents or strongly admonishes disproportionate disciplinary outcomes, student undermatch, and curricular underrepresentation.

Indeed, Title IX protections are discussed and invoked in support of equal protections for Black girls and girls in general. However, much of this energy focuses on higher education, more specifically 4-year college education. The clear majority of Title IX athletic discourse examines the impact of the gender-equity requirement on four-year college athletics for men (McAndrews, 2012; Langton, 2009; Darnell & Petersen, 2011) and female athlete resistance to inequitable distribution of resources, advocacy and organizing around Title IX (Druckman, Rothschild & Sharrow, 2018). Regardless of the context, both Title IX and Title VI require that institutions be inclusive in representation to include recruitment, participation, curriculum, and outcomes. In addition to educators and advocates working on their behalf, Black girls need opportunities to speak back to the failures of these structures in their own words, for themselves.

While not couched within these particular legal frameworks, scholars are engaging in critical work that loves femaleness and promotes the survival of a whole people (Evans-Winters, 2010, Dillard, 2012). For example, Love (2019) passionately outlines the ways in which institutions limit the wealth potential of students of color and further murder the spirits of children. In her call for abolitionist teaching, she calls for the use of thriving-grounded gender-loving practices that reduce harm and simultaneously affirm life and growth. From her Black feminist standpoint, Evans – Winters (2014)

convenes arguments that center the murder of Trayvon Martin to highlight the ways in which educational systems participate in the neglect, surveillance, and objectification of young black bodies, male and female (Evans-Winters, 2014, pg. 3) and urges parents, teachers, and community workers to consider their roles in preparing children should, should they encounter this violence. Grounding the work of both Love and Winters, Dillard (2012) calls for the use of an endarkened feminist epistemology in which we remember those things we learned and were taught to forget. And at the core of that work of recall and putting the self-back together is an understanding of the limitations of social constructions and material relations, alongside an embrace of “conscious relationship with the realm of spirit, with the invisibly permeating, ultimately positive, divine, and evolutionary energies that give rise to and sustain all that exists” (Hull, 2001, pg. 2). I understand this framework to exist within the purple to lavender spectrum of woma(femi)nism very helpful in multi-sited problem solving aimed at the whole body.

Black girl truths and their dissent are transformative agents. Such is certainly the case with Shakara as her experience mobilized a movement to challenge disturbing schools laws in multiple states. It is documented that Shakara’s traumatic experience led to a gradual decrease in the school-to-prison pipeline due to infractions common for children (Hinger, 2018). I argue that Shakara should be credited and lifted up for the freedoms that her experience precipitates for other students wrestling their development. While policy is improving for current and future students, the arc towards restoration for Shakara is long. Knowing and remembering Shakara is key to sociopolitical transformation in schools as schools should be places where Black girls are safe, seen, and agentially engaged. Before more Black girls fall on the sword in service of



educational reform, I intend to conspire with them to center their ways of knowing and being to help educators and other grown folks more optimally engage them and become more fully human themselves.

### *Curriculum*

Moreover, I find Kincheloe's position on education's role in the maintenance of a democratic society a tangible interarticulation of Deweyian and Frierean ideals wherein education functions as a maintainer of democracy and an apparatus for inviting partakers to become more fully human (Friere, 1972). As these theorists contend, I argue that a general application of the sobering status of education in the United States gets messier when we center Black women and girls (Cooper, 2021). Considering the amalgamation of race, gender, and other intersectional identities, Black female students report experiences that are dehumanizing and restrictive (Morris, 2015; Evans-Winters, 2018; Carroll, 1997). Wherein these experiences take place, I argue that Black girls deserve the space to express their discontent. Curriculum being an under-sanctioned site of critique for Black female students (Green, 2016), I position this study as a democratic space for critique and evaluation. As I maintain agreement with Jarmon, the audacious, prophetic, perspective of Black girls (Garner, 2018) has the potential to make manifest outcomes yet to be imagined.

Admittedly, students are not emphatically prohibited from evaluation in education. Most often permissible talking back is a component of the learning assessment, not an evaluation of teaching. Certainly, higher education studies suggest that student evaluations of teaching do not measure teaching effectiveness as much as they measure student preferences. Furthermore, the pressure to appeal to student preferences

for the purpose of getting a good evaluation compromises the integrity of the profession and exposes educators to bias from students (Stroebe, 2020; Esarey, 2020). Within the K-12 context student perception surveys increased in popularity with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation initiative advocating for the integration of “multiple measures” assessments for measuring teacher effectiveness (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). These measurements, while giving voice to students, are not without complex issues, particularly considering their ultimate aims of advancing innovation. I argue that advocate for student perception surveys demonstrates a convergence of interests wherein policy makers and lobbyists seek the perspective of students, not for the development of their humanity, but to heighten global competitiveness (Auld, et al., 2019).

Scholars argue that global competitiveness is much more of an imperialistic pursuit than it is democratic or humanitarian (Altbach, 1977). And as hooks (2002) argues that white supremacy and patriarchy are intertwined with imperialism, in the quest for global dominance whiteness is the largest beneficiary (Mills, 1999). Curricularly speaking, the formal U.S. eduscape is highly standardized and developed with universal aims, even though students and teachers engage curricula from their unique positionalities. I understand these universal aims’ role as centering normative identities, perspectives, and concerns, namely whiteness, maleness, and normative physical ability. It is also important to note that teachers also report frustration with curricular restrictions due to standardized testing-oriented teaching regulation. As liberation is a quest that must be taken collectively, I advocate for the building of coalitions wherein teachers and students, in the context of this study, Black girls, mobilize this frustration to produce

change (Lorde, 1984). Cultivating epistemic systems wherein Black girls can fully participate in knowledge production requires a decentering of these normative identities, acknowledgement of alternative epistemologies, and inviting Black girl students to participate in the process of curriculum development (Bron & Veugelers, 2015).

As schools function as socializing agents in society, curricula determine the program of study for such socialization (Bruder & Ferreira, 2021; Flynn, 2020; Labaree, 1997). By program of study, I mean the academic lessons deemed essential, the order and pace in which they are taught, methods for assessing learning, and measures of evaluating student performance and educator effectiveness. Critical curriculum studies interlocutors argue that these components can have a deleterious impact on socialization and maintain inequality when not engaged critically. Take for example Sylvia Wynter's explanation of the ways in which curriculum reinforces inequality. She argues,

If you look at the system of 'knowledge,' in the curriculum, it's set up to motivate every white student and to de-motivate every Black student. The system of 'knowledge' itself is what functions to motivate and de-motivate. Notice it motivates those who are to be at the top and de-motivates those who are to be at the bottom. So you begin to say then, "what do our systems of 'knowledge do?" And you begin to ask yourself, "how are human orders reproduced?" "How is it that each order is reproduced?" Why must there be this gap between Black and white? (Thomas, 2006).

In the tradition of Woodson (1933), Wynter argues that educative epistemic systems privilege the worldviews of normative identities, and that this possessive investment is a construct of the larger sociopolitical order. In this system privileges and oppressions are

based on power relations and identity, have material consequences, and are determinates of lifespan. And while this privileging is highly visible in formal curricular content, much of the unequal learning takes place via the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum or hidden curricula is a longstanding apparatus of socialization and widely documented (Anyon, 1980; Giroux, 1987; Porterfield, 2017; Prosser, 2007). Though not explicitly stated, easily recognized, or disclosed by educators or education systems, hidden curricula reinforce acceptable norms, behaviors, and values – most often in the form of curricular representation and classroom management or discipline (Giroux, 1987). As a major player in reinforcing societal inequality, a critical examination of the hidden curriculum is essential for creating safe and affirmative learning environments and experiences for students. I argue that one agentic challenge to the hidden curriculum is to involve students in curriculum development and solutions – oriented civic engagement within the school community.

#### *Student participation in curriculum development*

Scholars have argued that it is critical to consider students and community in the development and evaluation of curriculum (Isler et al., 2015; Brooman et al., 2015). Such arguments are critically important as curriculum development is most often adult and institution driven, although curriculum consumers are students who spend the majority of their time beyond school walls, in community (Bron & Veugelers, 2014). Most often, curriculum is developed with goals of skill attainment for material production and global competitiveness (Race to the Top, S. 844, 2010) with little attention to local particularity or student interest. As such, curriculum researchers argue for both student and community voice in curriculum development.

Valuing student voice in curriculum development, requires a renegotiation of power within the epistemic system. It disrupts the top-down nature of educational institutions and shifts power within the organizational structure of schools. The benefit therein is that students can offer their insights and educators in turn have a window through which to see students differently. In addition to educator contentions that a level of authority on the part of the educator is essential for maintaining order and meeting the established learning outcomes, some curriculum scholars argue that trends in student voice are likely to follow the sociopolitical climate of the epistemic system – that even student voice can have the effect of reproducing inequality (Leat & Reid, 2012).

Though those inequalities be possible, Leat and Reid (2012) also find that greater inclusivity among curriculum developers leads to a more inclusive curriculum. Simply put, representation and visibility matter. Other scholars argue that student voice in curriculum development has positive impact on student development as well. Extending beyond representation, Montoya (2015) shows that when students are invited to drive curriculum development, potential outcomes are improved leadership abilities, character, competence, and capacity. Though the study is set in a higher education engineering program and includes a small sample, taking Leat and Reid's suggestion of building an inclusive development group is a potential solution for observing curriculum and student development via student voice.

Like Leat and Reid (2012), O'Neill and McMahon (2012) argue for student participation in curriculum development. Using participatory research and action with graduating students in an undergraduate physiotherapy program, the researchers engaged in multiple rounds of development discussions. In this engagement, the researchers found

that group dialogue and negotiation, student involvement in transparent action, and a neutral facilitator are key components of a participatory process in with adult students. Though student voice was amplified in this study, the researchers are also clear that relationships of power still complicate outcomes, as in this study perceptions of autonomous curriculum decision making by students was a noted concern of instructors not involved in the study (pg. 169). O'Neill and McMahon unveil the complexity of power in participatory curriculum development spaces, particularly when students are engaged as agentic decision makers.

### *Black Girls and Curriculum*

Historical marginalization of Black girls, connected to their racialized, gendered, and classed identities extends to school curriculum. Despite the push for culturally relevant pedagogy and “world-class skills,” (Profile of the SC Graduate) much of schooling remains “rooted in a tradition that privileges print, canonical text, and individualized instruction” (Ladson-Billings, 2009 and King & O'Brien, 2002, p. 48). Moreover, this cannon predominately displays perspectives of whiteness and masculinity, leaving little room for the representing ways of knowing and being of people of color, let alone Black girls.

As literacy is a growing issue in U.S. education, scholars argue not that Black girls are lacking in literacy skills, rather they are not represented among the literary selections used in classroom instruction. Green (2016) makes an appeal for the use of street literature in promoting literacy among Black girls. In her argument she posits that Black girls' street literacies and academic literacies often come into conflict with each other in instructive spaces. According to Green “school spaces often do not account for

the multiple home and cultural experience that shape who Black girls are and how they see the world” (2016, pg. 284). Recognizing the standardization of teaching and learning, Green makes multiplicities call. She encourages educators to expand their libraries both in the classroom and in instructional materials to include texts that are diverse and relevant to students.

In as much as street literature or urban literature is becoming increasingly popular among Black girls, the use of Black girls’ language increases. This, however, is often misinterpreted in classrooms. According to Haddix and Muhammad (2016), “research on Black girls’ language practices reflects the importance of cross-generational relationships and linguistic apprenticeships, specifically in how to navigate linguistically in spaces that valorize ‘proper’ English” (pg. 311). What the researchers appear to suggest is that those educators who misinterpret Black girls’ language as deviant or deficient, miss an opportunity both to understand how Black girls make meaning and to help Black girls develop a linguistic skill that will assist them in resisting marginalization and accessing privilege when so desired. And while some educators may suggest that the framework offered by Haddix and Muhammad may fundamentally alter a course, they argue that “if we reimagine an English education where Black girls matter, all children will benefit from a curricular and pedagogical infrastructure that values humanity (pg. 329).

Moreover, Green (2016) advocates for the promotion of literacy programming using street literature and digital spaces for self-empowerment and self-determination. As students continue to see brick and mortar schools as sites that reproduce inequality (Oppenheim & Stambauch, 2014) the use of digital spaces, literature that is engaging and relevant, and instruction that helps students interpret their imagined lived worlds

becomes more attractive. The use of digital spaces, namely social media democratizes knowledge production and sharing. Increasing calls for the inclusion of media literacy in teaching supports recognition of the function of technology and media in the lives of young people, in addition to critical literacies essential for navigating digital spaces.

Hall (2011) uses a critical literacy framework, to examine Black girls' identities as digital storytellers. The three girl participants were members of a summer literacy program designed as a space for engaging in culturally responsive and intellectually rigorous curriculum. As a response to their reading of texts considered noncanonical, the participants and the researcher engaged in practices of reflexivity and critical analysis, before composing digital responses to the text. In her analysis of their digital productions, Hall finds that "creating, owning, and experimenting with narratives" gives students an opportunity to "push discursive boundaries of the classroom and establish their own space of meaning and experience" (pg. 17). Hall's work is an example of acknowledging students, showcased by Black girl narratives, as knowledge producers within an epistemic system. When given the opportunity to contribute, they invite others to consider new possibilities and imagine new worlds.

Literacy and critical media studies support this work and provide examples of narrative analysis, counternarrative storytelling, and representative reimagination among underrepresented student populations within skills-based policy and curricular mandates. However, these studies primarily center the development of critical media as a tool of assessment, rather than a curricular offering to educators. This study builds upon the creation of opportunities for students to agentially engage in knowledge production and also disrupts conventional processes wherein student created content showcases what



they've learned as opposed to the lessons they seek to teach. Understanding the unique experiences of Black girls in schools, their underrepresentation in school curriculum and the priorities of the policy makers therein, I argue that perpendicular sites of learning have the potential to support students and teachers in addressing educational needs unaddressed in the traditional school day or classroom.

### *Black Girls: Learning Beyond the Classroom*

According to the National Bureau of Educational Statistics, youth spend the majority of their time outside of traditional or formal learning environments (De Brey, et al., 2021). Whether in the form of school-sponsored or non-school-sponsored activities, youth engage in learning beyond standardized instruction in conventional spaces. These spaces are often vehicles for social and emotional learning, address inequity, and appeal to student affinities. Predominately recognized non-school-sponsored activities typically fall under the categories of performing arts, organized sports, religious activity, academic instruction, science or math camps, and other camps (De Brey, et al., 2021). In a number of categories research findings indicate that engagement in non-formal non-school-sponsored activities increases interest and improves learning (Jimenez-Cortes, 2015 & Pender, 2016).

For example, Mulvey et al (2020) find that visiting information science learning sites and interacting with an adult or youth educator at the site increases interest in science topics and interaction with site educators, increased self-assessments of learning (pg. 9). Through the study sample herein primarily consists of ethnic majority families, this study is of particular interest because two of the data collection sites share the same city and state location as the proposed study and because the data show that employing

youth educators increases interest and engagement. The proposed study builds upon this one by empowering youth educators in a state-sponsored, non-formal educative space with the specific aim of creating welcoming space (Dawson, 2014).

Considering the racial and gendered violence, invisibility, and lack of cultural relevance noted in previous sections, non-formal, non-school-sponsored educative or collective spaces function as safe havens for Black girls often seeking refuge from multiple sites of harm and dispossession. I invoke Septima Clark here for her vision of a democratic epistemic system and as a Black woman community educator committed to the survival of an entire people (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). In her discussion of her vision for citizenship schools in the US South, Septima Clark stated,

I want people to see children as human beings and not think of the money it that it costs nor to think of the money it will cost...think of the lives that can be developed into Americans who will redeem the soul of America and will really make America a great country” (Charron, 2012, pg. 347).

Within the current sociopolitical environment “make America great again” are contrary to the aims of citizenship education and they necessitate the establishment and support to community education programs that, like the Citizenship schools, teach people, young and old, about their rights as citizens, what it means to live among others, and “how change comes about” (Charron, 2012, pg. 346). The call I make is an invitation to fuller humanity.

Clark’s vision of a democratic epistemic system is possible within schools, but more likely beyond classrooms as informal learning spaces are less controlled by

educational policy and standardized mandates. For Black girls these spaces are often more agentic as they make room for vernacular ways of being and communication. Henry's (1998) study highlights the impact of environment on the disposition of Black girls. She is clear that within schools, even Afrocentric ones, Black girls often experience invisibility and silencing, yet they are also willful and audacious outside of class. This audacious demonstration of womanist sensibilities, when embodied in classrooms is more likely corrected, whether using disciplinary procedures or encouraging more "acceptable" behavior (Frolich, et.al, 2015).

As learning extends beyond classrooms, Black girls often find safe and celebratory environments for critical engagement and personal development in afterschool initiatives and programs. Black feminist and womanist scholarship call for more caring adults of resist leaving youth to "struggle alone" in the development of critical consciousness and self-love (Richardson, 2013) and to create spaces for Black girls to do so without the drain of the white gaze. Within these spaces, scholars found that Black girls often occupy liminal spaces that are difficult to navigate without the support of an enlightened witness (Winn, 2011; Stokes, 2007). The studies are consistent in their commitment to supporting Black girls wrestling with complex webs of racial, gendered, economic, political, and social arrangements. While I am clear that media is an educational tool that extends beyond classrooms, I seek, in this study, to see what public media looks like as an intersecting educational site for youth.

### *Public Media*

Per Cain (2017), public media in the U.S. context is an intervention implemented to address the findings of the Equality of Educational Opportunity (1966) report, also

known as the Coleman Report. Mandated by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the commissioner of education was expected to survey and present findings on “the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reasons of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions” (Section 402). In his report, Coleman found that the greater predictors of student success were the educational backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses of families and the demographic composition of student bodies, not increased funding appropriations. Though scholars and critics, contest the findings of the study, namely on the basis that the researcher’s positionality can have the effect of “subordinating the difficult and multifaceted realities to the constraints of method” (Clark, 1965, xix), they were operationalized on several educational reform fronts aiming to extend learning beyond the classroom for low-income minority students.

In one experiment, educational television was explored as an accessible, affordable, and reliable method of extending learning beyond the classroom. Using the show that would become *Sesame Street*, producers were able to document the ways in which a public access broadcasting platform for meaningfully created educational media increased early cognitive, social, and emotional development among viewers (Cain, 2017). By 1967, the passing of the Public Broadcasting Act, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was established as a fiduciary intermediary between the federal government and educational television stations. And, by 1969 the Public Broadcasting Service had been created to function as a coordinating body for participating stations. This network of stations, broadly understood in the U.S. context as public media, or PBS is composed of a diverse set of communication stations that distribute public service media to American homes and devices using television, radio, and digital platforms.

According to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, United States public media is the system of telecommunication stations that:

1. are independently and locally owned and operated.
2. distribute free radio, television, and/or digital content to the general public
3. provide free high-quality educational programming for children and local emergency management services, and
4. express commitment to the principles of access, inclusion, local specificity, and public service. (Corporation for Public Broadcasting)

South Carolina's (SCETV) public media, like many others in the nation, consists of TV, radio, and digital platforms to include PBS and NPR. SCETV is like other public media stations in that it is a licensee of Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio programs. It is among a group of stations that also function as a state agency. Predating the Coleman Report, the Educational Television Commission of South Carolina was established as the outcome of a 1957 resolution by the South Carolina General Assembly calling for a study on the use of television in public schools. Enabled by state legislation in 1960, the agency handles supporting the state's public communication infrastructure, supporting the state Department of Education with the provision of educational content and teacher training resources, and supporting emergency management systems (South Carolina Code of Laws, Title 59, 1960). The agency also serves as a provider of educational equipment for individuals and institutions and a revenue-sharing entity as it relates to communication towers.

Future studies in this area would benefit from a comparative analysis of public media internationally. Researchers have documented some ways in which public service

media is employed as a part of preservation and development plans in particular global contexts, (Malhotra, 2001, Orts, et al, 2020; Ferre-Pavia, 2018; Poyntz, 2020; Schwartz, 2016). A vertical examination of educational use cases has the potential to produce guideposts that are applicable across context. Particularly as the growth of the digital space advances and expands the potential reach of our communications, opportunities for sharing wisdom and resources across physical space are significantly more accessible. What we already know is that women and girls of color are prioritized in several developmental and sustainability plans across the globe (Easterly 2009, Unterhalter 2014, and Jewitt & Riley, 2014). What these plans and reports offer the U.S. is a window through which to explore the ecological return on investment in girls of color.

### *Public Media and Black Girls*

Scholars credit the Coleman Report with first documenting an *achievement gap* among students of different races and socioeconomic backgrounds. Coleman found that Black students scored lower on standardized reading and math testing than their white peers and from that “it was understood that the performance of poor children [both black and white] lagged behind that of majority whites, and the thinking was that this was due to deficiencies in the schools they attended” (Alexander, 2016). Educational media was created in part, to decrease these gaps.

I contend that the methodological blind spots present in the Coleman report contribute to the marginal visibility of Black girls in public media content. Coleman’s prioritization of quantitative survey methodology struggles to extend “beyond facts that are quantifiable and are computable, and that distort the actual lives of individual human beings into rigid statistics” (Clark, 1965, pg. xxiv). I see this represented in public

media's current engagement with Black girls and understand it to be grounded in the findings of this report.

Currently, the PBS programmatic lineup does not include a series that features a Black girl protagonist available to local stations. The lineup does, however, include programming that includes Black girl characters as a part of the cast. I posit that this invisibility or lack of prioritization is a result of the centering of the achievement gap in PBS commitments and metrics. Based on data related to the achievement gap, data driven decision making would support prioritizing Black males as a target audience with greater transformative potential. According to Young and Foster (2018), Black girls consistently outperform their male counterparts in every educational metric. These data support narratives that Black girls are resilient and competent, while Black boys are endangered. Though findings report better performance on standardized metrics, this data is meant to assess academic performance, not experience or wellness.

Other data sets provide justification for the development of interventions targeting Black girls. For example, The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (2021) student discipline data report finds that "Black girls were the only group across all ethnicities for girls where a disparity was observed." Racialized and gendered experiences of Black girls are rarely addressed because they are obfuscated within discussions of race or gender. Engaging Black girls at their interarticulated social location is important for addressing these seeming polarities in the data. Also, as will be explored moving forward, the creative potential of Black girls and their unique positionalities are gems public media has long lost out on due to findings of this report.

Yet, commercial media is reflecting an acknowledgement of the appeal and demand of Black girlhood. New shows like *Karma's World* a 40 11-minute episode series on Netflix and *That Girl Lay Lay* on Nickelodeon. Representing both streaming and cable platforms, both programs offer fresh, relatable representations of Black girls and their environments. While these representations are much desired and timely, they are not available within a vacuum. Navigating access to these programs requires users to engage with media less monitored for safety and messaging (Bulger, et. al. 2020). In addition to participating in this particular demonstration of inclusivity, PBS would add to the available offerings a safe, commercial-free viewing experience, on broadcast and digital platforms.

A comparable show, while on trend with commercial providers, would not address the challenges identified in the *Navigating Youth Media Landscapes: Challenges and Opportunities for Public Media* (2020) report. Presently, public media's primary audiences are early learners and adults. As noted in the report, after more than fifty years after the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, "children are no longer underserved" in public media (pg. 9). However, the mission of the legislation further "the general welfare of the nation" can be applied to youth (Public Broadcasting Act of 1967). Where engaged at all, youth and adolescents are more likely to engage public media in the classroom. It is less often engaged as the first option of viewers between the ages of 11 and 25. Current engagement trends show that this group uses digital platforms as their primary venue for accessing news and media. Moreover, the prevalence of social media and other participatory digital platforms, has a democratizing effect on content development.



This change within the delivery system has resulted in increasing interest and participation in content creation (Bulger, et. al, 2021, pg. 26). In their executive summary Bulger, Madden, Sobel, and Davison (2021), share

When we ask youth for advice on how we could create more appealing content for kids their age, the issue of representation is especially important. They want to see kids like them, as well as other who reflect the diversity they see in their generation. In order for this content to be perceived as authentic, it will be important to integrate the input from youth and also take advantage of the fact that these kids love to create and share their unique perspectives” (pg. 6).

Yet, even in their finding that youth recognize lack of diversity, age and sexuality are the prioritize social locations (pg. 23-25). The degree to which racialized and gendered LGBTQ and/or youth experiences are represented in the media produced as a result of this call is a future window into the condition of public media’s epistemic system.

As suggested by Jarmon (2013) and others engaging Black girls in digital storytelling, Black girls are creative reservoirs engaging in this everyday work. In an effort to expand its audience, public media would be the wiser to consider this group with a unique positionality that has proven, transformative aces in the world of media.

In tandem with the primary use of digital media platforms for social media engagement, gamification, and remote learning, public media has expressed commitment to creating media “made with or for youth” (pg. 7) for the public good. Considering high school Black girls in the “underserved” youth audiences a uniquely qualified target group for informing plans and practices that are “responsive to the needs of people” and my

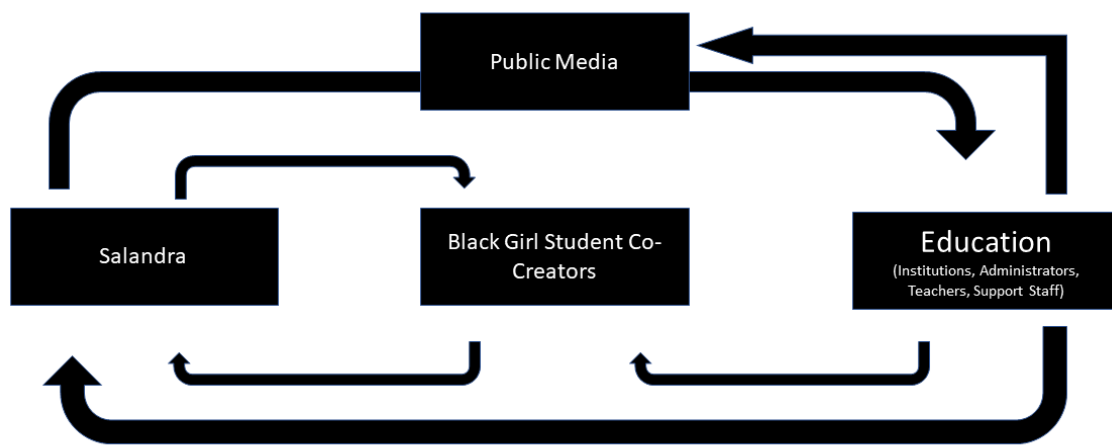
group of choice for endeavoring though “creative risks,” this study is one station’s local process for finding and engaging our missing youth audience (Public Broadcast Act of 1967). Using a womanist conceptual framework, I facilitated a youth participatory action research (YPAR) study with seven Black girl teenagers, during the summer and Fall of 2021. Chapter 3 explores the methodology in detail.

### *Summary*

Public media is a systemic support well-positioned and mission-directed to meet the demand for creating safe content that responds to educational, social and emotional, and physical health needs for youth audiences. As illustrated in Figure 2.1, I understand public media to be a transformative and agentic site within the epistemic system. Within this system. Understanding that formal school structures may be hesitant in sharing instructional power considering concerns with classroom management and high-stakes testing, I suggest that public media is an epistemic system beyond classrooms that have greater potential for democratic and agentic engagement with Black girls. As current public media efforts to increase engagement with adolescent and teenage audiences align with calls for student voice in education and whereas public media provides content and professional development services to schools and educators, engaging Black girls as curriculum developers enhances the bi-directional nature of teaching and learning.

Figure 2.1 outlines the various flows of knowledge within the system. Using my positionality as a womanist scholar, committed to Black girl celebration and a professional in public media, I take seriously the co-creative, symbiotic process of knowledge production with the Black girl co-creators and I from both my professional and researcher positionalities. The educational media is then shared with educators using

public media platforms. Educators with interest in using the resource would then re-cycle the content in the knowledge production process and use the content in teaching and learning. That educator would also communicate back to public media engagement with the content. As anticipated and in alignment with global wellness, it is expected that other targeted groups will occupy the center and other interlocutors enter at various locations within the system.



*Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework, epistemic agency*

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

*I dreamed about a space where Black girls would not be an afterthought. Would not exist in comparison. Would not be watched for the purpose of punishment or voyeurism. I thought about a space where we as Black girls would be engaged, not bored (Brown, 2012, pg. 39).*

#### ***Restatement of Purpose***

This study responds to the Joan Ganz Cooney Center's call (2021) for engaging youth in the process of creating content for engaging public media's missing youth audience. In operationalizing a local response to that call, this study seeks to describe the value of public media as a flexible educative site; understand what is required to seriously engage youth as co-creators in education content production and enhance representations of Black girlhood in public and education media.

#### ***Restatement of Research questions***

Because the goal of the study is to provide practical insights for multiple sites in the epistemic system, my questions seek to gauge the conditions necessary for facilitating participatory creative teaching and learning exercises in classrooms and informal learning spaces. Furthermore, I aim to evaluate the role of public media as a provider of educational content. And I ask what insights might emerge when Black girls co-create educational media in the public media space.

Explicitly re-stated I ask,

1. What conditions are required to create transformative informal educational environments that take the epistemic contributions of Black girls seriously?
2. What kinds of media content might materialize when Black girl creativity is centered in production processes?
3. What might we come to know about public media as an educational site by creating these conditions and centering the radical imaginations of Black girls?

### ***Womanist Methodology***

The womanist undercurrents of this study warrant a problem solving that is participatory, ecologically healthy, spirit-filled, and motivated by collective wellness.

According to Maparyan (2012) womanist methodology

is about being able to envision a desired outcome, then going back to the level of thought and feeling to transmute originating conditions in ways that lead to that outcome. And much of this process takes place on planes and in places that can only be described as “spiritual” or “invisible” and its knowledge and wisdom that “our grandmothers” perpetually maintained in both theory and act (pg. 51).

A womanist methodology would assume that there are many complimentary methodologies that contribute to problem solving. Some of these methods include harmonizing and coordinating, dialogue, arbitration and mediation, spiritual activities, hospitality, mutual aid and self-help, motherhood, and physical healing (Maparyan, 2012). In this study, I used harmonizing and coordinating along with dialogue to engage

the participant group in problem solving. In keeping with valuing personal experience, I do engage my critical womanist perspective in the study. When representing myself in the study, I intend to be transparent about my interpretative strategies and their role in shaping the study (duCille, 1993, pg. 197)

In taking a womanist methodological approach this study uses youth participatory action research (YPAR) to employ the womanish as an intergenerational problem-solving construct. This chapter 1. Provides an overview of the epistemological assumptions that ground this methodological approach; 2. Outlines the components of the study; and 3. Details the process by which I engage seven Black girls in co-creating educational content.

### ***Part 1: Methodological Overview of Youth Participatory Action Research***

Aspers and Corte (2019) argue that qualitative research is very fluidly defined. Rather than attempt to articulate or galvanize around a universal definition of qualitative studies, they offer four notions central to qualitative work. In taking up these notions from my researcher positionality, I define qualitative research as an iterative process of producing new knowledge wherein the researcher engages in reflexive practice that improves human understanding in multiple directions.

In this study a qualitative approach allows me to engage a group of stakeholders to understand the process and impact of world building with Black girls and to understand a group of Black girls' experiences and imaginations. Qualitative approaches are applied in this study against a backdrop of educational research and practice that

privileges student performance and demographic data in storytelling and policy making. Qualitative research does the work of humanizing the narratives that these data construct.

This study is adult-conceived, youth-centered, and collectively navigated. Youth participatory action research was selected as the methodology for this study. Creswell (2013) categorizes, its precursor, PAR as a transformative qualitative framework guided by an action agenda for change that may benefit those involved in the research and beyond. Within these frameworks, womanism offers harmony as dispositional and actionable criterion for producing an outcome meaningful to people's lives (Maparyan, 2012, pg. 56). Like jazz, PAR is improvisational, rhythmic, and harmonious or melodious in that it tries on various methods and perspectives for their fit in practice and alignment with intended outcomes. It is like call and response in that it is not linear in progression, rather PAR is often represented as a spiral that requires the researchers to plan, act, observe, and reflect (Pain, R., Whitman, G. & Millege, D., 2011). Like a verse and a chorus, PAR invites conceptualizations of researcher subjectivities as individual, singular, and in this case intergenerational.

YPAR is a critical research methodology that positions youth as legitimate experts in their own education and experiences and as agentic actors in social transformation (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Akom, et. Al., 2008). When used in education, YPAR blurs distinctions between role and directions of learning. Camarota and Fine (2008) consider YPAR an “epistemological challenge to the traditions of social science, most critically on where knowledge resides” (pg. 215). This is because YPAR methodologies recognize youth as knowing subjects and decision makers. As a

restorative and culturally sustaining methodology, Caraballo and Lyiscott (2020) contend,

beyond its role as a critical research methodology that carries specific epistemological commitments regarding who is invited to conduct and disseminate research in actionable ways, YPAR can be a lens that informs pedagogical frameworks which frame teaching and learning as collaborative inquiry, particularly with historically marginalized youth. (pg. 196)

Leveraging the voice of those in closest proximity to the issue begets outcomes more exacting to meet the needs of adolescents and youth. When youth and adults engage in partnership “legitimizing and openings spaces” is one role adults play with the partnership (Schuster and Timmermans, 2017). Creating opportunities and space for youth to engage in collaborative partnerships, provides adults an opportunity to participate in succession planning and personal-professional development. An extension of participatory action research, youth participatory action research is a future-facing methodology that engages young people in creating the solutions that will be needed in the world they will inherit and beyond. What follows is a discussion of each component of YPAR.

In addressing the issue of representation in educational media for middle and high school grades, the voices, experiences, and perspectives of youth are critical. The Coleman Report and others agree that peer relationships have a significant impact on student achievement (Burke and Sass, 2013). If the media to be developed is to be transformative and attractive to youth audiences, it must seriously engage youth as stakeholders in the creative process. To my knowledge, the vast majority of the



curricular content consumed by students is adult- conceived and adult-created as student friendly standard-aligned or learning-oriented content, but to varying degrees of satisfaction and effectiveness among students. The degree to which the educational media is considered relevant by students is influenced by student involvement in curriculum design (Brown and Veugelers, 2014, pg. 34). Though studies show that peers have non-trivial effects on student learning or achievement (Burke and Sass, 2008), they do impact student schooling experiences. Engaging youth in curriculum design elevates the student experience and for those students involved in creating the media, learning outcomes are more compounded.

In addition to producing these compounded outcomes, YPAR creates space to engage the womanish in educational settings. So often Black girls are asked to assume prescribed roles in schools or rendered invisible in racial or gendered discussions. In this study Black girls are taken seriously and in charge (Walker, 1983). Because of their unique positionality, Black girl voices are the subject of this study. It is expected that this model will be flexible for implementation with imaginatively designed participant groups.

Lincoln and Denzin (2012) note,

today, especially in more participatory forms of research, voice can mean not only having a real researcher and researcher's voice – in the real text, but also letting research participants speak for themselves, either in the text forum, or through plays, or forums, 'town meetings,' or other oral an performance-oriented media or communication forms designed by research participants themselves. (pg. 123)

This use of participatory methodology aligns with womanist problem-solving commitments like harmony, coordination, and dialogue (Maparyan, 2012). Including youth in these efforts can have a range of outcomes. And though case studies and analyses of unsuccessful studies can be instructive, these outcomes manifest on the other side of the human experience. For me, the literature also supported taking the risk of engaging in participatory action research with youth. Whereas some YPAR projects are complicated or even derailed by ethical dilemmas and tensions between youth and adult stakeholders (Mitra & McCormick, 2017 and Gristy, 2015), similarities in intersectional identity aided the passionate participant in helping youth stakeholders “assert their right to take up space in the public imagination and discourse” (Evans Winters, 2017, pg. 421).

### *Participatory*

Even as PAR consists of a broad range of participatory methods, the participatory aspect of the research is often contested in action research. Glesne (2015) defines PAR as community-based action research committed to social transformation through active involvement of marginalized or disenfranchised groups (pg. 25). Herein she also emphasizes PAR’s collaborative commitments (Lincoln and Denzin, 2012). These commitments to collaborative inquiry and engaging disenfranchised groups in knowledge production that informs their [our] lives speak to the who and where of participatory action research. That is PAR most often takes place in sites beyond the ivory tower with stakeholders less traditionally understood as knowing subjects. And while leveraging the voices of the everyday people in marginalized communities is a valuable and seemingly subversive endeavor, without attending to issues of power, implicit biases, and assumptions, PAR also has the potential to function as an affront to inclusivity in route to

social transformation (Burke, Green, & McKenna, 2017 and Brydon-Miller, Kral, et. al 2011).

Expanding beyond people and place theorizations, Santos (2016) posits that the “P” in PAR come to “re-signify” a political framework for engagement. This framework engages notions of people, plurality, publicity, participation, power, and politics (pg. 636). Although articulated for the purpose of addressing challenges to implementing PAR in higher education and for encouraging researchers to theorize politics along with the social benefits and challenges in doing PAR. Even in contexts outside of higher education research, it is essential for researchers to unpack what we mean by participation. For Santos a theoretical engagement with PAR grounded in social justice and democratic citizenship posits that

Plural people’s participation can carry out a type of research aimed at advancing social justice on the basis of plural people’s participatory actions, to put new beginnings into motion in the public realm. In this way, plural people’s participation can bring powerful communities to act together to make such realities ‘real,’ and plural people’s intensive searches for meaning and knowledge can re-humanize and renew universities [communities] from within (pg. 644).

Such a framework does not negate Lincoln and Denzin’s (2010) overview of the participatory paradigm. Santo’s label, “plural people’s participation” addresses the paradigms viewpoints regarding the nature of knowledge, knowledge accumulation, and quality criteria. Therein, Lincoln and Denzin argue that participatory epistemologies understand knowledge as emerging from practice or lived experiences, embedded in communities. When these individual, collective, local sites of knowledge work in

harmony, they “lead to action to transform a world in service of human flourishing” (pg. 101).

### *Action Research*

While “action” and “research” are single terms in PAR, I argue that together they necessitate the participatory.

According to McNiff (2016) action research involves

Taking action ‘in here’ your mental world to improve the quality of your interactions with others, who you hope are doing the same as you. It is always done in interaction with other people, so the knowledge you create is knowledge of practices, that is how you work with others to ensure that what you say and do, and how you interact, will be for the benefit of all (pg. 14).

McNiff’s articulation of action research presents the very problem that motivated Santos to articulate a theory of participation. McNiff makes mention of participation via interactivity in the aforementioned definition; however, I argue that the definition is missing the Freirean foundations that would make it PAR (Freire, 1972). Freirian emphasis on the democratization of knowledge, the development of critical consciousness, and the necessity of praxis beyond theorizing supports the notion that “ordinary people can understand and change their own lives through research, education, and action” (Brydon-Miller, 2011, pg. 2). McNiff’s definition is laden with singular pronouns and clearly privileges the primary investigator as “passionate participant” and primary beneficiary (Lincoln & Denzin, 2012).

I take Lewin (1946) to have best articulated the intervention offered by action research – that is to go beyond publication as the intended outcome of research (pg. 35). Action research presupposes the inextricable nature of research and action for the purpose of developing practice and producing knowledge, emphasis on developing praxis (Rauch & Schuster, 2014, pg. 8). Here research connects to social transformation. Although action research scholars engage varying positions on the meanings and mediated value of action from notions of systemic inquiry and professional development (Rauch & Schuster, 2014), these transformations are situated within particular communities of practice and do not necessarily articulate value of social justice.

#### *Why I Chose YPAR*

I chose YPAR because it is a qualitative methodology designed to recognize Black girls as knowing subjects and involve them in problem solving and world building. Black women and girls as knowing subjects with “practical knowing, critical subjectivity, and living knowledge” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2012, pg. 101). Taking from Venus Evans-Winters (2017), engagement in PAR, in alignment with endarkened feminist epistemology and hip-hop generation feminism can “bring girls of color into the conversation about girlhood as a potential epoch of self-empowerment and agency, such as naming one’s own reality, speaking truth to power, an embracing ways of knowing the social world by young women and women of color” (pg. 415).

Lincoln & Denzin, in discussing participatory axiology, notes that for participatory researchers “practical knowing how to flourish with a balance of autonomy, co-operation and hierarchy in a culture is an end in itself, is intrinsically valuable” (pg.

111). I argue that the ability to flourish while balancing autonomy, cooperation, and hierarchy is a historically rooted skill for Black women (Dillard, 2000).

In “Flipping the Script,” Venus Evans-Winters (2017), offers a model of YPAR of Black girlhood in conjunction with a girls’ empowerment organization. Herein, Evans-Winters demarcates the boundaries between insider-outsider positionalities and acts as a co-researcher with participants. Primarily Evans-Winters takes on the role as researcher educator and guides organization members through the research process (pg. 417). Here, Evans-Winters is not in control of the research process or its outcomes, rather she just initiates co-researchers into the inquiry process and serves as a validity checker in alignment with the collective’s goals for representation. This is my goal.

Evans-Winters (2017) offers a model for engaging in YPAR in ways that facilitate students’ identification of problems in their local sites of practice and experience, developing a research design for addressing the identified problems, analyzing the data, and representing it. In this project, the researcher uses her intersectional similarities to navigate issues of power within the project - represented as research as performance and art (pg. 421).

Through participatory engagement around the experiences of Black girls, the researchers, Black girl participants, and invited co-conspirators, collectively created multi-platform educational content grounded in womanish ontoepistemologies. In critique of the impact of colonization on the onto-epistemic orientations of Black and brown girls, I employed He and Phillion’s (2008) framework of personal, passionate, participatory inquiry to bridge the gaps between research and practice, to understand the

schooling experiences of Black girls, to engage the public space for solutions-oriented engagement, and to create opportunities for counter storytelling (Ayers, 2006).

## **Part 2: Research Design**

Data were collected in the form of participant observation notes, transcribed and coded audio-visual recordings, digital platform engagement artifacts, and researcher journals and memos. The study used a qualitative approach that enabled analysis of the outcomes of YPAR implementation in a public media educational content development initiative and the particular possibilities when Black girls are the passionate participants.

### *Co-Creators*

Seven black female high-school students participating in Upward Bound Summer Enrichment Program at the University of South Carolina.

### *Alexandria*

Alexandria is a rising sophomore at a rural high school. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, her entire freshman year consisted of remote learning. She is as anxious as some freshmen about the first day of school. Alexandria is a student athlete. During the summer she played volleyball as a part of a recreational club league. During the school year, she plays as a member of her high school varsity volleyball team.

In the preproduction meetings Alexandria openly shared her experiences and ideas. Early on she expressed an appreciation for seeing natural-haired and dark-skinned female animated character on public broadcasting. She attended five of six preproduction meetings and was very involved in character development and scripting. She invited the opinions of others and facilitated group decision making. She values voice and

inclusivity. During the screening of the pilot episode, Alexandria participated as one of the co-creator facilitators of the question-and-answer period.

### *June*

June is a rising senior at a suburban high school. She aspires to be an entrepreneur and own a clothing store. During the school year, June plans to start applying for colleges and focusing on personal goals. She wants a change of scenery. June was more reluctant to share her experiences and discuss personal matters, but she was significantly involved in character development and scripting. She attended five out of six preproduction meetings and was a persistent presence in the group. In alignment with her description of her style, she has a “chill vibe.”

### *CoCo*

CoCo is a rising sophomore and attends an urban high school. She aspires to be a flight attendant because of her love for travel and culture. During the school year, CoCo will juggle school and work, but she is confident that she will do well. CoCo is a working student, so much of her engagement was asynchronous and made use of the digital platforms to be discussed further in this and subsequent chapters. When she was present, she enlivened the discussion with her audacious perspective.

### *Koya*

Koya is a rising eleventh grader at an urban high school. She plays the saxophone in her high school band. Koya attended three of the preproduction sessions and provided helpful suggestions for animation and the script. Her favorite movie is *The Princess and the Frog*. For Koya, Tiana is a helpful model of independence, resilience, and hard work.



During the screening of the pilot episode, Koya shared that she experiences anxiety speaking in front of crowds. She was an enthusiastic contributor to the preparatory work for the screening.

### *Mari*

Mari is a rising eleventh grader at a rural high school. She likes to build things and aspires to be an architectural designer. Mari attended four of the preproduction sessions and was very involved in hair related discussions. During the screening of the pilot episode Mari participated as one of the co-creator facilitators of the question-and-answer period.

### *Asia*

Asia is a rising tenth grader at a rural high school. She attended four of the preproduction sessions. Asia was a reluctant participant, but when asked directly she responded with wit. During the screening of the pilot episode, Asia was a studious reviewer and provided her responses in writing.

### *TJ*

TJ is a rising twelfth grader at a suburban high school. TJ attended two of the preproduction sessions. She loves animals, anime, and video games.

### *Adult Stakeholders*

#### *Ms. Counts*

Ms. Counts is the Executive Director of TRiO Programs at the University of South Carolina, which includes the Upward Bound program. In the study, Ms. Counts functioned as an intermediary between the co-creators, parents, and I. She assisted me

with acquiring parental consent (Appendix A), invited me to promote the creative opportunity at summer orientation, included me in the program schedule, attended three preproduction sessions, and supported retention efforts by sending email reminders.

Prior to serving as director of the program, she served as Director of the Opportunity Scholars Program for first-generation and underrepresented undergraduate students. I am a part of her first cohort of students from this program. A clear demonstration of her commitment to first-generation student success and access, she and I embraced this project as a full circle moment.

#### *Joshua*

Joshua is the editor and animator for the pilot episode. Joshua and I are colleagues who have worked together on previous access related initiatives. His work in animation is well respected at SC ETV. He is an advocate of student voice and public media.

Joshua and I met to discuss the production via virtual conference call and telephone. We also communicated through email.

#### *Non-Participant Contributors*

There are several people who contributed to and are visible but not spoken in the study. Because of the resilience of the coronavirus, the availability of human resources to take on creative projects in combination with competing essential priorities exacerbated by the times reduced the number of in-house personnel available to commit to supporting the pilot project. However, I was able to identify colleagues within the content and knowledge production systems to contribute to the series. Non-participant contributions included curriculum worksheet layout design and voiceover production for non-participant voiceover talent.

## *Setting*

### *South Carolina Educational Television and Public Radio*

This study was conducted at South Carolina Educational Television and Public Radio, the hub for the states broadcast and digital communication infrastructure. SCETV is a PBS-NPR licensee and a legislatively enabled state agency. Within the educational epistemic system, ETV broadcasts educational content that is accessible to 98 percent of households in the state; manages communications towers on school or district property; supports schools and districts by facilitating free professional development workshops and trainings; serves as an approved recertification course provider; creates standard-aligned educational content and resources that are presented to the public as KnowItAll.org; and supports accessibility through the provision of Wi-Fi hotspots and use of a new instructional delivery system called datacasting.

When not in the virtual environment, co-creators visited the Columbia station for a table read and voiceover recording.

## *Upward Bound*

The use of a virtual meeting platform gave way to a synchronous multi-sited study. In as much as the sessions were recorded using the digital platform owned by SC ETV, the meetings too place with the context of the Upward Bound Summer Enrichment Program. Thus, I understand Upward Bound to be a site in this study as well.

The Upward Bound Summer Residential Program is a summer residential academic enrichment and college access program, administered under TRiO Programs (Uof SC TRIO Programs). While the program includes a summer on-campus living experience for students; however, the coronavirus required that the experience be virtual

for the summer of 2021. The program serves as underrepresented and/or low-income high school students. At the University of South Carolina, Upward Bound serves students who attend school in Richland School District One.

During the virtual summer experience, student co-creators participated in SAT prep, college admissions, cultural awareness, and leadership classes and activities. Lunch was provided using delivery services. The summer experience aligns with the preproduction phase of the study.

While the summer semester used the virtual delivery format, school re-opening mandates from the governor required that teaching and learning take place in person for the upcoming academic year (A102, R33, S704). Following University of South Carolina COVID and CDC guidelines, Upward Bound resumes Saturday sessions the immediate Fall semester. Saturday sessions reinforce the curriculum implemented in the Summer Enrichment program and provides real-time learning support as needed. During these sessions the co-creators brainstormed educational supports to be used with the pilot episode and planned audience feedback sessions with other Upward Bound students.

### *Sample Selection*

Initially I planned to select participants using the SC ETV Youth Engagement and Interest Survey (Appendix B). This survey invites students to provide feedback on ETV resources and express interest in participating in the production process. Both timing and the pandemic limited responsiveness to the survey. Because the survey was disseminated near the end of the academic year, time did not permit the collection of enough responses for summer engagement. Neither did attempts to promote the survey using social media ads significantly improve responsiveness. As survey dissemination coincided with the

end of a year of remote learning wherein parents and students were exhausted with technology and concerned with plans for returning to in-person work environments, click rates supported findings of Zoom or virtual fatigue (Bailenson, 2021).

To secure an alternate sample, I considered potential partnering organizations and their nimbleness considering my research timeline and their proximity to a local ETV station. I reached out to Ms. Counts about partnering with Upward Bound for several reasons:

1. Meeting structure – During the Summer Enrichment Program, Upward Bound coordinators plan activities for at least four weekdays each week. I'd hoped to be able to schedule at least five sessions during their program. While I was not certain the meeting format for the summer session, my proximity to campus aided my flexibility should the meetings be in-person.

Because of the Upward Bound meeting schedule and the virtual format, I was able to pace the sessions back-to-back or with distance in between.

2. I understood the eligibility requirements for Upward Bound as in alignment with underserved populations. In considering this study as an equity and justice initiative, creating access was an important and attractive common commitment.
3. Partnering with Upward Bound was an opportunity to reciprocate the investment made in me as an alumnus of TRiO program serving undergraduates at the University of South Carolina.

### *Data Collection*

As shown in Table 3.1, data were collected from multiple sources. During preproduction sessions, data were collected using the audio-visual recording feature on

the online meeting platform, stored on an external hard drive and in cloud storage, then represented in the form of an enumerated spreadsheet called the Crescent Corpus. The Crescent Corpus was used analyzed for keywords as a method of in-vivo coding (Scott, 2010). Though it is a method that quantifies, makes clear, organized, and flexible data visualization less cumbersome.

I also collected data during meetings between the animator-illustrator-editor who agreed to assist the co-creators and I with bringing Crescent to life. These technical assistance meetings focused on animation and editing. They were recorded and will be used to support explanations of processes and provide insights from engagement in the participatory process.

During and between meetings, I communicated with study participants and co-creators via email. These messages were used to extend conversations taking place in synchronous formats.

I collected participant observer notes during throughout the study using various platforms and devices. Participant observer notes are collected and stored on their respective platforms. These notes were used to document the study from my unique positionality.

During the pilot episode screening co-creators took hand-written notes and submitted them as physical artifacts. These notes include audience reactions and co-creator feedback on the episode. They are used to describe the transition from the production phase to the post -production phase in the process and to document co-creator engagement with the content and process.

Together these resources provide a rich set of ingredients for representing the creative process undertaken in this study and share the insights and outcomes therein.

Table 3.1 Description of data sources

<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Description</b>
Crescent Corpus	A multi-sheet, enumerated spreadsheet consisting of all preproduction sessions. The spreadsheet identified the session and speaker of each speech act or utterance and was used to conduct in-vivo coding using search logics.
Animation Meeting	Periodic meetings between Joshua and I. During these meetings, we discussed notes and feedback provided by the co-creators, agreed upon action items, and completed administrative requirements.
Email Communications	During and between sessions, co-creators, Joshua and partners communicated using electronic messaging. These asynchronous communications extended our ability to communicate between meetings.
Participant Observer Notes	Electronic written notes, journal entries, and voice memos created during and between sessions. These data were used to identify highlights and emerging trends during preproduction sessions and reflect between sessions.
Pilot Screening Notes	Notes taken by the co-creators and I during the rough-cut screening of the pilot episode. These notes were used to assess audience reception of the content.

### *Data Analysis*

I started the data analysis process after the completion of the first preproduction session. I engaged in multiple rounds of in-vivo coding and textual analysis using womanism and Black girlhood celebration as a conceptual framework (Saldana, 2014).

### *In-Vivo Coding*

Preproduction session transcripts were converted to tables, then transferred to an enumerated spreadsheet used for in vivo coding using an enumerated spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel. The enumerated spreadsheet, referred to hereafter as the Crescent Corpus. The Crescent Corpus contains a spreadsheet for each individual preproduction

session organized by preproduction session number, speaker, and speech act and one master spreadsheet including all six preproduction transcripts that also includes enumeration columns. Transcripts were added to the master spreadsheet after preproduction sessions two, five and six. Furthermore, I identified and counted speech acts for words highlighted in my field notes and used the search logistics in Microsoft Excel to create a column that counted the number of instances that word appeared in the speech act column and to also make the “code” appear in the intersecting row and column. The total corpus included 37 filterable. code columns. Codes included: hair, braid learn, like, want, teach, media, video, history, high school, and talk.

As session transcripts became available, I added each individual spreadsheet and added the session lines to the master spreadsheet. Then I extended the formula in each column to see recurrences of the codes in subsequent sessions. I also added new columns as new insights emerged from my field notes and participant observation. Using the data filter, I was able to identify speech acts that included multiple codes. Those speech acts were used to determine categories and themes to be presented in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6.

### *Environmental Conditions*

To answer research questions one and two, I needed to look for themes of inquiry within my own reflections collected during the study. Using my field notes, journal entries, voice memos, and participant observations I coded for reflexive themes related to my professional practice and the inner workings of using YPAR to create an epistemically agentic environment in public media.



### ***Part 3: What I Did***

As the purpose of this study was to understand what conditions are necessary to create environments that foster epistemic agency among Black girls and public media's capacity to serve therein, this study is multi-layered and temporally contained. Situated within a public media production facility as my major control center during preproduction and the location where the favorable conditions for Crescent to manifest were created, this study begins the day following IRB approval. Starting June 16, I began collecting field notes about my conversations about Crescent. This arc ends after fourteen weeks with a preview screening for Upward Bound students. What follows is a description of the activities that take place during those fourteen weeks. This section of the study is organized using three phases of the production process, preproduction, production, and post-production (Figure 3.1). Each phase of will include a discussion of the activities as they took place chronologically. In Chapter 4, I will analyze these engagements for insights.

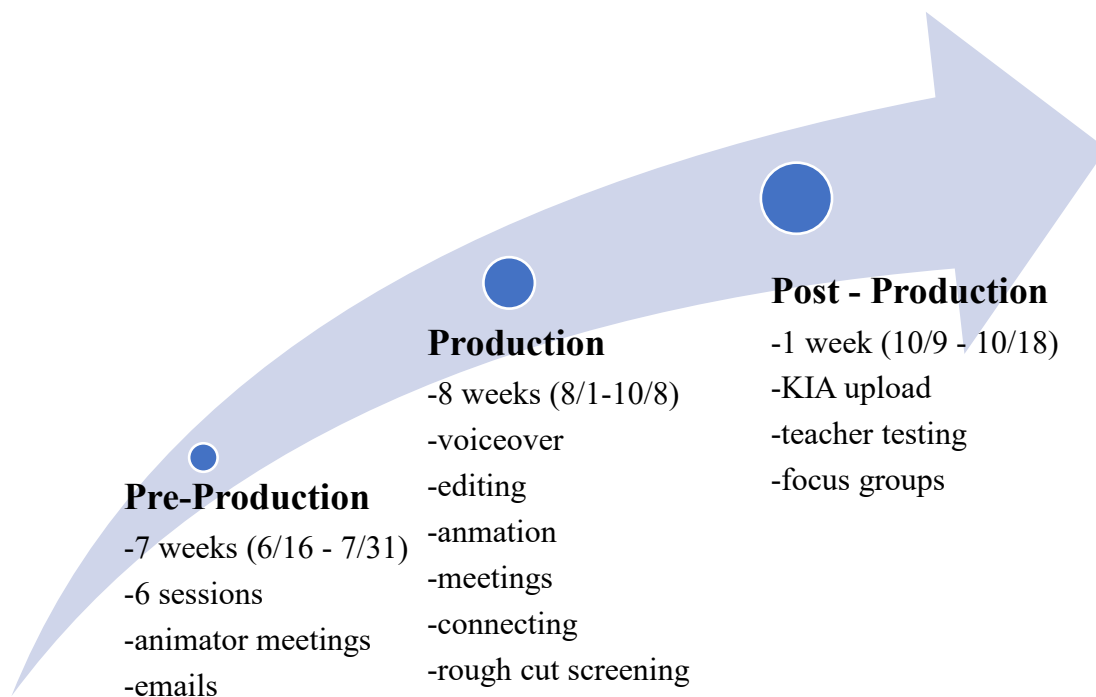
#### ***Preproduction***

On the first day of the study, the SCETV Youth Interest and Engagement Survey had been open for one month with minimal responsiveness. Excited about a greenlight to create a summer production experience for Black girls, in celebration of their creativity, I reflected in my journal,

So far, we only have one response for the survey. I get it, everybody's tired. Plus at this point, the kids are turning in their laptops and teachers are wrapping up the year with celebrations and review. I'm sure the kids are ready to turn their computers in anyways. They are virtual schooled-out! As much as I'd hoped for

different outcomes, I'm not surprised. Plus, Dr. Brown did ask me about the timeline. In 2020 we learned how to pivot, I'mma pivot! I have a greenlight to proceed with this pilot, I'm grateful for it and I'm going to proceed. Sure so far, it's not going the way I imagined, but as Crescent's comes to be, I'm going to enjoy that methodological adventure Dr. Bryan talked about and document vigorously like Dr. Beez suggested. Here we go!

I did not daily document my research activities in my journal; however, I did document my thoughts and experiences regularly. I will share insights from my reflections and notes along the way.



*Figure 3.1 Research phases*

On Day One of the study, I decided to shift course and use purposive sampling. Because the summer months had begun, sending a targeted invitation that would require potential participants to complete the survey to be considered for participation, projected

a low return on investment. The survey was reviewed, updated, and recirculated as a matter beyond this study and still circulates today. The goal is to use insights from this study to engage other targeted groups in creating content for our educational catalog.

In my purposive sampling, I sought a summer youth engagement partner. As shown in Burke (2018) youth empowerment and engagement programs benefit from YPAR methods, I thought youth programs with common commitments, interest in Black girl agency, room in their summer schedule, and in good standing in the community would be great potential partners. After a week of brainstorming and re(over)thinking the options, I invited Upward Bound at the University of South Carolina to partner in this study. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, I selected Upward Bound because of greater flexibility with scheduling and opportunities for academic engagement extended into the next academic year.

Ms. Counts and I engaged in multiple conversations on various digital platforms and telephone. Upon her agreement to partner, I shared the consent and assent form, the SCETV media release form, and the preproduction session overview. Using those documents, her familiarity with my work and personality, and her influence as the Executive Director, she was able to secure five potential participants. She also invited me to attend Upward Bound orientation and share the opportunity with the entire student body. From all recruitment efforts, we were able to collect nine complete consent packages. Seven of the nine eligible participants were invited to participate in the study.

Once consent was obtained and the cohort was established, Ms. Counts and I consulted calendars and agreed upon four one-hour sessions during the summer

enrichment program. An additional two additional sessions were added based on the need and interest of the co-creators.

Preproduction sessions started during the second of the preproduction phase. During this time, the Black girl co-creators and I dreamed up Crescent, her world. And her place in it. Next, I provide an overview of sessions and their discussions or activities.

Before each session I and the Upward Bound team sent reminder emails to the co-creator cohort. After each preproduction session I sent a follow-up email recapping meeting highlights, sharing action items, and expressing gratitude for their participation.

#### *Preproduction Session One*

In Preproduction Session One, I led with an overview of the study and shared my sentiments about their participation therein. Everyone present introduced herself by sharing her name, grade, school, favorite PBS or animated show, and favorite YouTube channel or TV show. Also, we continued to build community by answering the following questions:

1. Where do you see yourself in school?
2. Where do you want to see yourself in school?

#### *Preproduction Session Two*

In Preproduction Session Two, I started by asking, “what representations attract your attention when using streaming platforms?” I wanted to understand what media characteristics my co-creators value. After a discussion of their search terms and content preferences, we began dreaming up Crescent. Using the digital tools to be discussed in

Chapter 4, we brainstormed Crescent's look, her environment, her fashion sense, and her grammar.

The follow-up email for Preproduction Session Two included a survey that asked for feedback on their experience, what was needed to improve the experience, if co-creators were interested in continuing in the process, and asking about availability for future meeting dates.

### *Preproduction Session Three*

This session was a two-hour session. In the session, we developed Crescent's personality. Using a shared document, we created an acrostic poem to initiate character development. We also engaged in a discussion about the kinds of lessons she would teach and the goals she would articulate. I asked the co-creators to think back their response to my earlier preproduction question, "where do you want to see you in school?" After sharing possibilities for Crescent's personality and agreeing on a persona to be shared in Chapters 4-6, we cycled back to our preproduction brainstorming to critically review and continue character development.

To support the group in coming to a common understanding about commonly used terms like "natural hair," "plus-size," "dark-skinned," and "laid edges," I pasted five images of young Black girls with desired physical characteristics previously shared. We examined the images and the co-creators provided feedback about each item. The co-creators also ranked the images by their proximity to the collective vision for Crescent.

During Preproduction Session Three the topic for the pilot episode emerged from an organic question, “can Crescent have different hairstyles?” After wrapping character development, we began to storyboard the pilot episode.

After Preproduction Session Three, CoCo responded to the follow-up email explaining her absence due to work, but also expressing her excitement about the project and her desire to continue participating.

#### *Preproduction Session Four*

Preproduction Four took place on the eve of the last day of the Upward Bound Summer Enrichment Program. In Preproduction Four we continued with character development, including Crescent’s teacher and the friends of Crescent necessitated by the storyboard. Once we had a better vision for all characters in the pilot episode, we proceeded with treating the storyboard by including time ranges, scene descriptions, and editing directions.

The prototypes illustrations for Crescent we shared with me between Preproduction Session Four and Preproduction Session Five. Ahead of Preproduction Session Five, I sent the images using the digital platform and requested written feedback from the co-creators.

#### *Preproduction Session Five*

In Preproduction Session Five we discussed the Crescent prototype feedback provided on the digital platform and shared additional feedback. The actual comments shared will be discussed in Chapters 4-6. We also started outlining the details of scenes 10-12 as the live content, standard-aligned instructional component of the video.

The follow-up email from Preproduction Session Five asked the co-creators to send me examples of the feedback they suggested for the visual representations of Crescent. Three co-creators send examples of hairstyles.

### *Preproduction Session Six*

In this session we brainstormed series titles. We also made modifications to the pilot episode. During previous preproduction sessions, the co-creators expressed a commitment to inclusivity. However, the turnaround time for receiving illustrations for feedback limited our ability to dream up an inclusive set of friends for Crescent. As a result, the co-creators decided to use the two remaining Crescent prototypes as Crescent's members of Crescent's friend group.

Also, during this session we finalized the script for Scenes 10-12 and established Wendy Greene as the example of Black excellence to be introduced to students in the pilot episode. More context regarding this segment of the episode follows in Chapter 5. Before ending the session, I asked the co-creators interested in recording voiceover to rank and share their preferred assignments.

### *Production*

After the completion of six preproduction sessions, I invited the co-creators to the station to record the script as voiceover for the pilot episode. Based on a previous poll regarding their availability for afterschool or weekend meetings, I contacted each co-creator's caregiver to invite their children to record voiceover at the station and to answer any questions about their child's participation in the study.

On the Sunday during Week Eight of the study, Alexandria, CoCo, and June visited the station for recording. After a brief tour of the facility, we sat for a recorded

table read of the script and discussion to address any questions or issues. Once all anxieties were addressed and quieted, we proceeded to record the script by character. The recording studio used for this video is a single microphone booth with a software-enabled computer and connecting interface with two sets of headphones. While this recording format produced an audio track sufficient for the pilot episode, use of a different studio would have allowed all three co-creators to record their lines in the same space and practice physical distancing guidelines. This space was not available on the Sunday recording date.

### *Calling in the Network*

Because the co-creator pool in this study was limited to Black girls, in-study youth voices were not readily available to serve as voiceover talent. In seeking talent, the co-creators expressed what I interpreted as a hesitance to invite potential white female talent or lack of meaningful relationship for initiating the invitation. I considered requesting a volunteer from Upward Bound, however, doing so would require logistical coordination that I could not incorporate into my professional workflow. As use of a smart phone had great potential to create an imbalance in the audio component of the video, I needed assistance from a source with access to professional recording equipment. As mentioned in my discussion of organizational supports, this Black woman high school media teacher with whom I've collaborated on previous projects was a willing aid when called upon. Understanding womanist sensibilities, she was able to identify needed talent, a white male teacher and a white female teenager, for voiceover acting.

In addition to a pool of voice of voiceover talent, copyright free and royalty free libraries were limited stock repositories for content needed for this project.



Understandably so, specialized content was only available at costs that exceeded the project budget. To address one need for visual content to support the script, I called on a Black girl genius I personally know for real-time assistance. This Black girl genius is a high school senior with gifted hands and dexterity of mind for world class hair braiding. She lives in one of South Carolina's Abbeville et al. vs. the State of South Carolina plaintiff districts and will graduate high school and will graduate high school with stackable credentials. Because of our relationship, she was able to simulate an African hair braiding process using rice within 30 minutes. As Ruth Nicole and Aisha revealed to us in SOLkit and in the introduction to Chapter 2, so many Black girls are just “waiting on their moment” (SOLkit, 2021)

Again, media production is an inherently participatory process. In addition to relationships at the agency level, personal and professional relationships supported the success of this episode. They also expanded the participatory nature of the series and hopefully will serve as a base of support moving forward.

### *Sending the B-Roll*

As the animator and editor moved forward with the tedious process of illustrating and animating the pilot episode, I worked with the co-creators to select content for Scenes 10-12 on the history and politics of Black hair. This included locating copyright free images and B-roll that aligned with script. B-roll is a set of visual content used with voiceover. B-roll content was collected and vetted with co-creators before sending for editing. This work also included adding visual notations to the script by placing the respective file name in [brackets] where it should appear in the script. The files were

stored and shared using cloud storage and the notated script was shared with Joshua using the online project folder shared between he and I.

### *Co-Creator Check-In*

When the updates for the Crescent prototypes were made available, I scheduled a check-in meeting with the co-creators to discuss a path forward. The co-creators expressed their approval of the updated prototypes, now new characters Maisha and Kayla. I asked them about slight updates or changes they might want to suggest due to the fact that the illustrations of discussion were edited based on feedback for their vision of Crescent, therefore, all three characters has several similarities. I saw this as an opportunity to address their previously expressed value of inclusivity and their interest in scripting an episode about colorism or biracial student experiences. The co-creators preferred to keep all characters in their second edition version.

We also discussed meta-data and learning resources for the pilot episode. Because the learning resources will be made available on [www.KnowItAll.org](http://www.KnowItAll.org), it was important that we identified the aligning SC College and Career Ready standards and consider the aligning the keywords that would optimize a user search for this video. It also meant that we would need to create at least one learning resource or supplement that would help educators implement the resource in their teaching. This discussion extended previous asides during the preproduction sessions. The co-creators shared their ideas and expressed an interest in screening the rough cut of the video for their Upward Bound peers, once available.

### *Post-Production*

While the Postproduction phase of this study is ongoing, this study is temporally confined to approximately two weeks of postproduction engagement. During these two weeks, I worked with Ms. Counts and Upward Bound staff to schedule a Saturday, in-person screening of the pilot episode with Upward Bound participants and a co-creator check-in and screening prep session. During this session, the co-creators saw the rough cut of the pilot episode for the first time, projected on a large auditorium screen and provided their feedback in writing. They also drafted a set of question to garner feedback from an audience of their peers.

During the Upward Bound Screening Session, the co-creators and I introduced ourselves, and after I contextualized the series, we previewed the episode. After the preview, Mari and Alexandria facilitated the question-and-answer period, while Koya and Asia took notes on the feedback provided by viewers.

### ***Researcher Positionality***

I am a Black girl, grown woman from a South Carolina town much like The Bottom in Morrison's *Sula* (1970). I grew up in a kudzu-lined gully, adjacent to the railroad tracks, behind the county jailhouse, next to the old public works facility culturally rich community impacted by Reganomics. I am a product of a complicated history that informs my understanding of respectability politics and personal-political entry points. Before my recollection, my grandmother was a juke joint owner. And while I can recall eavesdropping on conversations about her heyday during routine visits from friends, I knew her to be a member of the community women's club and a foundational member of our neighborhood church who was loyal to my grandfather, who served life in

prison until his death. While she is not my biological grandmother, she is the only grandmother I know, and I only had 12 years with her. Time notwithstanding, she is my muse for understanding the messiness of humanity, the importance of a self-determined love ethic, and the value of doing your work.

I bring these sentiments to this research. As a researcher, I believe that inquiry with transformative aims is most worthwhile and answers to questions are optimal when generated from experience. I believe that knowledge is experiential, personal, and collective and that acknowledging, valuing, and engaging collective experiences, particularly from a unique social location, precipitates conditions for transformation and liberation. My value of experiential knowledge affirms my selection of a qualitative methodological framework and my grandmother's insistence on doing my work, informs my privileging of praxis over theory and my participatory approach to curriculum development.

I enter this research as a former Black girl, now student, and professional leader in public media. From this standpoint, I connect with Black girl stakeholders as a former Black girl, underrepresented in advanced classes and curriculum experiencing racial, social, and economic marginalization in schools. As a Black girl with little social capital, reeling from the impact of deleterious public policy, smartness was my capital. And though through the provided curriculum, I acquired knowledge and skills for improving my life chances, the curricular content I interacted with did not create a sense of belonging.

I take up this research to create a sense of belonging among the Black and Brown girl stakeholders and the Black and Brown girls who will see themselves represented in

the content. I take up this research, in this way, to create space where the Black girl waiting, can become. I also take up this research as a scholar transformed by SOLHOT, Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths. Engaging in collective praxis with homegirls in SOLHOT introduced me to emancipatory Black girlhood praxis, one that knows, remembers, and affirms the womanish; disrupts conformity and conventional epistemologies, privileges movement and artistry over performance, and is intentionally celebratory as critique. SOLHOT's insistence on the collective has taught me that Black women and girls are always "we." SOLHOT helped me understand the importance of valuing Black girls as humans, not projects.

As a woman middle-level leader in public media, my Black girlhood and collective Black girlhood inform my professional praxis. In addition to excellently performing the duties listed on my job description, I understand my personal responsibility in this role to be social justice or equity oriented, which is in alignment with the provisional language enabling public media in the United States and South Carolina. In this study I act as a "passionate participant" to answer my call to "research as responsibility" and invite other Black women and girls to join me in cultivating a research response to some social justice issue for which we are collectively responsible to combat (Lincoln & Denzin, 2012; Dillard, 2000, pg. 663). I make no claims of objectivity as my love for Black girls is thick (Morrison, 1987; Nash, 2013). Much of my role in this study engages his question "how can the public space for discussion, problem posing, and problem solving be expanded?" (Ayers, 2006, p. 88). I also ask how public media professionals can narrow the gaps between audience and the public and endeavor in that regard in this study.

## CHAPTER 4: WOMANIST YPAR IN PRACTICE

My understanding of the wide range of possibilities for Black girl creativity and expression, made flexible design a methodological priority. In order to engage in the participatory process and collect data within the context of the moment, technical conditions for the manifestation of outcomes included access to flexible and accessible equipment and software, human proficiency using the software and access to technical assistance or third-party providers. Moreover, in our preproduction session de-briefings Ms. Counts and I spoke about the necessity of using multiple modalities to engage a group of students already exhausted by a year of remote learning due to the pandemic and sociopolitical unrest. To create a meaningful and sustainable experience for students would necessitate meaningful integration of digital platforms, tech devices =, and where possible, in personal activities.

The data used to describe the conditions necessary for creating productive and agentic space for Black female creativity are outcomes of participant observation as researcher, facilitator, and professional. As such, this chapter gives a view of the production process from the perspective of a passionate participant seeking to create, for Black girls, a transformative real-time experience of creating transformative learning media for their peers, educators, and future generations of both. Using elements of autoethnography, I describe the technical, environmental, and organizational conditions that made this study possible and successful, as determined by the delivery of educational media.

Table 4.1 outlines the interactive functions of the digital platforms used in this research. To make the experience as welcoming, accessible, and engaging as possible, I would need a robust digital toolkit. Those included in the table supported data collection, planning and professional correspondence, content production, and content delivery. These platforms created a harmonious virtual studio that supported dialogue and creativity in both virtual and in-person activities.

It is also important to include the various machine technologies used to create the conditions for epistemic agency. As digital platforms are rarely used singularly and cannot function without an apparatus, access to hardware expands the capacity of desktop and digital applications. Table 4.2 outlines the hardware or tech devices used by co-creators in this study. Subsequent findings are organized by environment (Table 4.3).

### ***Virtual Studio***

In this section, I examine the use of digital platforms and tech devices for participatory production of epistemically subversive educational content in a hybrid environment. While the tools of society necessary for participating in constructivist learning involving media will always include technological devices and software, during the time of this study the spread of multiple variants of the coronavirus necessitated the creation of a virtual studio to include tools for communication, creativity, and content delivery. As shown in Table 5.3, this virtual studio was flexible enough to support 1:1 emails, group chats, and shared documents simultaneously. As students' preferred methods of communication or accessible methods of communication varied, I found that the co-creators were nimble with their use of platforms and devices. For example, co-creators switched from using their microphone to the chat when transitioning from their

computers to their smartphones. In most cases, they sent an email or private notification of the change. Because learning is a social process, it was important to create an experience with multiple synchronous and asynchronous avenues of communication (Dewey, 1897). Findings show that favorable conditions for creating epistemically agentic environments requires proficiency in and cultivation of critical, digital, and emotional literacies.

Multi-modal digital tools were used in combination with tech devices throughout this study. Use of a personal computer, smart phone, or tablet expanded communication opportunities for the duration of the study. Use of these tools, among others increased digital literacy among the co-creators. Prior to this study, most had limited engagement with Zoom as their districts use a different learning management system and distance learning platform. Skill attainment or enhancement included learning to use Zoom features (e.g. hand raise, co-hosting, admitting attendees) and real time device swapping. In some cases, co-creators needed to re-enter the room from another device. Co-creators used the chat feature from the onset. Their use of Google Docs and Google Slides demonstrated familiarity with the application or other document sharing platforms.

Preproduction Session Three emerged as the most technology heavy session. It also commented in my field notes that it was “exhaustingly delightful. (Post Session 3 Notes) I know from being present for multiple Black Girl Genius Week experiences that Black girl celebration can have a time-stopping effect. Black Girl Genius week is a week-long public display of the genius and creativity of Black girlhood facilitated by integrational sets of Black girls and homegirls, wherever the love collects into action. The more robust the assembly, the stronger the time warp. Session Three was a welcomed and scheduled



reprieve for celebratory production amid my many other professional responsibilities. In the two-hour brainstorming and storyboarding session co-creators:

- created an acrostic poem characterizing Crescent using Google Docs shared on Zoom.
- Discussed a vision for Crescent's friends using Google Slides shared on Zoom.
- provided feedback on presented images using Jamboard individually and shared via Zoom.

In this activity I used my iPad and iPencil to navigate Jamboard and notate the discussion.

Table 4.1 Overview of digital platforms and creative interactions

Digital Platform	Participant Interaction
1. Jamboard – an online whiteboard that provides a collaborative workspace for users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used collaboratively in real-time to introduce themselves</li> <li>• Used collaboratively in real-time to brainstorm and develop character and series ideas, moving them around, categorizing them by color</li> <li>• Used as location for 24/7 feedback on characters and script</li> </ul>
2. Adobe Audition – an audio recording and production application that is a part of the Adobe Creative Suite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used for in-studio audio production</li> </ul>
3. Zoom – a virtual video communication platform used for meetings, webinars, and events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widely accessible collective meeting space for collective brainstorming, decision making</li> <li>• Provides more flexible controls for sharing screens and chat communication</li> <li>• Used in collaboration with other digital applications</li> </ul>
4. Google Docs – a shareable online text document application that is a part of the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to draft collective documents</li> <li>• Used to provide comments or feedback</li> </ul>

Google Suite of communication tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used by the <b>principal investigator</b> to send instructions and treatments to animator and editor</li> <li>Used by the <b>principal investigator</b> to draft session notes</li> </ul>
5. Google Slides – a shareable online slide presentation application that is a part of the Google Suite of communication tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used to collectively brainstorm in real-time and asynchronously</li> <li>Used to present overview of dissertation study to invited co-creators</li> </ul>
6. Google Forms – an online tool for collecting responses to questions or requests for information in a variety of formats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used by <b>principal investigator</b> to solicit reflections on the experience and current outcomes</li> </ul>
7. Email – an electronic mail system that uses the Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used for group and 1:1 communication between all parties</li> </ul>
8. KnowItAll.org – online educational content repository created and hosted by SCETV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used to distribute produced content</li> <li>Necessitated engagement around metadata and online user experiences</li> </ul>

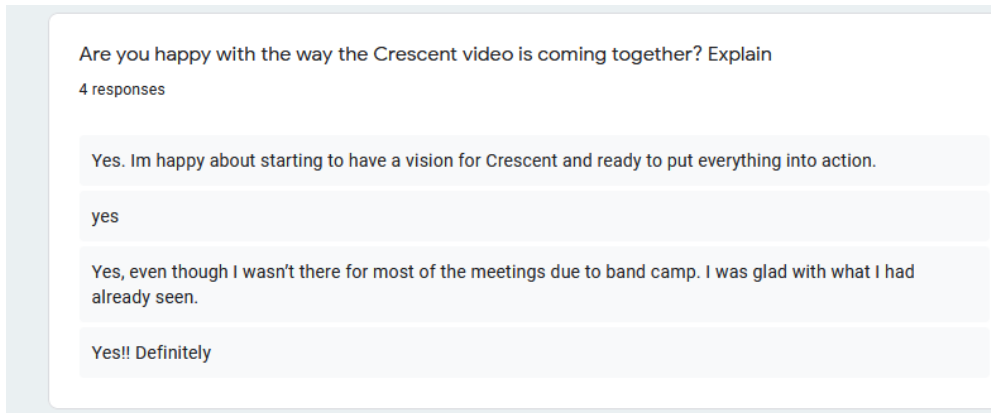
Table 4.2 Overview of devices and their function in the production process

Device	Function
PC: a personal computer with webcam and multiple inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used to send email correspondence</li> <li>Used for document drafting and production planning</li> <li>Used to host and record virtual preproduction meetings</li> <li>Used to record and store voiceover</li> </ul>
iPad: tablet or mobile device that uses cellular and/or Internet data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used Jamboard application for preproduction planning</li> <li>Used as technical back-up for PC</li> <li>Used as mobile PC during in-person sessions</li> </ul>
iPencil: mobile writing tool for iPad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used with iPad on Jamboard application</li> </ul>
In-Studio Recording Microphone – microphone that is connected to an interface that shares sound with headphones and computer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used to record voiceover</li> <li>Used to record researcher reflections</li> </ul>
Camera	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used to record voiceover table read</li> <li>Used to capture moments during in-person sessions</li> </ul>

Table 4.3 Overview of Preproduction sessions

<b>Session</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Digital Platform Use</b>	<b>Device Use</b>
<b>Preproduction Session One-</b> Introductions	Virtual	Zoom Google Slides Google Docs Jamboard Email	Computer iPad iPencil Smartphone
<b>Preproduction Session 2-</b> Creating Crescent and her World	Virtual	Zoom Jamboard Google Docs Email	Computer iPad Smartphone
<b>Preproduction Session 3 –</b> Creating Crescent and Brainstorming & Storyboarding	Virtual	Zoom Jamboard Google Slides Google Docs Google Forms Email	Computer iPad iPencil Smartphone
<b>Preproduction Session 4 -</b> Scripting & Treatment	Virtual	Zoom Google Docs Google Forms Email	Computer iPad Smartphone
<b>Preproduction Session 5 –</b> Crescent Feedback, Scripting & Treatment	Virtual	Zoom Google Docs Email	Computer iPad Smartphone
<b>Preproduction Session 6 –</b> Scripting & Treatment	Virtual	Zoom Google Docs Email	Computer iPad Smartphone
<b>Voiceover Recording Session</b>	In-person	Adobe Audition	Computer iPad In-studio recording microphone Camera Smartphone

In the post-session follow-up email, the co-creators were invited to respond to a survey (Figure 4.1) and provided the links to our working documents.



*Figure 4.1 Preproduction Session Three, follow-up survey responses*

These actions required properly functioning platforms and devices, in addition to an inclusively-minded facilitator of human interaction. As studies report increasing numbers of cyberbullying, increasing requests for mental health services, and increasing calls for social and emotional learning resources educators, especially during a pandemic, digital and emotional literacies cannot afford to be uncoupled. As previously noted, understanding Black girls ranges of expression grounded my multi-modal methodological decision-making.

### *Heard, Not Seen*

In Preproduction Session One and Preproduction Two, on-camera participation was minimal and rarely without request. Though I entered the study eager to share power and disrupt notions of what Black girls should be and do, I wrestled in my journal with the fact that I wanted my co-creators to be open to turning their cameras on. I asked myself,

“If they’re still talking, why am I trippin? What is my real concern? I just want to make sure that they are engaged, and they are. I want to see their faces, but I don’t

know that live cameras are essential. They ain't. What is essential is me making sure they have a meaningful experience" (Preproduction Session 2 Reflections).

In this reflection, I used harmony and dialogue as the criteria by which I determined my course of action for addressing what I perceived as a "glaring absence" (Preproduction Session 2 Reflections). As it relates to harmony, I asked myself if mandating live cameras would result in attrition instead of engagement. As it relates to dialogue, I asked myself if dialogue was compromised by lack of on-camera engagement. I did not find that the co-creators participated less. I did, however, find that I had to rely on audio interpretations in my analysis of the data between sessions. I was less often able to use visual cues other than my own or combine audio and visual communication in my analyses.

Before moving forward based solely on my reflections, it was also important to me to find out why the co-creators opted no to turn their cameras on. So, I asked, "Please tell me, help me understand why y'all don't like to turn your cameras on when you're in virtual meetings."

Alexandria: I just don't want to be seen.

Mari: I just don't like showing my face like that.

Their responses reflect little connection between camera use and engagement or participatory interest. To my questions, co-creators responded, "I just don't want to be seen" and "I just don't like showing my face like that." Their responses support findings from Black girlhood studies finding that Black girls are "oversurveilled" (Crenshaw, Ocean, et. al, 2015). Considering the spatial complexities of the virtual context, I understood the seriousness and compassion such a stance requires. Although participants

did not demonstrate cyberbullying behaviors, it was also important to maintain the flexibility for participants to control their cameras. Even where cyberbullying is not present, it is important to note the equity-laden challenges of visual attendance requirements.

Moreover, requirements to be visually present, often presume to privilege of a normative or commonly accepted background or environment. Some of the most widely circulated social media posts during the peak of the 2020 pandemic year of remote learning were painfully humorous accounts of what happens when a public health crisis necessitates schools entering the habitus of students (Mouzelis, 2008). Educators complained of all manner of identified distractions in students' environments. These insights from the pandemic and increasing virtual access, environment or background is an important factor in virtual engagement. Scholars focusing on access and equity in education might examine the ways in which virtual environment backgrounds impact participation in virtual activities.

With these sentiments, Alexandria and Mari pushed and spoke back again the notion that Black girls should be “seen and not heard” to state their preference to be heard and not seen (hooks, 2002, Brown, 2009). In a project heavily involving voice, the co-creators reminded me of the importance of prioritizing it.

### ***In-Person***

In addition to virtual integration of digital platforms and tech devices, conditions necessary for the cultivation of this creative environment also included acquiring access to in-person production spaces and equipment. In this section, we examine the use of in-

studio production tools in promoting epistemic agency in educational content development. These findings use data collected during voiceover recording sessions.

As a personal motivation in this study is Ayers (2006) question about the use of public space for achieving social justice. For me, this study is an exploratory opportunity that intersects with youth development and becoming to unlock a world of possibilities. One hope for this study is that participants will consider the possibility of career using their voices in public media. The use of in-studio tools balanced my desire for on-camera engagement with their excitement about new, live experiences.

The in-studio recording session took place in the local public media studio after six virtual preproduction sessions. Though some were aware of the location, none of the participants had never visited the station. My Black Girl Genius Week experiences prompted me to anticipate the giggles that so often accompany Black girl collectivity. In my journal I reflected on my expectations and the actual experience.

Their Black girl grins were everything and so refreshing to see. They did my heart good. We've grown accustomed to masks, it's good to see genuine, enlightened smiles. I think the masks and my experiences with SOLHOT had me listening for giggles. And truthfully, I don't remember any. But I do remember the grins, from each one of them. Who knows what the grin meant to them? Whatever the value, standing in front of the mic, headphones on, telling us who she be, how to spell it, and how her voice becomes, was LIGHT...showing up as a grin...visible...ah!

From within a significant hub in the state's educational epistemic system, the co-creators disrupted the epistemic system, with a speech act, accompanied by a grin. For

me, this was a moment of luxocracy (Maparyan, 2012). Maparyan defines luxocracy as “rule by light...the Inner Light, the Higher Self, the Soul, the God Within...Innate Divinity” (pg. 4). In my interpretation, their grins reflected recognition of their light and the power of their voice. They were agentially participating in knowledge production using “shared epistemic resources” like language and visual communication methods (Dotson, 2018). They were participating in the divine process of creation. As womanist epistemology values wisdom over theoretical knowledge, I would like to believe that their grins are also response to them having the space to freely share that wisdom, so often discredited or quieted, with others. Also, as the Cooney Center (2021) report shows, engaging youth audiences requires proficiency in the digital media landscape. These findings illustrate the important elements of a womanist ecosystem for engaging in participatory research.

In person research activities also included a preview screening of the rough cut for the pilot episode. The screening took place during an Upward Bound at University of South Carolina Saturday session. During their enrichment period, the co-creators and I engaged a group of 43 high school students, teachers, and college students for their feedback. Using digital projection, I played the video from a shared file location. Mari and Alexandria served as focus group facilitators and asked questions to the attendees for their feedback. Provided feedback supports findings in Chapters 5 and 6.

### ***Organizational Support***

Because the pandemic and professional responsibilities limited the involvement of agency staff in the production of the pilot episode, findings related to organizational



conditions for promoting epistemic agency are limited. What follows is a discussion of the process by which this pilot project was established.

Earlier in my career in public media, the idea of a Black girl animated character named Crescent came to mind. I shared this idea with my supervisor, an agency executive, who was supportive of the project once I was more established in my leadership role. Supportive youth-valuing and forward-thinking leadership is an organization condition necessary for creating agentic environments for Black girls. It was a major component for this study.

As months progressed, I learned more about the content development process. It became clear that there was limited content in existence that was driven by youth-centered approaches to development. Nevertheless, leadership was not opposed to using youth for content creation. In fact, youth voice was established as a critical component for desired audience growth and diversification. Conversations were ongoing about the need to involve students in the content creation process, the same way that we involve educators in the creation of content specific to their needs. In addition to the need for audience diversification and a focus on youth voice, our leadership possessed interest in having courageous conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A proposal for the project was developed to include a budget and timeline. An agreement of terms was established to include a clear outline of the resources to be provided by the station (Appendix C). Further, there was conversation about the expectations for the project and an understanding of how data collected would be used. Leadership provided full access to production resources for the creation of the pilot, as well as resources to incentivize participation from the girls.

### *Summary*

While it may seem simple or perhaps apparent, the conditions necessary for creating transformative informal educative spaces for youth include identification of a problem and support for a solutions-oriented framework for addressing that problem.

As in this case, getting the support to engage in this womanist problems solving process required presenting evidence of capacity to report proof of concept. The technological conditions reported in this chapter play a significant role in that proof of concept because they add a flexibility that lends to sustainability and accessibility. These conditions:

1. Access to multimodal platforms for communication, creativity, and distribution
2. Proficiency of use of tech devices to achieve outcome or access to human resource assistance
3. Ability to effectively navigate the established technoscape, both technically and socially
4. Access to technical support

when harmoniously activated have transformative potential in service of myriad creative endeavors. As will be shown in this study, they also lend well to womanist participatory creative practices and when employed in public media, have the potential to be transformative in local, national, and global development.

## CHAPTER 5: INSIGHTS FROM ENGAGING WITH BLACK GIRL WAYS OF KNOWING

The experience of engaging Black girls produces insights that are valuable in addressing multi-layered and multi-sited problems. As an equity initiative and intervention, a goal of this study is to give way for the co-creator voices to share themes of importance to the cohort. This chapter centers the womanist commitment to dialogue and the voices of the co-creators (Maparyan, 2012). It is organized to provide an overview of the educative experiences and desires of the co-creators, to orient readers to their creative perspectives, and identify values and stances of importance within this process. Part 1 of the study describes participant responses to questions about their educative desires. Part 2 describes participant engagement during the preproduction and production process. Part 3 describes participant values and decision making in producing appealing educational content.

### ***Part 1: Educative Desires***

In Preproduction Session One, I asked co-creators to post their responses to two questions on the JamBoard:

1. Where do you see you in school?
2. Where do you want to see yourself in school?

My goals were to use the responses to these questions to learn more about the schooling experiences and desires of the co-creators and to facilitate future conversations about

Crescent’s mission and commitments. What follows is a description of the emergent themes from both questions (Table 5.1).

TABLE 5.1: Educative experiences and desires

Introduction & Preproduction Questions	
Where do you see you in school?	Where do you want to see you in school?
Theme: Participation – engaging with a group or interacting in a particular environment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Doing things outside the statistic</li> <li>- Involved in many activities</li> <li>- Joining a lot of science and math clubs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Modern history</li> <li>- Conducting engineering classes</li> </ul>
Theme: Pedagogy and Publications – teaching practices and curricular materials	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brochures in the office</li> <li>- Posters in the hall</li> <li>- Not really in lessons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Modern history</li> <li>- Conducting engineering classes</li> </ul>
Theme: Personal goal – self determined educational aspiration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good consistent grades</li> <li>- Just trying to get good grades and graduate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Early childhood ed (certificate)</li> <li>- With a diploma</li> <li>- In the top of my class</li> <li>- Learning a new language</li> <li>- Having a lot of accomplishments that I want to achieve</li> </ul>
Outlier – no clarification provided	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Law</li> </ul>

### *Participation*

The first theme that emerged from these questions is participation. Participation here refers to engagement with a group of interacting in a particular environment. In response to the first question, co-creators posted “doing things outside the statistic,” “involved in many activities,” and “joining a lot of science and math clubs.” Alexandria and others see themselves reflected in school involvement and observe increasing representation in math and science.

It is important to note that “you” in the question or responses should not automatically denote Black and female. In fact, when asked to clarify “things outside the statistic,” Alexandria responded,

So like my school, they are, I mean, we have like a nice mix of race, but there are more, Black students. I’m in transition, from where I went to middle school at. It was also a good mix. I went to Bethune Middle School, but you saw a lot of white students being, um, presented as higher than the other races there. They were doing the things like science club, captain of that all these organizations, they're top of the class. But now going to the high school that I go to, the students are not being a statistic and they're doing things that people say that we can't do and that we're not capable of doing.

Her comparison highlights “Black students” countering pervasive narratives about the potential of and possibilities for Black students. Other mentions did not address race or gender in their descriptions. Regardless of gender, studies show that teacher perception and expectations are significant factors in student success (Trang, and Hansen, 2021; Papageorge and Gershenson, 2020; Johnston, et al, 2019;). Alexandria’s comments suggests that students of color at her middle school experienced education by teachers with low expectations. They also suggest that she feels a greater sense of belonging amongst other living young examples of Black excellence.

If we are to take Black girls seriously as insightful knowing subjects and effective problem solvers, experiences like the one recounted by Alexandria are important to unpack. Furthermore, a womanist commitment to collective survival, wellness, and balance also asks how policy and practice might facilitate a more seamless cultural

transition school levels. Beyond, academic preparedness, such an undertaking is also environmental and determined by district zoning, trends in home and land ownership, and urban renewal (Fonza, 2010) Guided by a love of folk and commitment to collective survival, a womanist lens seeks opportunities to engage in problem solving within the larger context of the education system. In addition to addressing the need for professional development, Alexandria's vignette makes a case for examining age distribution and trends among minor populations alongside school zoning trends to identify opportunities to ensure that student body demographics are proportionate with their district demographics.

### *Pedagogy and Publication*

Pedagogy and publication also emerged as a theme in response to the questions undergirding this section. Pedagogy and publication refer to teaching practices and curriculum materials.

When asked where they see themselves in schools, publication related responses include "brochures in the office," "posters in the hallway," and "not really in lessons." These responses reflect some schools' acknowledgement of the importance of representation in the school in environment or at minimum the importance of compliance with regulations for institutions receiving federal assistance. (34 C.F.R. Part 106).

When asked where they want to see themselves reflected in schools, pedagogical related responses included "conducting engineering classes" and "modern history." Here the co-creators expressed as interest in curricular changes. In asking about engineering classes, Koya indicated that she is interested in seeing more Black women teachers and Black women and girls represented in her school curricula. It is important to note that

these interests do not insist upon each other. Indeed, diverse curricular content may be used in instruction by an educator, however, an instructor of color increases the likelihood that diverse learning materials will be implemented. Early on Koya expressed an interest in building things. Her comments during the preproduction session suggest that she also desires to build relationships and discover new possibilities. Koya's comments reflect a womanish sensibility in that she is interested in building solutions for everyday problems. As I intend to make a case for womanist pedagogy beyond seminary in this study, Koya's comments plant seeds for a fruitful examination of the potential of womanist methodologies in teaching STEM (Westfield, 2006). CoCo's comments about modern history are to follow.

*Still learning the same people*

The "modern history" post provided great insights. While providing clarity on modern history and their curricular ideas, Alexandria and CoCo offered their sincerest sentiments.

Alexandria: I just think we, they, keep repeating the same thing every year and trying to teach us the same thing every year. Like, if we're going to learn about somebody, we need to learn about somebody different. It's always the same people and we've been learning that since the first grade. Half of us about to graduate and we're still learning the same people. We know about those people We grow up learning about those people at home. So, it's not something that we need to be taught over and over again. It's people that have done numerous things that we don't even know about.

CoCo's iPhone: Right, it's sorta hypocrisy.

Salandra Okay

CoCo, tell me a little bit more about what you're saying

CoCo: It's sort of like hypocrisy because they're saying as a black woman, you can do so much if you applied yourself and you can achieve many great things in life. Yet they're repeating these things, they're not giving us examples, it's just like saying something without showing like actual figures, I guess. You know what I'm saying? Like they say doctor, if you're a teacher, why not pull up doctors that you know, or that you met or give us a book of, you know what I'm saying? Just give us something to look up to.

Alexandria and CoCo are appealing for a culturally responsive and sustaining education or at minimum, pedagogical practices (Ladson Billings 2009, and Paris, 2012). Their curriculum reflections suggest that they have been students of sustained culturally relevant teaching. They also reflect that culturally relevant teaching is perceived as insufficient for meeting their evolving needs in a rapidly evolving time. A culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy requires meaningful engagement with students and curricular and teaching practices implemented in consideration of those discoveries.

It also requires an ethic of care that sets high expectations of students. The appeal in the excerpt above shows that the co-creators are seeking relevant indicators of excellence beyond the ritualistic honorees during annual celebrations. Beyond the relevance discussion in the excerpt above, we are engaged in an ethical one. She is



contending with the ethic of care expressed in routine engagements with historical iconography at the expense of self-discovery through learning. She is contending with responding to questions about her future and seeking proximate examples of the possibilities.

Methodologically speaking, this conversation also illustrates the value of a flexible virtual environment for engagement. Leat and Reid (2012) warn researchers that the act of engaging students in participatory curriculum development processes has the potential to produce inequalities (pg. 193). Because she had minimal absences and was an enthusiastic participant, Alexandria is widely represented in this study. In some cases, co-creators used the chat feature to insert themselves in passionate conversations and contribute to the knowledge being produced. This is the case in the scene above. Before using the chat feature, CoCo had been vocal in the discussion before it rapidly progressed to the point of entry provided. What I understand as an effort to ensure acknowledgement and participation around matters of collective importance. The ability to navigate the agentic moves of the co-creators within the epistemic system was an important competency for ensuring equity within the study.

### *Personal Goals*

The third theme to emerge from participant responses is personal goals. For the purpose of this study, “personal goals” refers to a set of self-determined educational aspirations. Personal goal related responses to the first question include “good consistent grades” and “just trying to get good grades and graduate.” As high school is a temporary, productivity and accomplishment driven life-station, the provided responses are consistent with graduation, college, and careers goals.

For the question, “how do you want to see you in schools?” Participant postings outnumbered all other responses areas and addressed credentialing, skill attainment, and personal development. Regarding credentialing, co-creators envisioned themselves “with a diploma,” with an “early childhood ed” certificate, and “at the top of my class,” reflecting engagement with *Race to the Top* educational priorities and policies. Smartness as capital and diploma as certification of college and/or career readiness. In addition to credentials earned, one participant posted another response in alignment with the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate (2019), “learning a new language.” Other posts or clarifying comments include “having a lot of accomplishments that I want to achieve, like try to be more involved in my school and just make sure I become a better version of myself than I was before.”

In asking what will make for appealing content and how might out of school time be used to reinforce learning lags identified because of the public health crisis impacting educational assessment and competitiveness frameworks, the themes that emerged from these introductory activities are insightful. As curricular development trends increasingly toward subject integration and practicality, these dialogue-drive, participatory insights offer potential sites of convergence around common interests and commitments.

#### *Outlier: Law*

The participant who posted “law” as a desired reflection in schools did not come forward to further discuss her post. Moreover, the pace of the session and the limitations of the session recording prevented me from post-session tracking of individual real-time responses. I was not able to follow-up 1:1. Unlike the participation, pedagogy and publication, and personal goals themes, the law post speaks to the pervasive need for

increased representation in the law and its protections. Without participant clarification, the contextual moment of the study supports this claim.

## ***Part 2: Black Girls and Hair Literacies***

Very early in the preproduction sessions hair emerged as a matter to be taken seriously. It was discussed in each session and on each digital platform. Phelps-Ward and Laura (2016) agree that hair is a topic worth the attention of educators, education scholars, and black-girl-caring folks. Hair discussions in this study evolved into scripting an episode around the topic. What follows is a description of those preproduction hair-related mentions and discussions.

### *Natural hair and children's media*

The introductory icebreaker questions used in Preproduction Session One were designed to help me get a sense of engagement with public and/or educational media and content preferences. In response to question one, “Who is your favorite PBS character?” hair was mentioned. Alexandria responded.

“For my favorite PBS character, I put Koki from the *Wild Kratts* show. And, though my passion isn’t technology and stuff, I like how she was, you know, computer smart and you don’t see much representation from the black community in anything STEM and I thought that was really unique. And they also use her natural hair. That’s another reason why I like her and she’s also dark skinned.

Alexandria’s review is instructive for both education and public media audiences, particularly in light of national and local commitments to achieving equitable representation in STEM (AAUW, 2010). Even though Alexandria does not self-identify

as STEM-oriented, she was able to identify with the Koki's smartness and her embodied features. Studies show that a sense of belongingness is critical to academic performance and completion (Booker, 2006; Booker, 2004). For Alexandria, the representation of a Black teen girl with natural hair on public access television is appealing and helpful in creating a positive sense of belonging. And as Alexandria's response speaks to the importance of public media, it also provides rich market data anticipatedly useful in sustaining her future. As assumed in womanist methodology, granting viewers an opportunity to speak, whether in survey or focus group, supports the sustainability of public media as an exacting service and resource provider.

#### *Hair and participation*

Alexandria: Um, I know for like when people play sports, they don't really think about curlier hair and thicker hair. So, when with competitive cheer, you know, the girls with straighter hair, they tease it up and making big ponytails. Well, that makes black girls have to keep flat ironing their hair and causes heat damage and it ruins your curl pattern. Just like, you know, in the workplace where it's unprofessional to wear certain, hair colors.

In sharing his impression of the pilot episode and potential reactions, Joshua warned that the messaging could be perceived as "whiny." In his explanation he suggested that viewers may question the truth claim that "if you want to participate in a straight ponytail is what you need." From Joshua's positionality this was easily questionable as Black girls clearly participate in sports. While Joshua is well-intended, his very positionality as a white male gave way to his questioning the legitimacy of Black girl claims and experiences based on his observations (Townley, 2008). I agreed to share

headlines as visual support for the co-creators' argument. For Joshua, this support would strengthen the claim and help curtail pushback. Now considering this experience a verified reality, Joshua also suggested using an experience of hair discrimination as an episode opener, such that it would support the co-creator's claims being taken more seriously while bringing the viewer into the experience. While this artistic choice was considered among the co-creators in their brainstorming session, it was not the preferred opening of the majority.

To support the co-creators' vision and lend credibility to their claims regarding hair and participation, I shared a few headlines with Joshua related to race, gender, sports, and hair. In one article, Olympic gold medalist, Gabby Douglas shared her experience of with hair damage resulting from participation in gymnastics (Lowe, 2020). While competing in the Olympics, Douglas experienced misogynoir, on the basis of her hair. While Douglas was subjected to the restrictive norms of white femininity within the sport, she was also mocked, teased, and disrespected among African Americans because of her hair. As current trends inspire Black women and girls to mold their edges carefully and artistically in search of a smooth and sleek ponytail, it is important to note that for some Black girls, "the hair they were born with" limits such possibilities, within and beyond sports (The Crown Act).

Even when professional athletes are required to cover their hair, Black women and girls experience unique challenges. Using this fact in support of the co-creators claim, I also shared with Joshua an article that reported on the status of Black female Olympic swimmers being permitted to use swim caps designed for natural hair during their Olympic races. The International Swimming Federation ruled the swim caps

ineligible because they did not follow “the natural form of the head” (Pruitt-Young, 2021). Though the ruling did not state that the swim caps confer to swimmers an unfair advantage, the ruling did point out normative assumptions about the normative biological features.

These are experiences of professional and student athletes, who participate in sports despite hair-related obstacles. The tragedy is that expectations for hair and dress can be barriers to participation overall. Future K-12 Title IX studies should consider an intersectional examination of race and gender in athletic participation by sport (Druckman, Rothschild & Sharrow, 2018). While the focus of the enforcement of Title IX in sports focuses primarily on equitable schedules, budgets, and facilities, if Title IX covers participation as well, the headlines and experiences of Black girls warrant intersectional guidance.

This example is an important illustration of agentic participation and balance in the epistemic system. The fact that the co-creators were not present in the conversation and animation meeting, did not preclude their voices from being present or transformative. As a uniquely situated interlocuter, I was able to lend credibility to the claims made by the co-creators with the support of other Black girl experiences. While Joshua’s interpretation of the claims of the co-creators did undoubtedly impact the artistic outcome, he did not have creative decision-making power to nullify the claim as in previous examples of first-order epistemic oppression. I understand this to be the work of womanism.

### *Hair and Adultification*

Alexandria: Another thing is Black girls are just overly sexualized period...when we want to straighten our hair, when we're at a younger age or put color in our hair where we're at a younger age. But when you know someone of another race does it, it's trendy, It's cute, It's out of the box. (Preproduction Session Two)

Here Alexandria shares a position that generated extended discussion beyond the live session. When arguing that use of hair color results in perceptions of non-conformity, other co-creators expressed agreement. Mari agreed that as a result of making such a decision, Black girls “get labeled.” When asked to clarify the label, responses included “fast” and “out there.” Per the co-creators “fast” and out there are synonymous. They are also consistent with Blake and Epstein (2017) in their sharing of Black girl sentiments reflecting adultification.

In their report, *Listening to Black Women and Girls*, (2018) a Black girl between the ages of thirteen and seventeen shares, “some people at our schools look at it like, ‘oh yeah: she’s fast. Then I’m gonna treat her how she acts.’ But really, we don’t know. We’re still kids trying to still grow up...they’re accusing us girls. And so, I think that we still have a lot of learning to do, and we shouldn’t be treated as adults” (Blake and Epstein, 2019 pg. 13). Both knowers highlight the uninvited application of maturity to their bodies such that to experiment with hair color and make mistakes are polarized as teenage privileges afforded to those with resources or risky behaviors of the undisciplined.

Like Black women, Black girls also navigate controlling images (Collins, 2000). We also share in a collective struggle, at many levels, with the images. One co-creator shared her reflections in an email after the session. Among other things she shared, “for your hair color and what you wear, they start to label your mother too because she let you wear that. That’s in school and the streets.” This co-creator shared a truth that reflects on the politics of respectability as it impacts Black women and girls. I reflected on this and what I understand as the “weight of representation” for Black girls. I also found this comment insightful because it also speaks to the nuance of gender dynamics in relationships between mothers and daughters (Everet, Marks and Clarke-Mitchell, 2016). While children have special dynamics with their children irrespective of gender, studies show that Black women and girls have a particularly and sometimes perilous journey in relationship building. Here the co-creator reflects on the symbiotic nature of the relationship and its perceived connection to social acceptance or upward mobility. The statement also acknowledges that even as teenagers, Black girls understand the representational burdens of Black womanhood as well.

### *Hair and cultural appropriation*

Alexandria: Tik TOK! I think it's something that people have been saying, but now that it's getting worse. Everybody is kind of speaking up about it. But the way I've seen people address it is, most people don't know it's not about box braids and faux locks. It's more about where it started and where it originated from. And people are saying, it's just the hair and it's not. People aren't educated about the history behind braids and they think it's just a hairstyle And a lot of white women use the hairstyles for



appropriation and not appreciation. You can appreciate our hair and keep going. Well, you can do that without having to put it in your head. And some people explain that it's not even for your [white women's] hair type. It's damaging to your hair type, and they don't understand that. And then it's kind of sad when you see other Black girls try to make it seem like it's okay. And they try to say, it's just the hair style when it's not. It's your culture! You should be proud of it and you shouldn't try to give it away.

Koya: Yeah, I agree you shouldn't want to give it away.

June: I don't know why they don't care about the damage. I just think social media influencers want the likes.

CoCo: A lot of stuff on social media nowadays, like I saw a video earlier and there was this Asian woman who had cornrows. She was talking about taking her braids out because she was going to a job interview. There was a big backlash because it was like, so now you're going to take it off. It's something that you can use to play, pretend, and take off and stuff. For us, it's like our culture...something that we can't take off.

As Smith (2019) argues, hair is a Black girl literacy that should be understood, especially among educators and will be valued among others. As noted in the overview, hair was discussed in each session. This particular insight and the responses it garnered segued Preproduction Session Three into story development. The distinction between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation of hairstyles was a discussion that included voice

engagement, thumbs up reactions, and comments in the group chat. June commented, “I agree with Alexandria” and Asia posted clapping hands emojis in the chat.

In the storyboarding process (Appendix D) the narrative of the story is chronicled using blocks explaining each scene. When “Crescent explains the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation” appeared on the Jamboard, I started to engage the co-creators in considering another grammar for entering that discussion. With a goal of harmony and facilitating a process wherein all interacting with the content are compelled to become more fully human and because project parameters required that we create a standard-aligned resource, we did experience subject matter limitations (Friere, 1970). Cultural appreciation is included in the South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards for Social Studies (2019), cultural appropriation is not. For SCETV educational resources meet the purposes of implementation in teaching and learning or K-12 educator professional development. What follows is a description of how the co-creators navigated the scripting process as it relates to hair.

In Part 3, particularities about hair, expressed in the form of edits, reveal hair related values of the Black girl co-creators.

### ***Part 3: Black Hair in Production***

#### ***Edits to End Adultification***

In recommending edits for Crescent Prototype One (CP1) one co-creator commented that the illustration represented a Black female older than Crescent’s agreed upon tenth grade age (Figure 5.1). Per the co-creators, the combination of the hair, body

type, and outfit made the illustration more adultlike. The co-creators agreed that their commitment to making Crescent a plus sized Black girl remained.

Their suggested edits reflect the negotiations Black girls with curvy bodies make to maintain an appearance of their youth. Suggested edits include the following:

1. Change the skirt to high waisted jeans
2. Make her afro bigger
3. Change her earrings to studs
4. Change the clutch purse to a backpack

Per the co-creators, these edits reflect the characteristics of a recognizable and relatable Black female character. They also offer a window into the distinctions Black girls make between “looking like a teenager” (June) and looking “more mature” (Alexandria). As referenced in Chapter 2, the perceptions of Black female embodiment impact the quality and longevity of life for Black and Brown girls.



*Figure 5.1: Crescent Prototype 1 (CPI)*

As this study takes place against the tragic killing of Ma'Khia Bryant, Black female teenager defending herself against adult aggressors. Public sentiment weighed on the side of the officer trained to eliminate threats in seconds, argued that Ma'Khia should have been able to compose herself at the command of the officer, and blamed Ma'Khia's mother for her life conditions. Within these seemingly reasonable justifications of the murder of Ma'Khia Bryant, Brittany Cooper stated aloud a critical truth about the case. Although both Bryant and Tamir rice were child victims of police homicide, "the way that she has been talked about, because she is a big girl, people see her as the aggressor. They don't see her humanity. They have adultified her. We turn Black girls into grown women before they are even able to vote" (MSNBC, 22, April 2021).

Whether these girls make the leap of connecting their edits to the Ma'Khia Bryant killing, I cannot confirm. What I am willing to argue is that most are interested in presenting like a teenager for as long as they can. While the co-creators demonstrate characteristics of the womanish, they do not present as audacity to their own detriment. In this study the co-creators demonstrated use of critical frameworks for naming and analyzing systems of oppression and solving problems, still loving roundness. Knowing and remember Ma'Khia and her beautiful mane is important for sustaining the work.

### *The hair must be right*

They've expressed their personal values about hair and dreamed up Crescent's hair portfolio.

Mari: I like everything, but her hair.

Asia: That's just the only thing for me, the hair. She do not need that ponytail!

The statements above represent comments made during the character feedback portion of Preproduction Session Three. During the session we provided feedback on the three Crescent prototypes submitted by the animator and editor. I asked the girls to share their feedback on each illustration and suggest edits that would help Joshua bring the illustrations closer to the vision of the group.

Figure 5.2 presents an illustration of Crescent Prototype Three (CP3). As is discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, CP3 later became Maisha (Appendix E). In route to CP3 becoming Maisha, the co-creators offered design feedback that would make her relatable to their peers. It is important to note that CP3 was the only prototype that received negative feedback. For the co-creators, CP3's hair did not represent their vision for Black girlhood in digital.



*Figure 5.2 Crescent Prototype Three (CP3)*

*Co-creators understand the importance of epistemic agency*

CoCo: Um, we're talking about like, Hey, so, so far we're thinking we're at three best friends instead of two, and I'm making those three other best friends, all people of color, Asian, like an Asian person where you haven't figured out genders yet.

Alexandria: Well, I was just saying, because we can't, you know, speak on their behalf just because we don't know their experiences. But I mean, if there were opportunities where we could do some other type of video, I would consider it! (Preproduction Session Three)

Alexandria: And I would want everybody to participate in have, you know, the same amount of voiceover time

June: I would say I agree with Alexandria because like, I just don't want to take, like most of like the speaking part, I just want to make sure, everybody, has like an equal opportunity to like, you know, speak and stuff  
(Preproduction Sessions Six)

While framed within a discourse on voice, I argue that the leading quotations suggest that the co-creators have an understanding of the importance of epistemic agency. Using an inclusive friend group, the co-creators sought to share in representation and knowledge production. Unfortunately, the constraints of the study and few survey responses, limited access to diverse talent to invite for participation. Considering this limitation, Alexandria offered a solution that promotes epistemic agency, addressed

logistical concerns, and helped her co-creators move forward with their previous discussion about using the remaining two Crescent prototypes as friends.

In expressing her hesitance speaking on behalf of other groups, Alexandria demonstrated an understanding that social location impacts one's experience and that individuals are the most credible source regarding those experiences (Lincoln and Denzin, 2012). Furthermore, in keeping with the precedent set by inviting Black girls to speak to their experience in schools, Alexandria's proposed plan of action was to invite a Latinx and Asian American to participate in the scripting of a future episode.

While much of my attention to this point, had been focused on expanding the use of student voice in public media beyond traditional journalism or news reporting. In my participant observation notes, I reminded myself to think through an orientation or retreat for the co-creator cohort, should the series receive the greenlight. Alexandria's comment confirmed the importance of including reporting techniques and resources in production projects in general. While I did intend to center the series around Black girlhood experience, I had not considered their ability to research and represent the experiences of others in writing or on screen.

In addition to acknowledging the importance of participation in knowledge production over mere representation, the co-creators expressed an understating of epistemic agency in their commitment to making voiceover opportunities more equitable for those interested. In the initial script, Crescent was the sole speaker in politics and history of Black hair scenes. The co-creators suggested that these scenes be edited into a collective presentation of information. In the session, I expressed gratitude to the co-creators for re-presenting this study as a collective endeavor, though the series centers

Crescent. As the material outcomes of the study began to manifest, luxocracy required that I acknowledge and give thanks.

### *Summary*

The first thirteen weeks of this fourteen-week study provided a rich account of Black South Carolinian girl school experiences, problem solving, and world building. When taken seriously, they contribute to knowledge production and building world wherein all can thrive (Love, 2019). As we progress to Chapter 6, the womanish will produce. What follows in the next chapter is an engagement with the material outcomes of the study. These materials will include the *Conversations with Crescent* pilot episode and supplemental teaching and learning materials.



## CHAPTER 6: CONVERSATIONS WITH CRESCENT

*We may find that our understandings of third-order epistemic oppression and change are enriched when we come at them through performance art, spoken word, mystical insights, mindfulness, about affective resources, or by applying non-Western cosmologies and epistemologies critically to the unlevel knowing field. (Bailey, 2014, pg. 67)*

In the quote above, Bailey is asking how epistemic systems are changed and proposes creativity as a transformative path forward. Creativity has the capacity to cathect epistemologies. Studies have shown that when engaged collectively, creativity transforms epistemic systems because it can “dwell unapologetically in uncertainty so that it becomes productive, question even as it claims to know, and move people to act, inspired by a feeling, or lack of options” (Brown, 2013, pg. 11). Creativity is an invaluable faculty educators understand as such yet find less time to integrate into curricula due to policy demands and other mandated priorities (Omasta, et. al., 2021; Edgar & Elias, 2021). Brown’s proclamation refutes positivist claims of greater legitimacy and when applied to educational methodologies of assessment and evaluation, defend the call for more creativity in classrooms. Creativity stimulates inquiry and generates multiple ways to represent thinking. Wherein these activities are not possible in classrooms, public media has the potential to function as a parallel educative site wherein creativity is prioritized.

What follows is a discussion of the material products that manifested because of collective, participatory engagement inspired by the concept of Crescent and all that she might accomplish in South Carolina classrooms. They were spoken into existence through audacious, courageous, and willful conversations among a group of Black girls doing “responsible” and commonly understood “grown up things” like producing educational curricula. I offer it as an example to public media stations and educational entities of what is possible when Black girls are “in charge” and taken seriously for their ontoepistemic reserves and contributions. The gifts birthed during this process are productions of Black girl ways of knowing. Their transformative impact will be the subject of future studies.

### ***Introducing Crescent***

From the vision and hearts of the co-creators and I, I am delighted to introduce you to Crescent (Figure 6.1).



*Figure 6.1: Crescent*

Crescent is a Black girl from South Carolina. She is average height, dark-skinned, plus-size, wears glasses, and has natural hair. Her height is a happy medium between tall and short because “no matter what people are gonna have something to say” (Koya, Preproduction Session Two). She is dark-skinned because “you see dark girls in movies, but nowhere near enough” (Mari) and because “boys be acting like dark girls aren’t pretty. They be playing pass or smash and pass on the black girls because they say she too dark and stuff.” (Koya). Their responses reflect an understanding of the impact of colorism on the lives of Black women and girls and a desire to offer a solution to the issues it presents. During Preproduction Session Four, my humanity required that I leave my computer, before which I encouraged the co-creators to use womanist methodology and “talk to each other while I’m gone.” While listening to the recording, I learned that their conversation was about colorism as a topic for a future episode. Inasmuch as hair is significant in their understanding of Black girl embodied experiences, so is skin tone.

Crescent is a plus-size Black girl because the group values “body positivity” (Alexandria, Preproduction Two) and because lots of “Black girls have plus-size bodies” (June). For the co-creators, it was important that Crescent be realistic and reflect back to girls what they see in schools and their communities. While the group did have a conversation about tall girls and the need for more representation of tall girls, beyond basketball players, their embodied vision for Crescent was plus size. Also, comments referencing “smash or pass” games played among boys in school suggests that the co-creators are aware of the ways in which Black girl bodies “are never simply matter, for [they are] never divorced from perception and interpretation” (Peterson, 2001, pg. ix). While I did not have an opportunity to confirm during our last meeting, I would also

suggest that co-creators are motivated by a desire to challenge fat shaming; in addition to the audacity to highlight what history tells us about the fallacy of mammy stereotypes, confirmed by the likes of Lizzo and Amber Riley, that roundness is indeed desirable (Cooper, 2013).

When not at school, Crescent enjoys baking, glass painting, creating graphic tees, and hanging out with friends, especially at the mall and basketball court.

### *Crescent's Character*

Crescent's character was conceived in the form of an acrostic poem. The co-creators used Crescent's name as a starting point for conceptualizing Crescent's personality. After brainstorming personality characteristics, the co-creators suggested characteristics using letters of the alphabet outside not included in Crescent's name. Development of the list required the use of an online personal adjectives resource for resume writing. Once all characteristics were listed, the co-creators agreed upon the characteristics to be included in the acrostic poem I will use them to provide an overview of Crescent's personality. Emphasis denotes direct quotations agreed upon by the co-creators.

C is for courageous and confident. Crescent walks with her head held high. When she has a problem, she talks things out. In tough times she's courageous. She's always cool.

R is for resilient, radiant, reliable, respectful, and real. Crescent is true to herself, and viewers can rely on that. She was raised to be respectful, but she also knows

how to say what she feels. She shines brightly and she overcomes challenges.

Crescent is a real one.

E is for educated. Crescent is about her grades, but she is also educated by experience. She talks about what she knows about. What she wants to talk about, she learns about.

S is for sincere and stylish. Crescent is not *fake*, and she is fly. She dresses *for the culture*. She can be chill or fancy, but she's always together and her edges "stay laid" (Alexandria)

C is for creative. Crescent like to build things and to make things beautiful. She's not too extra, but she likes to think outside the box.

E is for eloquent. She is eloquent in how she speaks and acts.

N is for noble. Crescent *knows that she is here for a purpose, and she acts like it*.

Crescent has good character. She does the right thing.

T is talkative. She is also ambitions, so she hopes that her *talking will take her far*.

Embodied and personified, Crescent has a mission to have important, courageous, and inclusive conversations. For early episodes, the co-creators named two friends, Maisha and Kayla, to join Crescent in her endeavors.

### ***Pilot Episode Overview***

The pilot episode of *Conversations with Crescent*, titled "Conversations on Hair, History, and Popular Culture" is the primary learning resource produced in this study.

The 5:12 video reflects the direction and requests of the co-creators, the interpretation thereof by me, and the third-party interpretation, skills, and creativity of Joshua. The pilot episode uses Black girl literacies to engage in a compassionate and courageous conversation about race, gender, and hair. The title of the episode is “Respect the Crown<sup>2</sup>.” An overview and discussion of the pilot episode and other material outcomes follows.

### Scene 1

The episode opens (Figure 6.2) as Crescent approaches her friends in the school courtyard. Crescent greets them and the audience saying, “Hey Friends, what’s going on in your world?” and invites her friends and the audience into a previous conversation she had with a classmate.



*Figure 6.2: Conversations with Crescent, opening*

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<sup>2</sup> To view the pilot episode, visit: [Conversations with Crescent Pilot Episode](#).

## Scene 2

As Crescent travels back into her memory (Figure 6.3), the audience is directed to a school hallway wherein Crescent is approaching a classroom. The teacher greets her by saying “Your hair wasn’t like that yesterday. Why do you keep changing it?” It is important to note here that Mr. Price’s question is intended to reflect a microaggressive curiosity, not anger (Preproduction Session 3). Other options for Mr. Price’s greeting included “you have a new hairstyle, how long did this one take?” and “how did you do that?” In unpacking the types of comments Black girls receive when they return to school with a new hairstyle, the co-creators shared feelings and interpretations reflected the argument that intention is more of a factor to the actor than the interpreting interlocuter (Bacchi, 2009). Those responding in defense of Mr. Price, argued that these comments are often genuine acknowledgments that teachers notice. Koya offered, “I mean it’s not a bad thing. It’s a change they notice about you...a good change about hair” (Preproduction Session Three). Per Asia, Mr. Price’s disposition should have been presented like “he’s clueless, well he is, but I don’t want him to be negative.” (Post Preproduction Session Three).

As the co-creators and I had conversations about the political climate regarding educational curriculum, they expressed a desire to make sure that the approach to the issue would “get people talking to each other about things, not getting in their feelings about it” (June, Preproduction Session Three). And even though June shared harmonious sentiments, her comments also reflect the value of Black girl voices. Inasmuch as she promotes reflexivity, she also offers a window into the ways in which Black girls interpret statements made by adults, like Mr. Price. In Preproduction Session Three, I

began to consider the fact that Conversations with Crescent is a both a standard-aligned teaching tool and a professional development tool for educators interested in creating welcoming and inclusive environments. In my journal I reflected that “Crescent is going to show us just how much of an impact a conversation can have!”



*Figure 6.3: Why do you keep changing it, first draft*

The figure below reflects Mr. Price’s disposition after the co-creators provided feedback. This disposition was accompanied by a hallway more reminiscent of a school walkway closer to the starting bell. In Figure 6.3, the co-creators suggested that Mr. Price’s body language was curter than expected. During the Upward Bound Screening Session an attendee wanted to know if Crescent was late for class. From her perspective, Mr. Price, like most teachers, was waiting for the bell to ring while standing in the entranceway and Crescent made it just in time. She then offered a potential justification for such a response, that being habitual tardiness on the part of Crescent.

The use of habitual tardiness as justification for microaggressive behavior reinforces the facilitation of this study as an agent of epistemic agency. Here we see the credibility deficit and inertia Dotson speaks of emerging within the screening or epistemic exchange (pg. 5). As the resilience of an epistemic system is the very factor



that makes them so difficult to deconstruct, shared racial and gendered positionalities do not preclude one from engaging in epistemically oppressive thoughts or practices. The use of the potential tardiness justification would render the legitimacy of the grievance less credible. Fortunately, more use of the shared epistemic system expanded the interpretative possibilities. Others suggested that his response was realistic, and four attendees acknowledged that they had similar experiences.

To bring Mr. Price's greeting closer to the articulated vision, displayed in Figure (6.4), the co-creators requested that his lines be softened a bit. In both still and moving image formats, the high impact of collective participation is observable in the details.



*Figure 6. 4: Why do you keep changing it, post feedback*

### Scene 3

Crescent breaks the fourth wall and speaks directly to her audience as a representative of Black girls and other students of color (Figure 6.5). She appeals to the audience saying “Clearly this isn’t new for us. Has something like this ever happened to you?” In the storyboarding process, Alexandria asked if Crescent could speak directly to the audience like “call and response” (Preproduction Session Three).

For me, this question signaled Alexandria's potential alignment with womanist values. When I asked her to further explain her suggestion, she argued that "call and response" is the way that "Black people talk" and that the interaction between Crescent and her audience could be useful in real-time instruction. She suggested that "teachers could pause" the video and invite students to share their experiences "if they really want to know what students go through." First, Alexandria's articulation of call and response as a rhetorical device called womanism's Africanism into this process (Weems, 2019). As this production process is participatory, she also invites viewers to participate in the conversation. Alexandria speaks to the value of dialogue in womanist methodology and in world building.



Figure 6.5: *Crescent breaks fourth wall*

#### Scene 4

To Mr. Price's question, Crescent exhaustingly responds (Figure 6.6) by saying, "Yes, I got my hair done yesterday." Taking cues from the voiceover and facial

expression screenshot from the brainstorming session, Joshua animated an eyeroll as Crescent's nonverbal response. This nonverbal response often initiates disciplinary action among Black girls in and beyond schools; however, it is not enacted more often than other girls. African American Women's Discourse reserves include non-verbal rhetorical strategies like the "cut-eye" and "suck teeth" and are commonly associated with adolescent and developmental teenage periods (Rickford, 1976 and Smitherman, 2000). As Venus Evans Winters argues, it behooves educators and those engaging Black girls to extend more grace in understanding these mental, emotional, and physiological developmental periods (Race, Gender, and Education: Menstruation, 2019)

As noted in the section Mr. Price, one might ask why the Crescent's response remained the same after Mr. Price's disposition change. For the co-creators, the disposition does not change the sentiments. For the co-creators, the non-verbal communication is articulated as "what do they not get" or "here we go again." (Editing and Upward Bound Screening Prep Session) They reminded me that Crescent is respectful, so no disrespect was intended.

I found this exchange incredibly powerful because school discipline data tells us that Black girls are disproportionately punished in schools when compared to their white counterparts. Reports show that adultification and misinterpretation of non-verbal communication as attitudinal defiance create unsafe environments for Black girls in schools. The insights presented in the Office of Civil Rights data cited in Chapter 2, are connected to interpretations of non-verbal communications. What I understand the co-creators to be collectively expressing in this example, is an exhaustion with the burden of explanation. They also noted that "a conversation like this video" is the kind of

conversation they would need to have with a living, breathing Mr. Price (Editing and Upward Bound Screening Prep Session). Based on the federal data on school discipline, the experiences presented by the co-creators, and what we learned from Shakara’s account of the day, the need for agentic representation of experience is urgent (On These Grounds, 2021). Without it, Black girls will continue to engage in an unbalanced struggle against interpretation and representation.

I take this as call to use this video for professional development among educators. While this series is intended to be an educational tool, it was not my expectation that the first lesson in the episode would be for educators. As studies show increasing numbers of Black girls entering the school to prison pipeline, resources like this video have the potential in helping educators “understand where we coming from” and consider listening differently, making an affirmative statement instead of or ahead of such a question, or responding to the eyeroll with grace.



*Figure 6.6: Yes, I got my hair done yesterday*

## Scene 5

In Figure 6.7 Crescent enters the classroom environment. Once she makes it into the classroom, she is greeted by a classmate Aleisa.

*Aleisa asks Crescent, “do you follow Kalou? She has her hair like yours and people were hating in the comments!”*

Crescent responds, *“Well, she is wearing box braids.”*

To which Aleisa responds, *“What’s the big deal? It’s just braids.”*

Crescent replies to Aleisa, *“When Black women and girls braid their hair, it is a part of a cultural tradition. If you want to understand the comments, you need to know about the history and politics of Black hair. Trust, it’s rarely just hair!” formats.*

In this scene, Crescent enters the classroom environment and is greeted by a white female peer, named Aleisa. The co-creators included this scene because they wanted to provide multiple examples of the conversations a change in hairstyles can prompt. When I asked, “how do people at your school respond when you or other Black girls show up with a new hairstyle?” responses not chosen as encounters include, “show love,” “be shady or say something shady,” “give a compliment,” and “I’ve seen girls get bullied about their hair.” (Preproduction Session Five). For the co-creators the opportunities to have hair-related discussions are unlimited and can be “talked about in other episodes” (June, Preproduction Session Five).

The decision to use Mr. Price’s acknowledgement and question “why do you keep changing it?” and the encounter with Alesia was made based on the educative value of

the resulting action and resolution possible through those narratives. As the co-creators understood their assignment and were altruistically motivated by the fact that “so many people don’t even know” the history and politics of Black hair, that they wanted to create a resource that “teachers can actually use and get good work back” (Asia, Preproduction Session Five). Here Asia, shares an observed truth about student engagement with the curriculum materials and activities. When asked to expound upon her comment, she explained, “you know how the teachers let everybody know at the same time that the grades are low or you know the speeches they give before they give you a second chance. I think a video like this is something students will want to write about. They should be able to say a lot” (Asia, Preproduction Session Five).

Other details of note in this scene include the naming of Kalou. The name Kalou was offered by the co-creators to represent a social media influencer of which three of the co-creators were familiar. Per the co-creators this social media influencer is growing in popularity among teenagers and young adults across race and gender, as she is an attractive and curvy Hispanic model. The co-creators did not want to cast aspersions on the model as some of them are indeed followers. Their goal was to explain the tone and lend credibility to some of the comments in the democratic, but not so peaceful dialogue the post provoked. For CoCo the truth was that “they had receipts, but they just went off with them” (Preproduction Session Five). Here CoCo lends credibility to some of the anecdotal experiences shared in the comments, but also addressed the “way” in which those experiences were shared. Even in text, the directness of Black women and girls is interpreted as altitudinal or aggressive (Troutman, 2001 and Spears, 2001). In imagining Crescent’s response to the Alesia’s, the co-creators employ womanist values of harmony



and general humanity (Maparyan, 2012 and Hudson Weems, 2019). In the next scene, Crescent's friends join her in the educative cipher and explain the big deal in their "way."



*Figure 6.7: What's the big deal*

#### Scene 6

In Scene 6 (Figure 6.8) lively, Maisha enters the conversation to support Crescent and share additional facts about African retentions and the history of Black hair.

*Maisha responds with, "Facts!" and proceeds to share a few facts of her own.*

*Maisha: Braided hairstyles are a part of the culture enslaved Africans brought with them to the Americas. Hairstyles were used to show a person's identity, religion, or their tribe.*

*But once the enslaved got to America, African hair was compared to European hair. The better a slave's hair was, and by better, I mean curlier or with a texture closer to the Masters, the more privileges they received. You know, like the difference between the enslaved that worked in the fields and those that worked in the house. So literally, during*

*slavery, the lighter your skin and the curlier your hair, the closer they were to the privileges of working in the house.*

*Enslaved people with kinkier hair wore braids for a lot of different reasons. One reason was to manage and protect it. I mean, just think about having a pillow fight and what happens when the pillow breaks. Now imagine what it's like when a lot of slaves are picking cotton. That's a lot of cotton to pick out of your hair every day.*

First, the co-creators established hair braiding as an African retention, not a Western custom or invention. When Alexandria first talked about the history of Black hair, she grounded her historical knowledge in Africa. When asked about African hairstyles and customs the co-creators offered several responses. Some of them included, “I’ve seen this video where these African ladies with really long hair are putting ashy paste stuff in their hair,” “different types of beads and headwraps,” “no hair but bead crowns,” and “slaves braided rice in their hair.”

To locate the citations for these receipts, the co-creators and I engaged in a collective web search using the screen sharing feature. Many of the citations found for these facts, represent youth engagement on digital platforms. In several searches, the co-creators navigated me through platforms like Instagram and YouTube. Using these searches, we were able to name the “ashy paste” as “chebe powder” used by the women in Chad to reduce hair breakage and shedding (Long natural hair secret from Chad in Africa). During the search, Asia asked, “how far back are we going” and Alexandria replied, “as far back as we can.” As a result, I suggested that we search the hieroglyphics to see if we could locate images of Ancient Egyptians wearing braids, as indeed Ancient



Egyptians were a civilized African people (Diop, 1974). The images included in the video were available as copyright free, purchasable content from stock libraries. As noted in the Calling in the Network section in Chapter 3, I was also able to secure footage of the simulation of the practice of braiding rice into African textured hair.

In scripting this scene, it was important to the co-creators that we be as visually descriptive as possible without the video being traumatizing or dehumanizing for younger audiences. The of using a pillow fight to visually explain the need for using braids and head coverings as a protective style while picking cotton was provided by June. However, when selecting the visuals to accompany the voiceover, the use of visual images of pillow fighting proved problematic. One reason the use of pillowing fighting images provide problematic was the diversity included in the photos available on stock libraries. For the co-creators and I, these images available did not align with our representative needs of the seriousness of the tone desired. As a result, we opted for images of feathers strewn across a floor and an image of enslaved women and children in a cotton field.

In addition to teaching historical facts about the African experience in the Americas, the video as it stands also presents an opportunity for teachers to engage in nuanced conversations around the topic of enslavement and American history. As time and transportation constraints, limited our ability to schedule an additional audio recording of the script, we were not able update the audio to align with the evolution of our thinking in harmony with the production process. In the video script, Maisha discusses experiential differences among the enslaved based on phenotypical features. After multiple readings and audio reviews, the use of the word “privileges” to represent

difference was identified as a needed edit, in addition to the use of the word “master” to be replaced using the word “slaveholder” (Byrd and Thorpe, 2014). These alterations to the script would make it a more historically exacting resource and address the actions of these slaveholder as opposed to an arbitrarily determined and dehumanizing title. These voiceover edits are likely to be made before the launch of the series. If there are not, companion resources will be provided to support educators in unpacking these nuances.



Figure 6.8: Maisha with facts

### Scene 7

In Scene 7, Kayla jumps in on the conversation (Figure 6.9).

Kayla: *The enslaved were very smart they were, was the fact that they used braids to resist. It makes a whole lot of sense to me that braids could be used as maps for escape. In this book called Hair Story (2014), I also read that enslaved people “would use braids as a map to freedom.”*

*I think that means that sometimes they might remind those escaping whether the path is on the left side or the right side of the road or the*

*number of braids a person had in their hair would remind them of something they needed to count, like oak trees or houses on a path.*

*And then, they sometimes braided rice into their hair so they wouldn't starve during the Middle Passage or while they were trying to escape.*

During the preproduction session, the co-creators and I were able to re-locate the source of Mari's contribution as Essence magazine's online platform (Brooks, 2020). The post by Essence, refers readers to the original source of the message. After the session, I continued our research and found that Carney (2004) also lends credibility to the narrative that African women brought rice seeds to the Americas. As noted in this article, "in 1726 Swiss correspondent, Jean Watt, noted that 'it was by a woman that rice was transplanted into Carolina' African oral traditions, and the ingenuity required to fuel the economy that secures America today (Carney, 2004, pg. 1) This is an important story for Crescent to tell, because South Carolina is the ground upon which that rice entered the Americas and provided the sustenance and capital to build the nation.

Because this citation and visualization was essential, but not readily available as copyright-free content, I made an impromptu footage request to a Black girl in my life, Jala. Like the African, enslaved African, and African American foremothers who sustained communities through, hair related practices, she has gifted hands. I asked Jala to record herself braiding rice into the hair of her mother or someone with textured hair. As she is a Black girl whose primary literacy is hair. She and I have robust conversations about hair and African American culture. She obliged immediately and enhanced the visual power of the pilot episode. This inclusion serves as my shout out!

In a follow-up email, Alexandria shared Byrd and Tharps' *Hair Story* (2014) as a citation on the history and politics of Black hair. In their text, Byrd and Tharp explain the African origins of braided hairstyles and distinctions in labor and experience based on the phenotype of the enslaved. They provide,

a crucial determinant of how slaves wore their hair was their work assignment.

For the slaves how toiled in the fields and lived in separate slave quarters, the women wore head rages...on the other hand, the slaves who experienced a closer relationship with the White population...often styled their hair in an imitation of their White owners (pg. 14).

This citation was used to support June's facts about the enslaved and distinctions on the basis of hair. Dabri (2019) provides the citation for Kayla's facts about hair and resistance. Dabri's provides rich learning material in noting that,

Braided maps worked as a type of underground railway, but the emphasis was on hiding in plain sight. Women would encode important messages into their hair patterns; it was a means of communication for the enslaved, enabling them to share plans and eventually make their way to liberation and freedom. For example, in the Palenque, the hairstyle 'The Mother' is described as an 'unequivocal sign that everything was planned'; the women elaborated the hairstyle as a form of signal so that the escape could happen" (pg. 238).

In continuing her conversation based on the concept of African fractals, or shapes and patterns, Dabiri supports Diop's (1947) counternarrative refuting the narrative that Africans were uncivilized and backward people in need of socialization. Here she

presents an argument that African braiding patterns are an example of the mathematic and computational genius of African people.

Furthermore, the discovery of these historical facts supported the co-creators in coming to deeper understandings about the importance of having a voice in knowledge production. Koya made this clear in Preproduction as we confirmed this detail in the script. Per Koya, “it’s crazy how braiding hair is math, but people act like braiding hair is not a smart job or an important job” (Preproduction Session Six). Here Koya is pointing to hierarchies within the epistemic system and an understanding of what counts as knowledge production. When asked if the co-creators had teachers who used hair in math instruction, all co-creators responded with “No” (Preproduction Session Six). In understanding the statewide student and district performance data for math after a year of remote learning, Koya’s surprise and intrigue around the use of hair to teach math concepts, suggests that it is an attractive instructional topic beyond Social Studies and ELA. Future studies unpacking the potential of hair as a pedagogical apparatus for teaching math, have the capacity to be pedagogically transformative and emancipatory.



*Figure 6.9: Kayla shares resistance*

## Scene 8

Crescent: *So, it's never been just hair...*

*For Black women and girls it's so much more. It's a big decision.*

*Sometimes it seems like for Black women and girls, we have to wear our hair a certain way to be on a path to success or even participate. Like if you want to play sports or be in the color guard, a straight ponytail is what you need, even though it can cause heat damage to our hair. Or say we want to experiment with color, we are more likely to be dress coded. Even when some teachers talk about career readiness, they use words like "wild" and "unprofessional" to describe our hair.*

Maisha: *They make comments like Mr. Price.*

Crescent: *Right! It's like we get labeled for it, but when people like Kalou wears it, she gets more likes and followers. And in school it's no different. Some of the teachers act like they've never seen that hairstyle before and it's so unique.... like it's cool and fresh for her, but a distraction or unbecoming on us.*

*So, some Black women and girls "feel a way" because they feel like they should be able to have their hair the way they want without being unfairly judged and to be acknowledged for the hair trends we create.*

Maisha: *Did you know that in many states today it is legal to discriminate against a person in the workplace or in schools because of their natural hair or protective hairstyle?*

As she brings the audience back into the present, Crescent explains that the experiences and wisdom enslaved Africans and foremothers shared about hair are rich resources for unpacking and understanding present realities for navigating life with textured hair. In explaining these present realities, Crescent examines hair as a perceived permit for participation. These realities are important for education administrators and policy makers as they have the potential to function as guideposts helpful in creating schools more equitable and less susceptible to federal civil rights grievances.

In addressing hair as a current civil rights issue, Crescent explains that hair norms and standards create real and perceived barriers for participation in academic, career development, and extracurricular activities. In addressing participation, Crescent reveals that hair-related expectations impact student performance in sports and activities in addition to their perceived ability to participate. Early in the preproduction sessions, Alexandria recounted a story wherein she received a team member package including a team ponytail holder that would not fit around her hair. For Alexandria to use the ponytail holder, she would have needed to straighten her hair, which as Alexandria noted “would have defeated the purpose. Who wants to straighten their hair to get it sweaty and curl back up again? That would mean heat damage for no reason” (Preproduction Session Two). When asked how the issue was resolved, Alexandria noted that she was required to pin the ponytail holder into a ponytail secured by a larger and sturdier holder. Other co-

creators joined in the discussion and spoke about similar experiences with participation in band color guards and dance activities.

As well as lack of acknowledgement of curvier body types, co-creators indicate that such cultural understandings are not always discernable among activity decision makers. As noted in the section on hair and participation, Black girl claims of discrimination or marginalization are often deemed less credible. In route to realizing the intent of Title IX legislation, it would behoove educators to consider the ways in which hair related policies and practices have discriminatory effects. In the case of Black girls, such instances can be adjudicated using multiple legal frameworks grounded in equal protection.

It was important to the co-creators that they present a comparative case regarding hair. For the co-creators, white female teenagers were the unit of comparison “because Black boys get treated unfairly because of their locs and haircuts too” (Mari, Preproduction Session Four). Per one of the co-creators, “we know they [educators] don’t think its [hairstyles] ghetto on everybody, just us” (Preproduction Session Four). I understood the co-creators’ sentiments to be reflective of critical literacies or an understanding of hidden curricula (Giroux, 1987) and in this case, they are interested in teaching to it to expose and dismantle it.

In unpacking this sentiment, the comparative elements of the script unfolded as the co-creator’s way of discussing the distinctions between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. For the co-creators, it was important to express to those questioning Black women and girls’ passionate responses, the exhausting and frustrating nature of



“watching someone disrespect your culture on you and get excited about it on somebody else” (June, Preproduction Session Six).

Kalou was the example of the “unique” social media influencer, collecting social and material capital by wearing a hairstyle customary to a group of generally dishonored people (Patterson, 1982). Though the B-roll of Kalou (Figure 6.10) is not an exact reflection of the social media influencer the co-creators referenced during the session, it was found on copyright free images and per the co-creators “fits right in...looks like a rocker” (Alexandria, B-Roll Feedback Email). In this ten-second clip, a white celebrity-like figure is seen wearing box braids and shades while walking through a desert. For the co-creators, this scene would address their desire to discuss cultural appropriation.



*Figure 6.10: Kalou with box braids*

#### Scene 9

In Scene 9, Kayla informs viewers about the Crown Act. For the co-creators it was an important inclusion considering their lived prohibitive educational experiences related to hair.

Kayla: *Have you ever heard of Wendy Greene? She's the legal expert behind the CROWN Act and she's from Columbia, SC. She's a law professor and educates students and communities about the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and how it covers hair too!*

*The CROWN Act prohibits discrimination based on a person's hair texture or hairstyle if that style or texture is commonly associated with a particular race or national origin.*

*It basically says that a person should have the freedom to embrace their natural physical appearance in social, political, and corporate spaces and be free from bias based on the body they were born in and the hair they were born with.*

Maisha: *Now that's respecting the Crown. Wendy Greene is that girl!*

Crescent: *I agree!*

This scene addresses the co-creators petition for more contemporary examples of Black excellence and figures “to look up to” (CoCo, Preproduction Session One). Figure 6.11 reflects the image of Wendy Greene as an example of Black excellence selected to respond to co-creator call for more contemporary examples of the possibilities, given a South Carolina education. For the co-creators Wendy Greene was an appealing example of Black excellence because she helps them understand “other civil rights issues too” (Asia, Upward Bound Screening Prep).

In my notes, I reflected on the acceptance of Wendy Greene as the example of Black excellence. In our discussion about expanding the examples of Black excellence covered in educational materials, the co-creators cited Madame CJ Walker and Annie Malone as familiar figures. I offered Amy Surginer Northrop, a noted Black female cosmetologist, public servant, and August honoree for the South Carolina African American History Calendar (*Amy Surginer Northrop*). I offered Northrop as an example of Black excellence featured in a statewide educational initiative that Crescent has great potential to support. While the co-creators agreed that one of Crescent's conversational contributions could be connected to the calendar, they did consider Northrop a fitting example for the script as it was developing.

Demonstrating my agreement with their stance, I offered Wendy Greene as another example of Black excellence associated with hair. When presenting Wendy Greene as an option, I shared my screen in the digital platform and engaged in a web search with the co-creators. We browsed her website [Freethehair.com](http://Freethehair.com) and her university webpage to read her bios and learn more about her work combating hair discrimination using the law (Free the Hair; Green, 2008). Harkening back to responses to the question "where do you want to see yourself in school?" and the outlier response, "law" I understood Wendy Greene to be an appealing candidate (Preproduction Session One). The fact that I never learned which co-creator posted this desire, did not make it less important. In fact, her representational desire planted the seeds for a rich learning experience, in the process of creating learning experiences for others.

To visually represent the prohibitions of the Crown Act, we were able to locate copyright free content using the stock library, however these assets were all motion

footage and featured women wearing braids. During the Co-Creator Check-In we realized that we needed to include still images and other natural hairstyles. As copyright free content databases were limited in their representations of Black hairstyles, those featured as examples of everyday Black women with natural hair are consenting local Black women who responded to my call with images meeting SCETV technical quality standards for digital media.

This scene is powerful because it simultaneously educates students and educational professionals on the legal frameworks available for presenting and adjudicating claims of discrimination on the basis of race and/or gender using hair. Such an inclusion promotes epistemic agency and presents a collective narrative of hair discrimination that lends credibility to or supports Black girls in naming their experiences.



*Figure 6.11: Introducing Wendy Greene*

### Scene 10 and Scene 11

In Figure 6.12, Crescent and Aleisa come to a harmonious understanding about perspectives on hair using dialogue.

Crescent: *“It’s ok to appreciate culture, but you don’t have to wear your hair like that to do so. A compliment goes a long way and respect even further.”*

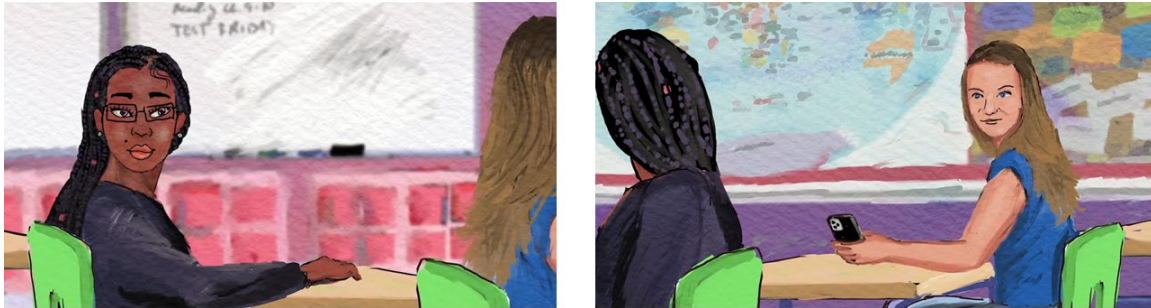
Alesia: *“I’m glad you broke it down to me like that. I still think it looks cool, but now I understand the comments.” “Do you think Wendy Green has Tik Tok? I want to follow her.”*

Crescent: *Probably not Tik Tok, but she does have Twitter. Check her out!*

For the co-creators it was important that Crescent and Aleisa come to a peaceful understanding about the tone of the dialogue. Reflecting womanist values, CoCo commented that the resolution should be such that she and Alesia “can have conversations about other tough topics in the future” (Pre-Production Session Five). As womanism is committed to the collective survival and harmony of people and nature, both students were able to acknowledge each other’s humanity and use dialogue to become more fully human (Maparyan, 2012 and Friere, 1972).

Within this current context, the narrative moves made by the co-creators are insightful as they provide an example of healthy engagement on the parts of both Crescent and Aleisa. Whereas, Black girls are stereotyped as attitudinal and aggressive and White girls are stereotyped as fragile and docile, this narrative shows both students agentic interlocuters. Ultimately, Alesia does not change her position on the attractiveness of box braids on the social media influencer. This detail was important to the co-creators. Per Alexandria, the goal of the conversation was “not to make Alesia feel

bad or not like Kalou. She [Crescent] just wants her to understand why the Black women and girls in the comments are responding like that” (Preproduction Session Six). It is also important to note that Crescent does not attempt to sustain this conversation alone, she directs, Kalou to Wendy Greene’s Twitter for more information.



*Figure 6.12: Harmonious Resolution*

### Scene 12

In Scene 12 (Figure 6.13) Crescent and her friend re-join each other in the real-time setting to recap their experience.

Crescent: *“That was a success. I’m proud of us.”*

Maisha: *“As you should be.”*

Kayla: *“Stay slaying lessons like your edges.”*

Crescent: *“Y’all do the most!”*

In this section it was important to the co-creators that Crescent and her friends affirm each other, because in their words “it could’ve gone another way.” In their response, the co-creators make mention of a reality that researchers have documented. Studies on microaggressions show that these everyday experiences have a deleterious impact on the physical and mental health of the offended (Williams, et. al, 2021). In education, these microaggressions impact student behavior and student performance.

Huber et al (2021) argue that the inertia with these microaggressions were launched should be matched or exceeded by the force of the microaffirmations released to vulnerable students. One microaffirmation in this scene, “stay slaying lessons like your edges” functions a coded language. The commendation means that Crescent, Maisha, and Kayla, carefully crafted a sound and aesthetically pleasing explication that resembles the artistic hairstyling technique of creating curved patterns at the hairline as an essential accent.

Here the co-creators also wanted to lift the weight of seriousness before concluding the episode. They wanted to celebrate each other for the “way” in which they handled the controversial conversation and to do so using their own shared epistemic resource or language. Green (2016) calls for valuing street literacies and honoring students’ rights to their own language (Students’ Rights to Their Own Language, 1974). Using their grammar, of which I sometimes struggled to seamlessly incorporate into the script, they created a sense of belonging for each other and viewers sharing their worldview. Especially in light of the comment that Crescent’s response “could’ve gone another way,” it is important to acknowledge when Black girls “do the most” in service of harmony and collective survival.



*Figure 6.13. Black Girl Microaffirmations*

### Scene 13

Crescent: *“Until next time, Peace!”*

In Figure 6.14, Crescent signs off with her womanist commitments to harmony and dialogue. Per the co-creators in promoting peace, Crescent is telling viewers that she is “approachable about things that are hard to talk about.” In modeling Crescent, they are also reflecting the kinds of environments and landings they prefer, peaceful and harmonious ones. Crescent also signs off with her mission-centric commitment to dialogue. As she prepares to share with them another conversation she’s been having, she anticipates that they would become spirited interlocutors as well (Maparyan, 2012).





*Figure 6.14: Until Next Time, Peace*

### ***Supplemental Learning Resources***

Because Conversations with Crescent is to be an educational resource for South Carolina students, it must align with South Carolina College and Career Ready standards. During the planning sessions the co-creators and I engaged in discussions about the ways in which we envision the videos being used in teaching and learning and what supports we might create.

### ***Standard Aligned Materials***

Early on, the co-creators identified English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies/History as the core subjects they envision the series addressing. They also included career exploration as an important theme.

### ***8<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA Essay Prompts***

Per South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards for English Language Arts, by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, student should be able to write clear and developed explanatory, narrative, and argumentative essays. The pilot episode of Conversations with Crescent creates opportunities for teachers to assess student “command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing”

essays in response to the episode. This product was offered as a solution for addressing the need for affirmative curricular content that engages the multiple literacies of Black girls (Ohioto, 2016; Muhammad and Haddix, 2018).

The co-creators and I discussed how the resource might encourage students who are not Black and/or female to active and productively participate in the conversation. For Koya, everybody has hair or a hairstyle, so it's a topic that everybody should be able to write about" (Upward Bound Screening Prep). For Alexandria, it was important that student have the opportunity to "share what they have experienced" using English as the shared epistemic resource. Alexandria's commitment creates opportunity for deeper understanding of student experiences among teachers and gives students a meaningful learning opportunity. Because Black girls stand at a unique location that encompasses multiple identities, addressing their concerns promotes the survival of a whole people. Regardless of race and gender, students could benefit from engagement with these academic exercises. The resource produced is attached as Appendix F.

#### *ELA Short Answer Worksheet*

As the data insights emerging from educational assessments and studies conducted during the pandemic report learning slide, lag, and loss in average. In South Carolina, more than sixty percent of 3-8<sup>th</sup> grade student taking statewide assessments did not met grade-level expectations for English/ language arts (State of South Carolina 2020-2021 Report Card). To support the acceleration of foundational comprehension and composition skills, the co-creators and I drafted a set of generic comprehension questions that can be applied to any episode and a set of detailed comprehension questions specific to the episode (Appendix G). As the resource will be made available on KnowItAll.org, it

can be used as a formal assessment or a supplemental learning or enrichment activity beyond the classroom.

### *8<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies Lesson Starter Resource*

Because South Carolina law requires that all 8<sup>th</sup> grade students attending public schools take a course in South Carolina history, SCETV specializes in creating critical needs social studies content not prioritized by national educational content providers. Also because of this mandate, *Conversations with Crescent* seeks to support teaching and learning centering South Carolina. The pilot episode was created to align with eight grade South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards for Social Studies (2019). The resource covers skills and theme like change and continuity, South Carolina's role in the Civil Rights Movement, and the use of primary and secondary resources to analyze multiple perspectives.

Circling back to Alexandria and CoCo's engagement about the repetitive lessons the receive on Black history, this episode creates opportunities to bring critical discussion of civil rights forward with an analysis of change and continuity, in ways that are standard aligned, but also propel the conversation beyond the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960's and 1970's. The resource also support education by inviting students and teachers to consider how civil rights inform our everyday interactions today and what is necessary to achieve global peace and civility.

This resource was created as a starter resource and is not intended to be a comprehensive resource. It is intended to be of use to teachers considering alternative or emergent approached to teaching social justice standards and attached as Appendix H.

### *Educator Reception*

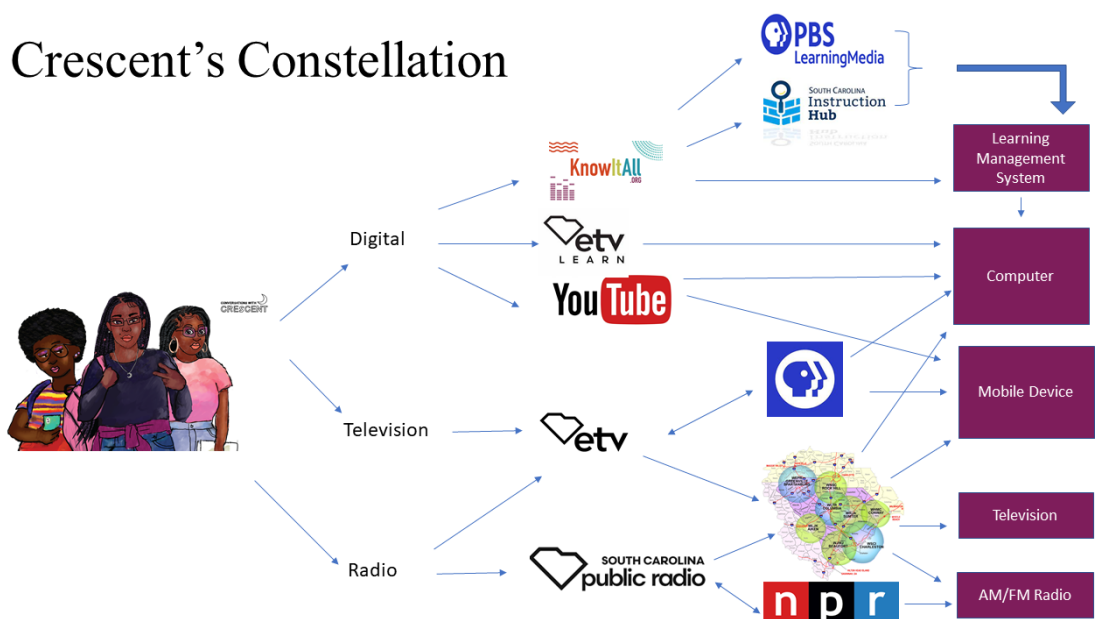
When asked to review the supplemental resources for their appeal for teaching and learning and for the standard alignment, a high school assistant principal of curriculum and instruction with a middle level certification responded,

Powerful! I appreciate the way you all capture and explore the topic of black hair/hairstyles. The content is relevant, authentic, and presented in a way that is brutally honest, yet not offensive. Your approach makes the topic that is seemingly "taboo" for some address in the classroom, one that is easier to explore. The companion activities align perfectly with the standards and set the stage for meaningful and structured dialogue, research, and writing that will hopefully lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of diversity.

Between the submission of this draft and defense, more feedback will be provided to describe educator reception to the resource.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In returning to the Universe of Crescent, I end with Crescent's Constellation (Figure 7.1). Crescent's Constellation functions as an illustration of the possibilities when Black girls are engaged seriously and carefully in knowledge production and dissemination. This constellation is also an illustration of the value of public media as an intervention in multi-modal learning and extending learning beyond the classroom. As students prepare for a high stakes testing year, it is my hope that Conversations with Crescent is a resource that generates meaningful opportunities for students to enhance the skills and competencies on which they will be assessed, and do so in ways that support them and their teachers in becoming more fully human.



*Figure 7.1 Crescent's Constellation*

### *Methodological Contributions*

Using womanist methodology and YPAR allowed for the creation of a safe space that centered the experiences and perspectives of Black women and girls. In this study a Black woman, with the support of Black women colleagues and associate, and Black girls engaged in a synergistic process through which we fashioned ourselves as a co-creator collective by fashioning Crescent and her world. In the words of our woma(femi)nist foremother Zora, “that too, is something” (Walker, 1979). In extending Hurston’s thought, I invoke Toni Cade Bambara and add that the “something” of discussion is “no trifling matter” (pg. 10). That fashioning is as brilliant as the foresight to use what is available on one’s person, hair, to transport seeds that have fueled economies and sustained a people (Littlefield, 1991). The seeds offered in this study are seeds of balance, harmony, dialogue, and peace transported by these fashioned animated representations via the channels and information highways of public media. And whereas public media was conceived for the public good, and development of an educated and democratic citizenry, it functions as a powerful site for delivering transformative content and transforming educative relationships.

In alignment with womanism’s African origins, Crescent emerges as a griot committed to engaging in conversations to set stories straight and offer parables that assist audiences in navigating life’s stations. Through dialogue, storytelling created opportunities for the youth co-creators to speak back to the majoritarian narratives and microaggressions they engage and experience in their lives in ways that empower and affirm them. In involving the co-creators in the production process, three of them lend their actual voices to restorative aims in education. In centering their voices, we push

back against norms that position Black girls as consumers of curriculum and support their agentic participation in processes of productive resistance. In engaging them, their genius, and wit during a workday, I experienced more creativity, productivity, and audacity professionally as well. This honors womanist commitments to collective wellbeing. In this study, the co-creators and I grew together, a harmonious departure from common representations of YPAR experiences.

Womanisms African origins, when combined with YPAR make it a powerful compound for addressing social justice issues diasporically. The co-creators and I included a hair discrimination headline from South Africa in the Crown Act segment of the pilot episode. As the co-creators understand that the Internet provides international access in the palm of one's hand, they expressed hopes that Black girls in other countries encounter the video and have a transformative experience. I imagine that the same would be true for the colorism episode they expressed interest in planning and producing.

Womanist methodology when combined with YPAR activates the womanish in powerful and transformative ways. While Black women and girls often engage in acts of service together, collective problem solving between Black women and girls deserves more exposure and effort. It offers Black women scholar practitioners the opportunity to remember what we learned to forget by engaging the ingenuity and freshness of the youth (Dillard, 2002). It offers Black girl stakeholders a window into future possibilities and opportunities to access wisdom for navigating the unique racial and social locations of Black women. Commitment to these understandings supports sustained intergenerational dialogue, interactivity, and the dynamism that keeps woma(femi)nism moving forward.

## *Implications*

The outcomes of this study show that public media is a transformative venue for personally and professionally developing students through curriculum development. The success of programs like PBS News Hour have demonstrated the transformative potential of public media for cultivating journalistic producers, this study broadens that youth content production field beyond news to teaching media and leverages the potential of youth voice to transform schools and communities (Mirra, et. al, 2015). The study also offers Black girls as an initial example of the possibilities when critical measures are taken to create the space for agentic participation in production. Certainly, there are other critical representational needs within the epistemic system, for example students with disabilities, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American students, pregnant and parenting students; in addition to critical subject area needs including geography, math, ELA, and world languages using technology as an apparatus of flexibility. I anticipate that this participatory framework can produce equally transformative outcomes based on other exacting combinations of need. I also anticipate that additional production groups will be formed at my agency for the purpose of creating critical needs educational media. Future studies examining the particularities of these production processes would also enrich the epistemic field.

Moreover, this work has significant implications for the ways practitioners can improve educative environments and educational experiences of Black girls. This research describes the values and experiences of Black girls in schools and reveals rich insights. The study revealed that a culturally sustaining and responsive curriculum supports enhanced engagement in learning. The study also revealed that Black girls are



impacted by the implicit biases of practitioners, and that cultural norms have the impact of de-motivating participation in school activities. Acting upon these issues will support create more equitable and just schooling environments for all students.

While this study is contextualized within the U.S. South, the far-reaching implications of this project are in sight. I understand from the example of the UNICEF sponsored character Meena, that it is possible to use public media to address transnational or diasporic issues. In 1998 UNICEF partnered with All India Radio to create the Meena Communication Initiative, a series of stories about a spunky South Asian girl bravely facing and pushing back against developmental challenges of her day (Anis, 2017). As a tool for engaging children and families in conversations about education, health gender equity, and safety Meena supports development aims that center women and girls. As I am transparent about my dream for Crescent and her crew, she has passport stamps.

### *Limitations*

Limitations in this study were primarily ecologically influenced. Conducting research during a resilient public health crisis impacting children and adults impacted the availability of human resources to enliven the process with more participation. The pandemic also impacted our ability to gather more frequently to engage in-person and collectively create. In addition to these environmental factors, this study was limited by the time constraints of my professional and academic schedules.

### *Thinking Forward*

The account presented in this dissertation is a temporally contained representation. The work does not end here, it begins. In order to be recognized as a

formal SCETV produced program, the pilot episode and series treatment must be presented before the agency Greenlight Committee for approval. This committee, representative of the functional areas in the agency, reviews production proposals for criteria including: alignment with the agency's mission and vision; material and human resource capacity within the proposed scope, budget, and timeline, and potential for expanding audience reach. Approved programs receive a budget allocation and a dedicated producer. During the first greenlight meeting of the upcoming calendar year, I will present *Conversations with Crescent* for consideration.

During that presentation, I will share the vision for the series beyond the pilot episode. While that vision has not yet been determined, it will certainly include an expansion of the cipher (Brown, 2013). In addition to continued engagement with the co-creators, I intend to create space for more Black girls from South Carolina to participate in the production of the series as statewide representation is a goal limited by the pandemic. Some of these girls are former participants in Black Girl Genius Week Columbia and others are respondents to the SCETV Student Interest and Engagement Survey. At the beginning of this study, the survey had one respondent and currently has 449 respondents. As the series evolves the survey will continue to be a source of identifying potential interest and talent.

In keeping with the sentiments, I shared entering into the study, I am fully aware of the potential of a program grounded in the Black girls as serious, courageous, and spirited epistemologies of Black girls. Without a doubt, the system created anew will keep the conversation going. In fact, the co-creators and I will be sharing our experience as presenters at an upcoming statewide conference for first-generation, underserved high

school students. As evidenced by their dispositions and engagement during the Upward Bound Screening Session, several of the co-creators are ready to share the knowledge they produced with the world. That womanist audacity, coupled with the fact that the co-creators do have a desire to be seen *and* heard motivates my sustained personal, passionate, participatory engagement herein.

When Crescent came to mind, she was a commitment to Black girlhood celebration in South Carolina. She would be a heart-conceived offering to counter the compounding narrative that, since 2015, I revisit each year when I extend birthday gratitude to the heavens and ask restoration for Shakara. I thought that she would live on multiple digital platforms and have the potential to transform classrooms, individual learning experiences, social media timelines, feeds, and consciousness. She would be a character recognized and received by Black girls as authentic and educators as engaging, educative, and motivational.

The outcome is a universe of Black girl genius, light, and power with exponential potential. The COVID-19 pandemic showcased numerous glaring inequities, especially in education. To address multi-layered and multi-faceted issues, multi-layered and multi-faceted resources are needed and engaging those in closest proximity to the intended audience is wise. I sum up Dotson's justification for promoting epistemic agency as, where one sits determines what he/she sees. An inclusive epistemic system makes space for the person closest to and furthest from the light to participate understanding that everyone can contribute to the manifestation of the optimal solution. As for Black girls solving the problem of critical curricular representation in this study, they fashioned their lessons like their edges, in the shape of C.

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## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT & ASSENT FORM

Dear Parent and Perspective Participant,

My name is Salandra Bowman. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Studies Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Educational Foundations and Inquiry, and I would like to invite your child to participate. This study is funded by South Carolina Educational Television.

I am studying Black girl participation in creating educational media. If your child decides to participate, she will be asked to meet with me for an interview about her thoughts on school curriculum, what she watches on television or online, and the kind of media she wishes you see in her classrooms. Your child does not have to answer any questions that she does not wish to answer. The interview will take place virtually and should last about 30 minutes. The interview will be videotaped so that I can accurately transcribe what is discussed. The recordings will only be reviewed by me, the researcher and permanently deleted once the study is complete.

Your child will also be asked to participate in seven group production sessions where she will have the opportunity to share her ideas for creating that media. Group sessions will take place on Zoom based on the Upward Bound schedule.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. Your child will select an alternative name she would like used in these publications when speaking about her involvement.

Information your child shares during interviews will be private. Only I will know your answers to the questions. However, during group production sessions, the group will hear what your child says, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, we cannot promise that what she says will remain completely private, but we will ask that she and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

We will be happy to answer any questions you or your child has about the study. You may contact me at (insert contact information). or my faculty advisor, (insert contact information).

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like for your child to participate, please provide your signature and printed name below.

Upon receipt of this consent form, your child will receive a link to complete the supplemental application questions. I am attaching a preview copy of the questions for your information. If you or your child has questions, please contact me at the number listed below to discuss participating.

With kind regards,

(Signature)

Salandra Bowman

#### Parental Consent

If you give your child permission to participate in this study, please sign and print your name below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Name

For Minors 13-17 years of age:

My participation has been explained to me, and all my questions have been answered. I am willing to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Minor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Age of Minor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Minor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B: 2021 SCETV YOUTH ENGAGEMENT & INTEREST SURVEY

1. Do you watch or listen to content on ETV, PBS, and or NPR shows? (check all that apply)
  - a. Yes, I watch ETV/PBS on TV
  - b. Yes, I listen to NPR
  - c. Yes, I watch ETV/PBS shows on the SCETV App
  - d. Yes, my teacher(s) shows ETV/PBS videos in class
  - e. No I do not watch ETV/PBS/ NPR
2. Do you follow SCETV on social media? (check all that apply)
  - a. Yes, Twitter
  - b. Yes, Facebook
  - c. Yes, Instagram
  - d. No, I do not follow SCETV on social media
3. What is your favorite ETV/PBS program? [comment box]
4. Please rate the degree to which you agree with the statements about educational media below:
  - a. The educational videos my teacher selects are clear and helpful
  - b. The educational videos my teacher selects are engaging
  - c. The educational videos my teacher selects are outdated
  - d. The educational videos my teacher selects reflect my interests and values
  - e. The educational videos my teacher selects include diverse representations (race, gender, age, ability, etc.)
5. Please rate the appeal of the following types of educational media:
  - a. Audio and music
  - b. Documentaries
  - c. Infographics
  - d. Informational videos
  - e. Interactive games
  - f. Tutorials and How-to videos
6. What is your favorite TV or YouTube channel? (multiple comment boxes)
7. Are you interested in any of the media production areas below? (check all that apply)
  - a. Animation
  - b. Cinematography/ music production
  - c. Editing

- d. Promotion
  - e. Scripting
8. Please tell us about your Internet access at home.
- a. I have quality Internet access.
  - b. I have limited access to broadband Internet.
  - c. I do not have access to the Internet at home.
9. What social media platforms do you use?
- a. Facebook
  - b. Twitter
  - c. Instagram
  - d. Snapchat
  - e. Tik Toc
  - f. Clubhouse
10. What will be your grade level during the 2021-2022 academic year?
- a. 6<sup>th</sup> grade
  - b. 7<sup>th</sup> grade
  - c. 8<sup>th</sup> grade
  - d. 9<sup>th</sup> grade
  - e. 10<sup>th</sup> grade
  - f. 11<sup>th</sup> grade
  - g. 12<sup>th</sup> grade
  - h. Undergraduate student
  - i. Graduate student
11. What is your race/ethnicity? (optional)
12. What is your gender? (optional)
13. What is your zip code?
14. Would you like to be contacted to provide more feedback? SCETV staff would like to hear your suggestions for creating more youth content.
- a. No, I would like to submit this survey anonymously.
  - b. Yes, I would like to be contacted.
15. If you are under the age of 18, we will need parental consent to get additional feedback. Please provide the contact information requested below.
- a. Your Name
  - b. Parent(s) Name
  - c. Parent Telephone Number
  - d. Parent Email Address

## APPENDIX C: INDUSTRY – STUDENT RESEARCHER AGREEMENT

South Carolina Educational Television (SCETV) and Salandra Bowman (the researcher) enter into agreement to facilitate the discovery, dissemination, and application of new knowledge as a part of the study entitled “Creating Crescent: Using Youth Participatory Action Research to Promote Epistemic Agency Among Black Girls in South Carolina.”

SCETV will:

- Allocate funding for contractual services, resource development, and incentives associated with this study to include:
  - o Animation, illustration, and editing services
  - o An iPad for each participant, not to exceed \$300 each
- Permit the researcher to use agency resources (Zoom platform and production technicians) for this project.
- Permit the researcher to devote 20 percent of her work time from June to August to complete this study.
- Permit the researcher to use the 2021 SCETV Student Engagement and Interest Survey to select participants for this study.
- Maintain ownership of the content produced from this study.

The researcher will:

- Acknowledge SCETV for their support of this study.
- Provide a copy of the completed research study upon completion of the doctoral degree.
- Request permission to use the agency name when submitting results of the study for publication in academic journals and publications.

## APPENDIX D: CONVERSATIONS WITH CRESCENT PILOT EPISODE STORYBOARD

### Crescent Lesson 1



Figure D.1: Pilot episode storyboard



APPENDIX E: ILLUSTRATIONS IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT



Figure E.1: Character edits

## APPENDIX F: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER RESOURCE FOR PILOT

### EPISODE

#### Conversations with Crescent

**Episode Title: Conversations on Hair, History, and Popular Culture**  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA Essay Prompts

##### Standards Alignment<sup>1</sup>

**Standard 1:** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

**Standard 2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**Standard 3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**Standard 4:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

**Standard 5:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

##### Writing Prompts

1. After her encounter with Mr. Price, Crescent asks viewers, “have you ever experienced anything like this before?” In a complete and well-written narrative essay, describe your experience as it relates to the episode.
2. Identify one historical fact or issue discussed in the episode. In a complete and well-written essay extend the conversation. A well-written essay will further explain the issue, state your position on the issue, and present compelling evidence to support your position.
3. What is an Act? How does an Act become enacted legislation? This episode discusses the Crown Act. If you could propose an Act for the state of South Carolina, what would it be and why?
4. In the episode, Crescent, Maisha, and Kayla discuss the various messages hair can communicate. In your opinion, what do hairstyles and trends communicate? What do you intend to communicate with your hairstyle?



<sup>1</sup> South Carolina College and Career -Ready Standards and Indicators for Grade 8 (2015)

*Figure F.1: ELA Teacher Resource*

APPENDIX G: ENGLISH ARTS SHORT ANSWER WORKSHEET FOR PILOT

EPISODE

**Conversations with Crescent**  
**Episode Title: Conversations on Hair, History, and Popular Culture**  
8th Grade ELA Short Answer Worksheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Answer each question in complete sentences and provide details.

**Part 1:**

1. What is the theme of the episode?
2. What is the main idea of the episode?
3. What supporting facts or details do the characters present?
4. What is the tone of the episode?
5. Who was the notable South Carolinian Crescent introduced in this episode? Why should we know about him/her?

**Part 2:**

1. What is the Crown Act?
2. Do you think the South Carolina General Assembly should consider enacting the Crown Act in South Carolina?
3. What are your thoughts about how Crescent handled the conversation?



*Figure G.1: ELA Short Answer Worksheet*

## APPENDIX H: CONVERSATIONS WITH CRESCENT SOCIAL STUDIES LESSON

### STARTER RESOURCE FOR PILOT EPISODE

#### **Conversations with Crescent** **Episode Title: Conversations on Hair, History, and Popular Culture** Social Studies Lesson Starter Resource<sup>2</sup>

##### **Essential Question:**

How did South Carolinians contribute to the national Civil Rights Movement?

##### **Standards:**

**Indicator 8.5.CX:** Analyze the correlation between the Modern Civil Rights Movement in South Carolina and the U.S.

**Indicator 8.5.CC:** Analyze the continuities and changes in South Carolina's identity resulting from the civic participation of different individuals and groups of South Carolinians.

**Indicator 8.5.CC:** Utilize a variety of primary and secondary sources to analyze multiple perspectives on the cultural changes in South Carolina and the U.S.

##### **Context from the SC Department of Education Social Studies Alignment Guide:**

During the Civil Rights Movement, students mobilized in South Carolina by participating in sit-ins and protests. Civil rights activists were often met with violence as they campaigned for equal rights. De jure segregation was abolished through Civil Rights era legislation; however, de facto segregation has implications throughout present-day society. While South Carolina has consistently grown on the international stage, the state still faces challenges. Inequity in the funding of rural and urban public-school districts was illustrated in the appeal of *Abbeville v. South Carolina* (2014). In addition, race relations remain influenced by the state's history. However, in recent years, South Carolina elected a minority and female governor and an African American United States Senator, the first in the state since Reconstruction. The racially-motivated hate crime against parishioners at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church demonstrated an opportunity for South Carolinians to unify and the ability for people to peacefully protest for change. The state also continues to make strides in improving the education of the workforce, while tourism continues to provide jobs and attract visitors.

##### **Short Answer Question Bank:**

1. What rights are protected under the Civil Rights Act of 1964?
2. Have these protections been realized? What is the same? What has changed?
3. Why might hair be considered protected under the Civil Rights Act of 1964?
4. Compare and contrast a civil rights leader of the 1950s - 60s and a present-day civil rights leader.

<sup>2</sup>SC College and Career Ready Standards for Social Studies, 2019



*Figure H.1: Social Studies Lesson Starter Resource*