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"It tells about the street life": a portrait of a family of African American women who read and discuss urban literature

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"IT TELLS ABOUT THE STREET LIFE"
A PORTRAIT OF A FAMILY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO READ AND DISCUSS
URBAN LITERATURE

by

Valerie Nicole Nyberg

<u>An Abstract</u>

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in Teaching and Learning in
the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

December 2012

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Kathryn Whitmore

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the social function of reading Urban Literature and the role the genre serves in the lives of a family of African American women. This investigation discovered that their talk about a particular Urban Literature text reveals intertextual links among multiple "texts" and that these links relate to elements of their lived worlds and cultural models.

Using a case study portrait methodology, grounded in a sociocultural approach to language and literacy, this study focuses on the following questions:

1. What do the women in an all-female African American family read? Why do they read?

2. How are these African American women's self-perceptions and identities related to their family's reading practices?

3. How do the women in an all-female African American family engage and talk to one another about books as readers, individuals, and as a family?

4. How are the intertextual links they use during their talk socially constructed as they interact and react to one another?

To address the first two questions, I conducted two in-depth individual interviews of the participants and analyzed their responses for evidence that reading Urban Literature is part of larger social and cultural practices related to their self-perception and their lived worlds and cultural models. In this case, reading Urban Literature serves a larger purpose than just pure entertainment. Specifically, I found that the women in this family read Urban Literature for the following social functions: (1) as a connection to

urban life; (2) as a form of entertainment; (3) as a collaborative activity; and (4) as a means of constructing and defining their own identities.

To address the second two questions, I joined the family for a discussion of an Urban Literature book called *Rage Times Fury* (2004). After documenting the conversation on video, I analyzed a 6 min 16 sec segment of the 1 hr 17 min 11 sec discussion to explore the ways the family members' talk collaboratively constructs meaning through intertextual links. The collaborative nature of their talk about *Rage Times Fury* reveals that this family uses intertextual links to: (1) define themselves as readers, particularly as readers of Urban Literature, and as students; (2) strengthen their bonds as members of the same family through strategies such as repetition; and (3) identify and validate their cultural models and prior lived experiences based on their shared social and historical perspectives.

The analysis within this study suggests researchers can conduct more extensive studies of how African American families with adolescents engage in various literacy practices and how those practices are embedded in their social and cultural lived worlds. This study also recommends that educators should strive more to connect family literacy skills, practices, and cultural models in students' homes to instructional skills, practices, and cultural models employed in classrooms.

Abstract Approval:

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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To Isaiah, Nathaniel, and Jacob who gave me the strength, courage and
fortitude to finish what I started. To Circe Stumbo, the team at
West Wind Education Policy Inc., and especially Irv Richardson
with the Council of Chief State School Officers who gave me the
space and courage to keep trying. And to the "Walker women"
who opened their home and reintroduced me to the joy
of reading for pleasure.

It is my contention that concerted action is needed to break the cycle and improve the fortunes of African American males if upward mobility is going to be achieved in the long term for black children, families, and the African American community at large. This is not going to be achieved by making school a paramilitary camp, dressing the children in uniforms, and pushing incarceration down to lower grade levels. The answer to improving the future for African American children is to *connect them to academic achievement*.

Janice E. Hale, *Learning While Black*

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This dissertation was a collective effort. I want to thank the "Walker" family for generously allowing me to hang around their house and ask them a variety of questions about the books they read and why, as well as for including me in their conversation about one such book. Thank you to the faculty in the Language, Literacy, and Culture program who taught me that although I entered the program with an expressed intent *not* to focus on issues of race, but they opened a realm of knowledge, understanding, and perspective that has led me to multiple endeavors. I especially want to thank Cynthia Lewis who taught me how important identity is to everything we do and Gail Boldt who taught me about Foucault…I will never forget even though both of you are far away.

Kathryn Whitmore, I appreciate that you agreed to become my advisor when I still wasn't sure what I was doing. Thank you for continuing to work with me and guide through this labor, all the while reassuring me that I *do* know something. Thanks to Katrina Sanders and Malik Henfield for your guidance and encouragement along the way. Thank you to Amanda who agreed to join my committee in the last month of this process and to Linda for agreeing to serve on my committee and graciously guiding me in the process.

Finally, I want to thank my mother and her parents, though they have all passed, they taught me to have a passion for education and equity and provided me with the tools I needed to achieve my goals.

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MEET THE WALKERS

As a result of the civil rights movement, literacy and racial justice have become intertwined in the American imagination to the extent that it is now difficult to invoke one without at least approaching the other. Debates over school choice, standardized tests, affirmative action, and reparations all exhibit the conceptual enmeshment of literacy and racial justice, as proponents on every side of these issues advance their position as finally offering the fulfillment of *Brown's* promise to place all children on a level playing field.

Catherine Prendergast, *Literacy and Racial Justice*

Popular television has given much of the United States a glimpse into the inner lives of American families. Whether it was *The Walton's,* or *Little House in the Prairie* in the late 1970s and early 1980s, or *Good Times* and *The Cosby Show* in the late 1970s and mid-1980s, or today's *Modern Family* and *Parenthood,* with multicultural family members who defy rules of conventional family membership, these families are considered by some to be the idealized version of our own families. The Walker family, who is the focus of this study, presents its own unique configuration.

The Walkers are a close-knit family of African American women composed of the mother, Cheryl (38) and her five daughters: Chanel (18), Cleo (17), Cy'Marie (16), MaKiya (15) and Suki (13). They live in a modest three-bedroom ranch house on a semi-busy residential street on the southeast side of a mid-size town in Iowa. Cheryl said that she moved her family, originally from inner-city Chicago, to Iowa in 2007 in order to create a better life for her children. Prior to this most recent move, Cheryl moved her family to a couple of different communities on the south side of Chicago, but after an altercation with a neighbor who attacked her oldest child, Brian (22, who was serving in

the Army at the time of this study), she decided that it was time to make the move to Iowa.

Although she describes her time here as peaceful, one afternoon in her home might suggest differently. With five girls, the Walker household is constantly abuzz. The girls often share the kitchen table while completing college, high school, or junior high homework. During their time off from work and school (Chanel, Cleo, and Cy'Marie have their own jobs, two at a local McDonald's, and one with a new job at the nearby Kmart), they lounge in the house, watching TV, listening to music via a laptop computer, or sometimes playing board games or video games on their new Wii. And they spend a lot of time reading.

Having a conversation with one Walker girl is sometimes like having a conversation with all of them. Individuals wander in and out of the conversation when the subject piques their interest or when they have a quip ready to put on blast. Though in another household such practices might lead to verbal and/or physical altercation, these women routinely talk "smack" to one another, in a manner that is more tongue in cheek than really serious. As Cy'Marie describes, "It's never a dull moment, regardless as to who, whom is at home. Never a dull. Um, we have our crazy days. Chaotic. More loveable than most people would think because it's a lot of females" (personal interview, November 28, 2010). Similarly, when asked about her family, Suki said, "Well, one, they're annoying…And, we have our moments where we jus' annoy each other and then we have our moments when we just bond" (personal interview, December 27, 2010).

Even when there seems to be nothing going on, like on a cool early day during spring break, the buzz may be a hum, but the girls are coming, going, getting ready, and always interacting. This is illustrated in the following description from Cleo:

> **Cleo:** Well they all crazy so. Kind of weird to explain how crazy they are, but… I think we all a little bit touched sometimes, so we jus [laughing] I don't know.
>
> **Valerie:** When you say touched, you mean special?
>
> **Cleo:** Yeah…You can't describe this. It's like talkin' about, I don't know how to describe my family. And, I don't know how to describe them, they jus very…weird. (personal interview, December 27, 2010)

In all the activity, there is love, mutual admiration, and a good sense of teasing and fun between them. Though they may argue or disagree, if someone from beyond the family challenges one, they must contend with all of them. One of the family mottos is to take care of your own. Cheryl stated the following:

> Um, I think to be a member of this family, it, it means a lot because we stand by each other, regardless of what we do inside the household. What goes on, we can argue, fuss, fight in the household, but we still stand by each other, regardless ta [xxxxx], thick and thin. It means a lot to even become, be one of our friends, 'cause we stand by it. I've raised them to believe in your friends, stand by your friends, support your friends. If that's your friend, then that's what you need to do. If you're gonna call them your friend, that means a lot. (personal interview, December 10, 2010)

Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* motto, "All for one and one for all," is a predominant theme for how the Walkers interact with the world, particularly regarding perceived threats or unfair characterizations by outsiders regarding how the Walkers live their lives.

One representation often displayed in the media regarding Black families, particularly in households led by a single mother, such as the Walkers, is that the parent is often lax in her supervision of her children. This is certainly not true about the Walker family. One element of Cheryl's child rearing practices has involved setting clear rules

and boundaries. Cheryl is very clear about her expectations for herself and her children, as she demonstrate in the following:

> So I told my kids, I'm not cleaning up your mess. Shut your mouth, walk away, so what they talk, they talked about Jesus Christ. So, and that's the, that's what I try to instill in them. And, that's how I wish that, I jus' wish that our adults would truly be adults, and let your kids be kids. Teach them how ta resolve conflict. Don't teach them how to create more. (personal interview, December 10, 2010)

In addition, the girls have a curfew; rules for how friends first come to visit; household responsibilities like laundry, cooking, grocery shopping, and general house cleaning; and the older girls contribute financially to the household. For example, at the time of this study, Cleo paid for the family to have cable access. In addition, the older girls pay for the extras like their cell phones. Cheryl is clear in her goals for how she parents her children, "[I] always practiced raising productive humans for society" (personal interview, December 2, 2010), which requires maturity, a growth-oriented attitude, and education all with a healthy sense of who they are and where they come from.

James Gee (2004) argues that children form their identities in relation to the identities promoted by their family. Specifically, Gee states, "Thus becoming a 'person like us' (an identity as a member of a family of a certain sort) involved early commitment…" (p. 47). What the short portrait above shows is a close-knit family who has formed a strong identity that is pervasive in everything they do.

Upon entering the Walker home, an outsider may expect common stereotypes regarding low-income households as bereft of literacy since the first thing a visitor sees is the large flat screen television and DVD tower absent of books or other outward evidence of literate behavior. However, as one who spent time in the house, I witnessed quite the

Figure 1. DVD tower.

contrary. The Walkers have a print-saturated home. Just as Johnson (2010) noted in her study of an intergenerational African American family, the Walkers use literacy for multiple purposes. Their literacy uses include the following:

1. Everyday use—lists for tasks and shopping; reminders like advertisements for services; access to medical, dental, and social services; to maintain records; to remember loved ones through pictures and young children's artwork;

2. Entertainment—magazines, books, board games, mental challenge games, e.g., Sudoku, movies, music, and posters;

3. Educational—textbooks, self-education about African American culture and history, and school contact information;

4. To acknowledge accomplishments—certificates, ribbons, awards, report cards, and other correspondence from the schools;

5. To maintain finances—displaying bills to pay and marking the calendar;

6. Inspirational—displaying a poster/poem "What Don't Kill You Make You Stronger."

Figure 2. The Walker family library and games.

Rather than displaying evidence of their literacy as part of the interior décor, like some families do, the Walkers take care of their books by shelving them in the cabinet. The various books the Walkers have collected over the years include a set of encyclopedias, a set of books featuring various historical African Americans, and various other books. In addition, like many households, the refrigerator features the artwork of the only grandchild (at the time of the study, Cheryl's son was expecting his second child), as well as other items such as bills and important papers. Once past the front room, in the bedrooms are stacks of books and papers including everything from files documenting the girls' progression through school including their awards and recognitions, to course papers and other materials that Cheryl and her daughters have collected and maintain.

In my research, the element that makes this family of particular interest is that nearly all the women in this family share an interest in reading. They often check out books from the local library, read them within a few days and pass them to each other. The books they share are often Urban Literature. Also labeled by other names such as street lit, hip-hop fiction, or ghetto or gangster literature, these books are often set in the inner city and the characters are typically African American, but also include Latinos,

other minorities, and a few White characters (typically as very minor characters). The main focus of these books is varying slices of street life. Gangs, drugs, sex, and money are common themes. However, much of the existing research regarding Urban Literature (Gibson, 2010; Hill, Pérez & Irby, 2008; Stovall, 2006; Morris, Hughes-Hasselll, Agosto & Cottman, 2006; McQuilllar & Mingo, 2004) discusses its popularity amongst urban teens as juxtaposed against the disapproval of teachers and other mainstream resources such as librarians (and sometimes parents) due to the taboo common themes. Yet, despite what English teachers and mainstream readers may think, people and families like the Walkers flock to these books in droves. For this reason, as Buckingham & Sefton-Green (1994) state, "…English teachers—should be centrally concerned with popular culture, and with the media that children actually read and watch, and enjoy" (p. 5).

Research Questions

The overarching, long-term questions that drive my academic interests are: What are the texts that African Americans enjoy outside of school and how do these books speak to them and what they know? How can teachers use these insights about intersections (student-teacher, home-school, and societal-community) to create literacy instruction that improves academic achievement for African American students? Although my study helps me make progress toward answers to these larger questions, in this case, I centered my study on the following questions regarding the reading practices in the Walker family of women:

1. What do the women in an all-female African American family read? Why do they read?

2. How are these African American women's self-perceptions/identities related to their family's reading practices?

3. How do the women in an all-female African American family engage and talk to one another about books as readers, individuals, and as a family?

4. How are the intertextual links they use during their talk socially constructed as they interact and react to one another?

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural approach to literacy and language

In my work, I argue for the importance of understanding why adolescents prefer non-school sanctioned books and how such books are related to their lives and experiences outside of school. The theoretical tenets that ground this study are the following: Literacy is socially situated, literacy is embedded within identity and cultural models, language and literacy practices are socially constructed, and reading practices are intertextual. These tenets guide my research questions.

Literacy is socially situated

Current sociocultural theorists focus on the notion that literacy and language are not neutral, universal practices, but are embedded in particular social contexts that create particular reading and writing practices (Street, 1984; Gee, 1996). Specifically, this approach to literacy defines literacy "as a shorthand for the social practices and concepts of reading and writing" (Street, p. 1). Therefore, according to Street (1984), sociocultural theorists stress the following:

> …the significance of the socialisation process in the construction of the
> meaning of literacy for participants and…therefore [are] concerned with the

general social institutions through which this process takes place and not just the explicit "educational" ones. (Street, p. 2)

This suggests that researchers using a sociocultural framework must look beyond traditional notions of reading and writing to see literacy as a set of practices within a specific historically, socially, and culturally situated settings that occur beyond the classroom and include places like the home, social/peer groups, and other settings outside the institution of education. I use this theoretical tenet to question why some people are attracted to some books rather than others. In this case, the specific literacy practice I chose to focus on was reading. In doing so, I ask the following research question:

What do the women in an all-female African American family read? Why do they read?

In these questions, I ask to what degree are their reading preferences related to the fact that they are women/girls, African American, living in a small Midwestern, predominantly White community, having relocated from a larger urban center. I also consider the combination of all of those factors. If literacy is a product of socialization, what are some of the factors that have led *these* women *in this family* to choose to read Urban Literature? Basing his point on the work of Scribner and Cole (1981), Gee (1996) states, "what matters is not literacy as some decontextualized ability to write and read, but the social practices into which people are apprenticed as part of a social group" (p. 57). Therefore, by focusing on reading as *the* literacy practice under investigation, I sought to understand more clearly how the Walkers' reading of Urban Literature serves a social function (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994) within their sociocultural world and experiences.

Literacy is embedded within identity and cultural models

As stated previously, reading and writing are embedded in a larger set of social practices and processes. I turn to theories of identity and cultural models to ground my approach to understanding the Walkers' reading practices and responses. In doing so, I want to emphasize that the notion of identity is one that is fluid and changing rather than static. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) explicate the notion that identity is situated. Specifically, they state the following:

> Persons develop more or less conscious conceptions of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds, and these senses of themselves, these identities…permit these persons,…at least a modicum of agency or control over their own behavior. (p. 40)

Identity, then, is not one unifying whole; rather it is negotiated within specific social and cultural situations and through specific activities. As such we form identities for different social situations. These identities are based on figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998), which are "socially produced, culturally constructed activities" (p. 40-41). An important note is that, "The identities we gain within figured worlds are thus specifically historical developments, grown through continued participation in the positions defined by social organization of those worlds' activity" (p. 41). This is to mean that we develop, maintain, and negotiate our positions within the activity and among the group in which we are engaged in activity.

Another way to further explicate and understand activity and participation is through "communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Communities of practice is an approach to learning, participation, and membership as it relates to power and authority. These aspects of participation in a community of practice are all situated within

the social and cultural factors that play a role in the process of being a member of a particular community of practice. As Lave and Wenger (1991) state the following:

> We assume that members [of a community] have different interests, make diverse contributions to activity, and hold varied viewpoints. In our view, participation at multiple levels is entailed in membership in a *community of practice*…[The term community] does imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities. (p. 98)

As this quote demonstrates, essentially, the root of communities of practice lies within the idea that learning itself is situated, meaning that learning happens at the intersection of a specific time and space within a social context. The process of learning becomes multidimensional and is shaped primarily by the ways people negotiate and wrestle with making meaning as they come to conceptualize and *experience* the activity at hand.

Therefore in considering the figured worlds the Walker women participate in constructing, negotiating, and continuing, it is important to understand how these figured worlds are embedded within their community of practice, which is historically, socially, and culturally situated. In addition, as African American women who engage in reading Urban Literature texts, it is important to understand how their figured worlds and communities of practice constitute the ways in which they develop and share cultural models which they draw upon to interpret the Urban Literature texts they choose to read.

Gee (1996) defines cultural models as "pictures of simplified worlds in which prototypical events unfold" (p.78). Stated another way, these are the elements that shape our response to, and inform our views of the world in which we live. Gee (1996) argues that our cultural models are not static; they differ across and within cultural groups and change through time. This has relevance in literacy studies because it helps sociocultural theorists understand how different people engage in and respond to literacy practices and

processes according to their unconscious normative notions of what is acceptable or valuable in the social groups in which they are embedded.

In building an understanding of how the Walkers' reading choices are related to their figured worlds and the communities of practice, I ask the following research question:

How are these African American women's self-perceptions/identities related to their family's reading practices?

The Walker women form a community of practice as a family unit, and as a group of women who often share the same activity of reading Urban Literature books which they share among themselves. As such, I was specifically interested in the ways in which the Walker women's interest in Urban Literature was a means of negotiating and wrestling with their identities as residents of Iowa and products of inner-city Chicago. Regarding their literacy practices, understanding their identities helps to inform my understanding of the multiple ways the Walker women's literacy practices are situated, and mutually shared and constructed, within their talk.

Gee (1996) argues, "There is no knowing a language without knowing the cultural models that constitute the meaning of that language for *some* cultural group" (p. 89). In the case of this study, the Walkers' language regarding their reading brings together the elements of the socially constructed nature of literacy and illuminates the ways literacy is embedded within identity and cultural models.

Language about literacy practices is socially constructed

> Gee attributes the following statements to Wieder and Pratt 1990a, 1990b:

> …each and every language is composed of many sub-languages, which I will call social languages. Social languages stem from the fact that any time we act or speak, we must accomplish two things: we must make clear who we are, and we must make clear what we are doing. (as cited in Gee, 1996, p.66)

Accordingly, social languages recognize and express differing identities that are never static but are fluid, changing and shaping to the context and situation.

> Bakhtin (Morris, 1994) originated the notion of heteroglossia, which describes the following phenomena:

> …language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language…but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (p. 77)

Each speech act is a product of both another's word or voice as well as our own. Our intentions, accents, and semantics are "ideologically saturated…which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization" (Morris, 1994, p. 74-75). Thus language itself is socially situated within a social, political, and cultural context that continuously shape it. As Gee (1996) states,

> In fact, even what looks like a uniform social language…is very often a compendium of different social languages with different historical, social, cultural, and political sources, and looks to us now to be uniform only because the working of multiple social languages have been forgotten and effaced. (p. 70)

Understanding and studying the social languages of individuals and groups is important in order to understand the subtleties in which people make meaning and how that meaning shapes thought. For sociocultural theorists, this results in the understanding that

language and literacy practices are constructed within particular social and cultural contexts which impact the ways people read, write, use language, and respond to institutional practices like those of the school. This has particular significance when considering *how* people *talk* about such things as literature. Therefore, my third research question is:

> **How do the women in an all-female African American family engage and talk to one another about books as readers, individuals, and as a family?**

How does the language the Walkers use and the meanings they make as they talk with one another related to who they are? In their "classroom-based 'action research'" (p. 9) study of British teenagers, Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) intended to substantiate their students' "existing cultural practices and identifications, which…necessarily include[d] the diverse ways in which they use[d] and interpret[ed] commercial media" (p. 8). They state,

> In our account thus far, we have attempted to define reading as an inherently *social* process. This has two main dimensions. Firstly, it involves a recognition that the "meaning" of a text is not established by the reader in isolation. On the contrary, meanings are defined in and through social interaction, and particularly through talk…What we "think" about texts and how we use them in our daily lives depend to a great extent on how we talk about them with others, and on the contexts in which we do so. Reading is thus inevitably a process of *dialogue* (p. 29).

Therefore, in this study I explore the social languages the Walkers use in their talk about reading Urban Literature. I seek to explicitly show, through analyzing the structure and content of their talk, how the Walkers used language to make and negotiate the meanings of the text they read.

Reading practices are intertextual

In much the same way that language is connected to others' utterances, so too is an interpreting texts. Intertextuality is a means to explore the complexity of the Walkers' Urban Literature-related *dialogue*.

The term intertextuality first appeared when Julia Kristeva (1980 [1967]) used it to "describ[e] intertextuality in metaphorical terms: 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (as cited in Gordon, 2009, p. 7-8). In my analysis of the Walkers' discussion of *Rage Times Fury* (2004), I found that much of their overlapping talk interconnected in many ways, creating a mosaic of understanding and shared meaning. This explanation also connects the socially situatedness of *what* and *why* as the Walkers read Urban Literature. Reading in the Walker household was largely a collaborative activity based on their figured worlds supported through their cultural models.

As a result, I turned to David Bloome and Ann Egan-Robertson (1993) to more precisely understand *how* the Walkers produced intertextual links and understandings in their *dialogue* regarding an Urban Literature book. Bloome and Egan-Robertson's (1993) notion of intertextuality is grounded within literary studies, social semiotic perspectives, and educational studies of reading and writing.

In their work, Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) examine the ways that intertextuality is used in literary studies, social semiotic studies and in educational studies. According to Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993), literary studies focus on intertextuality as residing meaning within the text itself and/or on the connections readers make "between one or more aspects of the text and other literary text" (p. 306). They

found this approach to intertextuality to be limited because "the argument often seems to slip between what readers *do* and what readers *should do*" (p. 306). In social semiotic perspectives, "intertextuality is seen as a resource which is inherent in language for making meaning, and which has interpersonal, ideational, and textual functions" (p. 306). In other words, in social semiotics focuses particular attention to the language people use. It extends intertextuality to include interdiscursivity, which "refers both to assumed connections among various discourses…and to connections created across discourses not conventionally assumed" (p. 307). Thus, the emphasis of the analysis is in the language *itself*, not the text or the people who are participating in such studies.

Buckingham and Sefton-Green's (1994) focus on the social, interactive nature of reading and its inherent dependence on dialogue helps to shed light on Bloome and Egan-Robertons's (1993) viewpoint of intertextuality. They state the following:

> We view intertextuality as a social construction, located in the social interactions that people have with each other.…A juxtaposition must be proposed, be interactionally recognized, be acknowledged, and have social significance.…Our view of intertextuality is grounded in a broader view of social interaction as a linguistic process. People act and react to each other, and they do so primarily through language. Intertextuality describes one of the social (and cultural) processes involved in how people act and react to one another. (p. 308)

Using this framework, intertextuality offers a way to pay primary attention to the social interactions that the Walker women had with one another as a necessary part of their negotiated meaning-making process. In addition, this framework helped me to better understand that intertextuality happens at many levels and dimensions that constantly inform and build from one another. With this theoretical understanding I ask the fourth and final research question:

How are the intertextual links they use during their talk socially constructed as they interact and react to one another?

Organization of Dissertation

The following chapters provide a portrait of why the Walkers avidly read Urban Literature and how they read these texts and engage with one another. Chapter Two provides a review of findings from ethnographic and qualitative research literature that contribute to understanding how identity is connected to the literacy practices in which readers engage. Chapter Three discusses the methods used to gather, code, and analyze the data used in this study. Chapter Four explores the social functions of the Walkers' reading of Urban Literature, providing a detailed description of the genre itself and four prominent social functions for why they read it. I joined the family to talk about *Rage Times Fury* (Gentles, 2004), and in Chapter Five, I describe the ways this family reads and talks about Urban Literature through analyzing one portion of their discussion for dimensions of intertextuality and intertextual links they make throughout the discussion segment. Though not a complete portraiture of Urban Literature readers or the Walker family, as I explain in Chapter Six, these findings do hold significant implications for how literacy educators might create spaces for students to demonstrate their literacy practices on their own terms.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of literacy education, this study of the Walker women and their reading stands on a foundation of research in literacy outside of school, family literacy, and identity as related to reading. The Walkers are an African American low-income family of women consisting of five teenage sisters and their mother, who all live within the same household. I organized the review of literature according to how studies pertain to: (a) adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices, with a focus on family literacies and hip-hop/urban literacies; (b) identity (in general) as it relates to literacy engagement, as well as specific explorations of the influences of gender, race, and family in the selection, engagement, and interactions with texts; and (c) the role intertextuality plays in the social engagement that occurs when readers talk. I limited the review to literature that utilize ethnographic and other qualitative methodologies. The literature review demonstrates a gap in empirical study about the dynamics regarding African American girls' and women's identities and the choices they make about reading, and how they talk about what they read. Research is particularly absent about students who live outside of large cities and attend non-urban schools.

Out-of-School Literacies

Many studies of adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices demonstrate the disconnect between the literacy practices students choose to participate in and enact and those most valued in the classroom (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Heath 2001, Schultz & Hull 2002, Mahiri 2004, Morrell, 2008). This is particularly true for children

and adolescents who are defined in formal educational settings as underperforming, urban, and/or minority students. Historically, these studies are rooted in an approach that searches for ways to build bridges, make connections, and otherwise link children's and adolescents' out-of-school literacy practices with school-sanctioned texts and practices (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Heath 2001, Schultz & Hull 2002, Mahiri 2004, Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Smith & Whitmore, 2006; Lee, 2007; Morrell, 2008). Such studies offer glimpses into the lives of children and adolescents outside of school and demonstrate the power and importance that such non-school-sanctioned "reading" and "writing" practices play in social construction and identity negotiation for young people.

For example, British researchers Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994), working within the theoretical frame of cultural studies, conducted a school-based study of ethnically mixed students (Black Afro-Caribbean, Greek and Turkish Cypriots and White British with two small groups of Asian and Chinese students). They studied the students' consumption and production of popular culture, with a particular interest in media. Specifically, they considered "students' uses of a wide range of media, including television, films on video, popular fiction, newspapers, magazines, popular music, and computer games" (p. 18) outside of school because they felt that the "competencies and understandings that children are developing in their encounters with media texts, largely *outside* of school, are both valid and important…" (p. 5). Part of their aim was to document and understand how participating students used popular media as part of a process of establishing and renegotiating their individual and social group identities (i.e. as Black or White, male or female) and how "through such processes…'readings'

becomes 'culture'" (p. 30). Based on observations, small-group and individual interviews, surveys and students' own "productions" of popular culture, Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) were able to demonstrate that students read these texts as a means of constructing and negotiating social relationships and found that establishing and maintaining membership within particular social groups is a complicated process of negotiation. This suggests that young people engage in particular texts for particular purposes. As Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) state, young people's literacy practices reflect the "symbolic resources which [they] use in making sense of their experiences, in relating to others in organizing their daily lives" (p.10).

Similarly, *Schools Out!: Bridging Out-of-School Literacies with Classroom Practice* (Hull & Schultz, 2002) is a compilation of studies by educational researchers, sociolinguists, classroom teachers, and community activists. Together, these studies indicate moments and places when home and school literacy practice that are traditionally divided actually complement one another. Using school-, home- and community-based contexts, this body of research demonstrates the rich variety and depth of literacy practices that both children and adults engage in to "cross boundaries between school and non-school understandings of literacies" (p. 6).

In that vein, Jabari Mahiri (2004) explored young Black students' (four high school students and one young graduate student who presented writings from his undergraduate experience) writing practices and found that students' uses of out-of-school writing provided social spaces for them to critique and address the inequities they experienced, particularly through the use of what Mahiri refers to as "street scripts." Mahiri uses this term to conceptualize the writing practices of the five student mini-case

studies in order to acknowledge the "themes and images [that] resound with authentic youth perceptions and experiences being young, urban, and, black…[and] to really hear their voices, we have to tune into the actual mediums and contexts that they appropriate for expression" (p.19). In doing so, Mahiri finds that "Reggie's hip-hop documentary, Geoff's video essay, Troy's rap, Keisha's screen play, and Jay's poems" (p. 24) appropriate the form, features, and content of hip-hop music and culture to view and reflect on their own lives as adolescents, when they are more often portrayed as "the dangerous Other" (p. 23). Mahiri's research reveals how rap and hip hop are intricately intertwined in the lives of these adolescents as they "expose the contradictions in the ways they are depicted by politics, the media, and other societal institutions" (p. 22), while using forms of hip-hop culture and rap as *the* form and function to represent their views of themselves and their social worlds.

Amanda Thein (2009) also sought to understand the connection between students' out-of-school literacies and classroom learning. In a case study, Thein (2009) documented how a White high school student, Molly, responded to school-sanctioned texts through the lens of her out-of-school literacies; describing how Molly's out-of-school reading centered around "'confessional' (Greer, 2004) popular fiction and nonfiction that divulges the true stories (or seemingly true stories) of people struggling with unpredictable and uncontrollable difficulties in their lives" (p. 294). Since what Molly chose to read outside of school aligned with Molly's cultural models, defined as "more or less conscious conceptions of themselves as actors in socially and culturally constructed worlds" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 40), Molly relied upon her cultural models to judge and assess the worth of books assigned to her in class.

Research about adolescents' reading outside of school provided the impetus for my investigation of the Walkers' literacy practices. I wanted to understand the "symbolic resources which young people use in making sense of their experiences, in relating to others in organizing their daily lives" (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994, p.10). Specifically, I was interested in how the Walkers' reading practices demonstrated the intersection between their textual choices and their lived experiences.

Family Literacies

Since the 1980s, when three key studies were published (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; & Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988), a vast amount of research has analyzed literacy practices in families (Rogers, 2003; Compton-Lilly, 2003 and 2007; among many). As a precursor to contemporary family and community literacies research, Heath's (1983) ethnographic work in the Carolina Piedmonts documented the social situatedness of literacy development within family and community contexts. Heath demonstrated that children come to school with particular "ways with words" (Heath, 1983) that they learn first within the home and then use as a cultural model for subsequent literacy development. Specifically, her work demonstrated that both class and racial differences affected the ways in which children developed different orientations toward reading and writing within the home. Heath found that the middle-class oriented teachers (the Townspeople) evaluated and interacted with the children of Roadville and Trackton based on their own sociocultural backgrounds, thereby strongly negatively affecting the likelihood of the children's academic success.

Using similar "naturalistic methods" to observe children's use of literacy within the home, Taylor and Doresey-Gaines (1988) studied four African American families

living on the Shay Avenue, an inner-city neighborhood. Building on Heath's (1983) and Taylor's (1983) work, Taylor and Doresey-Gaines' (1988) study demonstrated that literacy learning was intertwined with young children's growing understandings and constructions of family and place. This was evidenced in the children's multiple drawings of home and family throughout the study that changed as children grew older and became more influenced by others and experiences at school. Young children within these families grew up "with literacy (drawing, writing, and reading) as an integral part of their personal, familial, and social histories" (p.98). In addition, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines closely studied the Shay Avenue families' literacy to document a "plurality of literacy configurations that are a part of their everyday life" (p. 190). Both of these studies point to the constant presence of literacy within the home of African American families, as well as how literacy is infused in the social and familial relationship between children, their parents, and extended to friends and family outside the home. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) point out it is stereotypical to believe that these poor Black families grew up in home environments devoid of rich literacy experiences, and their studies demonstrate otherwise.

Extending from this notion, Compton-Lilly (2003, 2007) emphasizes the need to look for and rely upon students' strengths, whatever they may be, in order to create bridges and alternative means for students to experience success within the classroom with a particular focus on reading. Compton-Lilly states repeatedly that reading and reading practices are not as simple as decoding words; rather, reading involves a complex process which is embedded in those social, historical, and cultural experiences and environments from which students come. Compton-Lilly's longitudinal ethnographic

study (2003, 2007) relied upon data collected from urban families of differing backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations to demonstrate the ways children and their families negotiate and work with the schools to obtain an education for their children.

In terms of reading practices, Compton-Lilly highlights students' different interactions with reading, from reading in the cafeteria to trading books with friends. She underscores the point that meaningful reading practices are not contained or supported in the classroom environment alone. Rather, children often seek alternative means to engage in literacy practices on their own, and experience more rewards and opportunities to feel successful outside of the classroom. Essentially, as Compton-Lilly states, students' identities are not static; they are affected by a variety of factors, which are demonstrated in a variety of activities and practices. In *Re-Reading Families,* Compton-Lilly uses Bourdieu's (1986) notion of social capital as a means of understanding how "the different types of reading capital" (p. 107) are related to how children develop and employ reading practices, which are not narrowly focused on the mechanics of reading, but instead related to the role students and their teachers identities and their social positions lead to their reading successes and failures. Specifically, Compton-Lilly calls attention to "social reading capital" (p. 94) gained through engaging in reading practices that recognize and access different social relationships as a means of connecting oneself with others within his or her social group. In fact, she states, "Children's success and failure with reading involve the figured worlds of teachers and parents. These figured worlds highlight particular ways of being and particular types of knowing as significant criteria for the success" (p. 108).

A more recent study by Amy Suzanne Johnson (2010) adds another dimension to family literacies research through the exploration of the intergenerational nature of literacy within the family unit. Studying the literacy practices of a African American family living in the Black Belt region of the United States, through the use of a life history method of in-depth interviews, Johnson argues that the Jones' established a "culture of literacy" within their family that existed cross-generationally. Within this research, Johnson (2010) focused on "eight distinct uses of literacy…: interactional, news-related, environmental, financial, spiritual, recreational, and educational" (p. 35) in order to situate it "within a family culture of practice" (p. 42). She concludes that understanding literacy in these ways helps her and other teachers to understand the skills and practices that students like KiKi (the focal child within the study) bring to school with her each day in order to better understand the ways in which they approach literacy and education.

Across all of the findings in these family literacy studies is the documentation that reading is more than a mechanical process of making sense of words from a page. Rather, reading, like all forms of literacy, is a socially embedded practice of making meaning based on children and adolescents' figured worlds and social positionings, which are often established within their family unit.

Hip-Hop/Urban Literacies

Hip-hop or urban literacies is a topic for a growing body of research that extends understanding about how situated reading is within specific communities. My review of the literature reveals a current focus on "urban street fiction" (Marshall, Staples, & Gibson, 2009, p. 29), often referred to as street lit, hip-hop lit, ghetto fiction and hip-hop

fiction. This is a reemerging genre of fiction that depicts the lives of Black people, often in large cities. Hip-hop research is still young in its development. As such, much of this literature is still conceptual in nature, not based on ethnographic research as much as reviews of the literature and conclusions drawn from those reviews.

Contemporary urban street fiction, which is often written by women, represents an "important site of struggle" (Marshall, Staples & Gibson, 2009, p. 29) where adolescent girls explore and negotiate their femininity and gendered performances. Like romance novels for White, and often more affluent girls, Urban Literature presents a means for young Black females to learn about and begin to negotiate their relationships with boys and other girls. In addition, these texts offer a kind of "hush harbor" (Kynard, 2010) representing "African American sites of resistance that functioned as 'hidey' spaces for multiple literacies that were officially banned via institutional and state structures…" (p. 33). As Gibson (2010) and Hill (2011) point out, Urban Literature provides a counterpublic space, which Nancy Frasier describes as "'[p]arallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscources to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs'" (as cited in Hill, 2011, p. 41), where readers can explore, confront, and debate issues of femininity and race that might otherwise remain absent.

Vanessa Morris, Sandra Hughes-Hassell, Denise Agosto and Darren Cottman (2006) conducted an ethnographic study of a volunteer book club formed through a public library. An average of twelve girls and two boys, aged 12 through 17, participated for sixteen weeks. The researchers learned that many of the participants knew people whose real lives mirrored those of the characters within the books they read. In addition,

they were attracted to such books because the depiction of street life "accurately reflect[ed] the violence, fear, and desperation prevalent in their inner-city neighborhoods" (p. 21). Given the freedom to select their own themes to discuss from week to week, many chose violence, hustling, rape, negative images of women, and negative images of the community as issues to discuss during their book discussions. More than this, Morris et al. (2006) point out, participants took morals from the events and situations the characters found themselves in as cautionary tales of what not to do. Lastly, they found as the weeks progressed, that teens wanted to move beyond the Urban Literature to mainstream young adult urban titles. Essentially, Morris et al. (2006) conclude that Urban Literature was empowering to these teens because it is a genre "that includes characters who look like them, talk like them, and live in neighborhoods similar to their own" (p. 22).

Likewise, Megan Sweeney's (2010) study of women's reading practices in prison showed that Urban Literature was particularly popular among "young, lower-class women, but it also gained popularity among some white women and middle-class black women" (p. 141). Within the walls of the prison, Sweeney found that Urban Literature was often banned by prison officials because they felt it reinforced the lifestyles and behaviors responsible for the women's incarcerations. The participating women found ways to circumvent the rules by having family members send books and covering books with jackets as to not arouse suspicion. Much like the teens in the book group documented by Morris et al. (2006), the women in this study identified with the "familiar characters, scenes, fashion trends, and speech patterns" (p. 149) within the books which helped them to feel connected to their neighborhoods and families on the outside. In

addition, she documents the sophistication with which the women read themselves into the narratives as a means of coming to understand their own choices and life experiences, thus "gain[ing] greater self-awareness, learn[ing] from the characters' mistakes, increas[ing] their sense of agency and even develop[ing] empathy for others" (p. 171).

In a conceptual article about urban fiction, Simone Gibson (2010) states "that further study is merited that considers how readers understand and apply messages from the text…that may influence their conceptions of self and others" (p. 572). Gibson (2010) describes studies about Urban Literature reading as potentially providing a doorway into the lives of African American girls, in order to "investigate the significance of the texts that are capturing the reading interests" (p. 572) where research has typically been scant.

Identity and Literacy

Much is written regarding identity formation (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001; Gee, 2004) that argues for the acknowledgement of the social nature of individual identity development, which can not happen absent of a social context. Within empirical educational research, identity development/construction is looked at as a complex, dynamic process within specific social environments. Literacy plays a role in this development as a means of adolescents coming to find a place or play a role in a larger social context.

One example of this is Elizabeth Moje's (2000) long-term qualitative examination of five gang-connected youth who seem to use literacy as a means to "claim a space, construct an identity, and take a social position in their worlds" (p. 655). Using cultural theory, Moje found that rather than using literacy as a site of resistance, these gang-related adolescents used literacy as a means of making sense and taking power in their

world (p. 654). Specifically, Moje (2000) found that they engaged in gang literacies such as tagging, graffiti writing, hand signs, and dress and color codes as well as poetry, narrative, journal writing, letter writing, and novel reading. She found that each of the different literacy practices served to establish connections, maintain, and advance memberships with others in their peer (gang affiliation) group, and make sense of their lives. In the examples of poems, tagging, letters and notes, the participants use various literacy practices to construct themselves as gang members, and to position and identify themselves, "The gang practices…allowed them to construct identities in relation to a group, to become part of a larger, unfolding story" (p. 680). As youth from marginalized and disenfranchised homes and neighborhoods, they used various literacy practices to both create and enact the "gang" identity.

As an extension of Moje's research, more recent work by Debbie Smith and Kathryn Whitmore (2006) points to the notion that literacy constructs identity as well as being a marker of identity. In their ethnographic study of four Mexican-American males, Smith and Whitmore (2006) state that the boys' literacies and identities are nested in the four communities in which the boys participate: family, gang, school and the juvenile court. Viewing these communities as communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Smith and Whitmore (2006) find that Lil Boy Blue's, Smurf's, Juice's, and Lil Garfield's community of practice memberships (whether full or partial, legitimate or peripheral) are dependent upon each community's use of literacy to include or exclude them. Specifically, within the school and juvenile court system, much like the gang-affiliated youth in Moje's (2000) study, the boys found themselves silenced and often positioned as failures. Within school, the literacy practices often erased the boys' identities as readers

and writers in favor of school-sanctioned "academic" literacies that did little to connect to their lives or their literacy practices outside of school. In addition, as they became more and more positioned and labeled as "bad kids," they began *not learning* (Kohl, 1995). As such, they became increasingly marginalized so that "[l]iteracy was part of what was done to them" (p. 180). In stark contrast, these boys came from literate homes where literacy learning was part of their everyday lives. According to Smith and Whitmore (2006), within their homes,

> …the boys were steeped in purposeful literacy events…in which they fully participated, without fear of evaluation, to communicate, to play and to learn…Literacy contributed naturally and easily to the identity of belonging in the Family Community. (p. 179)

Much like Moje's (2000) study, Smith and Whitmore's (2006) study points to literacy as a source of identity construction and identification as participants within communities seek to legitimize their belonging within specific communities of practice. In both cases, the communities in which these youth find the strongest and fullest access are those within the gang and their families rather than those within the school.

It is important to point out that identity is never fixed. Identity is fluid in that it changes and ebbs and flows as people have various experiences; however, as Stanton Wortham's (2004) ethnographic case study of one student within a classroom setting demonstrates, when messages from the social group, institution and traditions are consistent, identities can "thicken." Specifically Wortham stated,

> When an individual comes consistently to be identified in one way, in an institutional context that also solidifies as individuals get identified, Holland and Lave (2001) describe it as the 'thickening' of identity.…Stable individual identities emerge when various actors draw on multiple resources to establish an emergent, provisionally stable identity in a given context…. (p. 165)

In Wortham's (2004) study, he followed the identity thickening of a ninth-grade African American female student. Wortham (2004) defines positioning as an important element of identity thickening. His definition of positioning is "as an event of identification, in which a recognizable category of identity gets implicitly applied to an individual in an event that takes place across seconds, minutes, or hours" (p. 166). In other words, an individual's identity thickens as he or she is repeatedly recognized and positioned as a "kind of person" (Wortham, 2004, p. 166), e.g., as in the case of gender and race. These become important, and "psychological and sociocultural stability" (Wortham, 2004, p. 166) relies upon stable, thickened identities.

The focal student of Wortham's study, Tyisha, was a student in a ninth-grade English classroom where the teachers closely followed the Great Books Foundation recommendations for establishing and promoting "genuine questions" during a classroom discussion structured as a "seminar" (p. 171). Initially Tyisha's interactions were responded to positively as she was recognized and positioned as expressing her opinion and jokes as "normal or a good student" (p. 173). However, as the school year progressed and other students began offering arguments and interpretations based on evidence, Tyisha's comments became increasingly more recognized and positioned as opinions and disruptions. Students participated in this process, further solidifying Tyisha's "social outcast" (p. 185) identity, which Tyisha at times herself embraced and seemed to go out of her way to perform. In the end, Wortham concludes that "The thickening of identity happens across a trajectory of events as certain categories of identity come to identify as individual" (p. 185). This is an important consideration when examining particular identity-related literacy practices by girls/women and African Americans.

Gendered Literacies

In addition to this focus on the broader contexts of literacy and identity, many researchers have focused on specific social groups (i.e. socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic background, geography—suburban, urban, rural, etc.) and even more specifically on gender groups. In this section, I describe a few of the many contemporary studies that have explored the reading and writing lives of adolescent girls. It must be emphasized that the studies cited here speak specifically to aspects of my own research.

Margaret Finder's (1997) *Just Girls* is an ethnographic study of two female social groups, the "social queens" and the "tough cookies," who used literacy as a powerful means of identification within their social group, to represent themselves in different ways and to try on and measure their own development into adult roles. Finders makes clear that these girls participate in two different sets of literacy practices: sanctioned— those practices in which adults circulate and approve—and unsanctioned—those practices that work to disrupt the sanctioned literacies and the official point of view. Finders (1997) refers to the latter group of practices as the "literate underlife" (p. 24), which she states "provides an opportunity for the girls to refute official expectations and negotiate social roles within other powerful circles" (p. 26). It is important to note that Finders' work stands on the shoulders of other researchers who have examined the literacy practices of both women and girls. Both Meredith Cherland's (1994) *Private Practices: Girls Reading Fiction and Constructing Identity* and Linda Christian-Smith's (1990), *Becoming a Woman Through Romance* demonstrate that girls' and women's literacy practices are extensions of identity development and performance. Specifically, they show the negotiation and development of female gender roles that girls and women

explore and identify within their "literate underlife" (Finders, 1997). My work draws on the perspectives gained from these researchers, which helped me to view and come to understand how the girls' "literate underlives" demonstrate similar negotiations of social relationships as African American women living in a predominantly White community.

As attention has recently turned to the underperformance of males, particularly in literacy development and achievement, recent research continues to call for a specific focus on girls' literacy practices and achievement due to the continuation of gendered practices that disadvantage girls when considering skills needed beyond school. Kathy Sanford (2006) conducted a qualitative study of six boys and six girls in a suburban middle school. First and foremost she noted the ways in which the literature and teachers themselves continue to rely upon "gendered perspectives" as a basis for setting their expectations and interactions with students. Sanford (2006) argues that this has an effect not only on the "developing self-identity but also the expectations placed on them and their opportunities to engage in various literacy activities" (p. 303) and that these expectations continue to shape and define what students engage in outside of school. She argues that although girls do gain skills and competence in school-based literacies, they continue to fall behind in digital literacies. Bronwyn Williams' (2007) conceptual work regarding girls' digital literacy practices echoes this point. Sanford (2006) concludes that "adolescent girls tend to focus their online literacy practices on building and sustaining social relationships" rather than the more action-oriented, role play and skills with "alternative digital literacies" (p. 305). Both conclude that more must be done to help both boys and girls become more critically aware of how cultural constructions of gender

and gendered expectations of their literacy choices and practices and so they can begin to form their own critiques as well.

In this way, Thein's (2009) work helps to make clear connections between the messages girls receive about being girls and the kinds of out-of-school reading practices they engage in as part of their cultural models. In an ethnographic, qualitative case study, Thein (2009) found that a working-class White girl named Molly chose texts that aligned with her cultural models. Specifically, she "chose texts that were highly character driven, focusing on the struggles of individuals…" (p. 287-288). Thein goes on to state the following:

> Molly favored "confessional" (Greer, 2004) popular fiction and nonfiction that divulges the true stories (or seemingly true stories) of people struggling with unpredictable and uncontrollable difficulties in their lives….These texts have moral messages; they are intended to encourage readers to respond affectively and personally to intimate narrators, and to sympathize with and learn from the experiences of those narrators. (p. 294)

As previously cited recent research on gender suggests, Molly's preferences are aligned with cultural models of femininity and fit within the social relationship-based literacy practices that girls are expected and encouraged to engage in within the dominant culture. Much like Sanford (2006) and Williams (2007), Thein (2009) suggests that we "teach students to understand their own lived worlds as ideological, social and cultural spaces that are laden with cultural [gendered] models as opposed to universal norms and beliefs" (p. 306).

African American Literacies

Much of the research reviewed to this point has already considered the significant and growing research documenting African American children and adolescents' out-of-

school literacies (Heath 1983; Mahiri 2004; Morrell, 2008); African American family literacies (Taylor, 1983; & Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Rogers, 2003; Compton-Lilly, 2003 and 2007; Johnson, 2010); and hip-hop/urban literacies (Morris, Hughes-Hassell, Agosto & Cottman, 2006; Marshall, Staples, & Gibson, 2009). Therefore, rather than revisiting these previously mentioned studies, this section provides a more historical and social context for African American literacies than what has been established so far within this review.

In much the same way that Alfred Tatum (2009) calls upon the history of literary societies to demonstrate the collaborative nature of African American boys' reading practices, Elizabeth McHenry's (2003) study of the literary societies and reading practices of African Americans between 1830 and 1940 emphasizes a lack of focus on African Americans' reading practices during this period of time. Specifically, McHenry (2003) argues that much of what is known about African American literacy practices and literary production is shrouded in the focus on Black *illiteracy*, which has worked to mask African American "literacy interaction" (p. 5). While it was true prior to the end of the Civil War that African American literacy was banned in every southern state except Tennessee, it is well documented through slave narratives that Black Americans possessed a thirst for knowledge and literacy (McHenry, 2003). McHenry (2003) claims that one of the primary reasons for the lack of focus on antebellum Northern and Southern literacy practices and literary productions is due to attention to illiteracy. Another reason comes from the competing attention paid to the oral nature of African American communities, which is further complicated by intense focus on the southern and fugitive slaves. Rather, McHenry's (2003) work focuses on the literary societies of

the 1830s and 1940s that supported and encouraged not only reading but writing as well. One outlet for such literary productions was Black newspapers which printed and disseminated poetry, autobiographies, histories, and appeals; in addition, during the same time, religious presses and self-publishing produced literary productions for and by African Americans. McHenry (2003) states that the lack of focus on African American literacies is in part based on this historical, social, and cultural understanding of literacy, literacy practices and reading practices.

McHenry (2003) points to the growing field of the History of the Book as a theoretical and epistemological space "receptive to uncovering the many diverse communities of readers that have simultaneously existed and exposing the contexts of the actual reading practices of particular groups at particular times" (p. 8-9). She makes the point that reading as we have come to understand it is bound by our own social, cultural and historical understanding of what reading is *today*, but that such research and focus can better uncover how African Americans, in particular, have participated in not only the consumption of literacy but also its production. As a means of recapturing the "forgotten readers," McHenry (2003) looks to African American literary societies because of the following:

> …[they] have historically been crucial to uniting black communities, illustrating the importance of collective endeavor, providing a network of support for African American intellectuals, playing a constitutive role in the formation of American literature, and influencing the development of a black public sphere. (p. 297)

Though historical in nature, in the close of her study, McHenry updates readers on the continuing role of reading groups. Citing the rise and popularity of Terry McMillian's *Waiting to Exhale* (1992), McHenry argues that prior to her novel, "commercial publishers have traditionally assumed that blacks don't read and that they don't buy

books" (p. 298). Indeed, had McMillian relied on the traditional marketing provided and encouraged by commercial publishers, her success may not have happened. McHenry (2003) emphasizes that McMillian knew and understood her audience and that they were "hungry to see their own creativity, aspirations, and experiences reflected in literature" (p. 298). Therefore using informal networks, McMillian began a letter writing and book reading campaign targeting Black bookstores, church meeting halls, African American neighborhood centers, Black sororities, adult education programs, colleges, and jazz clubs (McHenry, 2003). As a group traditionally overlooked by booksellers and publishers, there was overwhelming support for her work. According to McHenry (2003), though not the same as their historical literary societies, such communities continue and in fact have grown in the form of reading groups. Although Black women "have been the most active in forming single-sex book groups" (p. 302), McHenry (2003) points to book groups for men, coed groups, singles, couples, mothers and daughters, and—to a lesser degree—parent book groups that encourage reading amongst boys. Membership within Black book groups continues to be dominated by Black women where "the impact of black women's association with a reading group is usually felt on both an intellectual and an emotional or spiritual level" (p. 303).

Similarly, Marc Lamant Hill's (2011) ethnographic study of Rasul's, a Black bookstore in West Philadelphia, reveals that just as literary societies continue to flourish and provide important intellectual, spiritual and emotional racial expression, Black bookstores form an important space for "counterpublic literacies" (Hill, 2011). According to Hill (2011), these include,

> …spaces in which written texts are central to the engagement of social practices
> that enable participants to challenge the authority of the state, develop

oppositional politics, reinterpret dominant social narratives, and counternarrate their own lived experience. (p. 40)

The importance of such places is that they provide space for books that otherwise are not accessible. Rasul's provided customers with access to texts from Black presses such as Third World Press and Africa World Press, both of which exclusively publish Black authors for Black readers. Hill (2011) quoted customer Sister Jamilah as stating, "The books here come from different people, different authors, different publishers. Therefore, when you come in here and read these books, you gonna have what? That's right, a different conversation" (p. 45). Therefore like Black reading groups, Black bookstores provide a place to find books that speak to the specific interests, needs, histories, and perspectives of African Americans in a way that mainstream bookstores and publishers continue to not address.

Hill (2011) selects Rashad, a young male who frequents the store, to illustrate that places such as Rasul's provide a space and access to texts that prompts readers to move beyond the bounded notion of reading as decoding or "technocratic" (p. 47) towards transforming their understanding and literacy development in order to inform "new individual and social identities" (p. 47). Moving from passive consumers to active and engaged readers "for whom the practice of reading was not merely individual enlightenment and pleasure, but the predicate for intellectual leadership and social change within the Black community" (p. 47), which was a response most prevalent among the male customers and readers who comprised Hill's (2003) focal participants. Hill concludes by emphasizing that such studies of everyday literacy practices enable researchers to "spotlight how some Black people continue to deploy literacy in ways that

defy the logic, aspirations, and expectations…" (p. 49) of dominant spaces and spheres of knowledge about literacy and literacy development.

The Role of Intertextuality

Deeply embedded in the sociocultural framework of literacy and educational studies, intertextuality is regarded as a tool as well as a conceptual framework for understanding how knowledge and identity are constructed and negotiated between participants of various literacy events. David Bloome and Ann Egan-Robertson's (1993) microanalysis of a first grade reading lesson reveals the following:

> …how teachers and students use intertextuality (a) to define themselves and each other as readers and students, (b) to form social groups, (c) to identify and validate previous events as sources of knowledge, and (d) to construct, maintain, and contest ideology of the simultaneous occurring teacher-class and peer-to-peer interaction. (p. 330)

Through a line-by-line analysis of a first-grade reading lesson, Bloom and Egan-Robertson (1993) demonstrate how interactional units among peers as well as among the teacher and students are deeply intertextual and serve as means of linking the "local event" (p. 331) to broader social, cultural, and political contexts. As such participants are constantly making and negotiating meanings within the local event juxtaposed against much larger contexts such as gender, race, ideology, and power (to name a few).

Recent research seeks to understand through intertextuality how participants display and maintain their social and cultural identities. Specifically, Duff (2001, 2002) examined intertextual links of pop culture and other textual references in Canadian high school classrooms with ESL students. In two instances, Duff found the many pop cultural intertextual references made by the teachers and mainstream students left already marginalized ESL students out of classroom discussions since they lacked the same

degree of "knowledge, social, and cultural identities" (Duff, 2002, p. 486) related to pop

culture as the teachers ad their peers. Even those students who had acquired sufficient

academic and conversational English to:

> …pass their tests and earn average to above average grades…struggled with aspects of [language and content] in [Grade 10 social studies] discourse and with their identities as competent and legitimate students, English speakers, and Canadian citizens…. (Duff, 2000, p. 122)

Therefore, much like the intertextual links made within the first-grade classroom (Bloom

& Egan-Robertson, 1993), Duff (2000, 2001) found that intertextuality played an

important role in establishing a discourse community that relied upon the larger racial (in

these cases, the ESL students were recent Asian immigrants) and sociopolitical context

with regards to language acquisition and power.

Lastly, Cynthia Gordon (2009) explores intertextuality in her qualitative case

study of three families with a particular focus on one family, "to investigate how

individuals use language in everyday family life to actually *construct* their families" (p.

5). Through her documentation of the repetition and intertextual links, Gordon finds that

families use language to construct themselves as a distinct social group. Specifically,

parents use repetition to establish certain linguistic routines through framing and naming

these activities, thus initiating their children into their families. These findings are based

on Heidi Hamilton's (1996) linguistic definition of intertextuality as the following:

> …the ways in which speakers/writers use language establish and maintain ties between the current linguistic interactions (i.e. conversation) and prior ones involving the same participants, as well as the ways in which listeners/readers identify and use these ties to help them (re)construct a (speaker's/writer's?) meaning. (as cited in Gordon, 2009, p. 14)

In all of these studies, intertextuality provides researchers a means of exploring

the figured worlds and cultural models that participants demonstrate as they co-construct,

revisit, and extend their reading practices embedded within their everyday practices, family relationships, and environment.

Conclusion

This review reveals a gap in the literature concentrating on non-school-based studies of African American girls' literacy practices. Much of the existing documentation of literacies of African Americans and African American families pertains primarily to early childhood, pre-kindergarten until around first or second grade. Therefore, there is a lack of research documenting the continued commitment to literacy attainment and achievement of African American families of older children, particularly secondary students. As such, there appears to be a gap in the current body of research that recognizes and calls for the utilization of older African American children's and their families' culturally and socially situated reading practices.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

> Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology. They are "factors" to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as a part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood.
>
> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*

In the late fall of 2010, I began conducting interviews with a family of African American women, including a mother, where Urban Literature is widely read and shared among all the family members. This chapter introduces the research design which guided my work as I designed the study and collected and analyzed the data. It also provides an introduction to the context of the study. I describe the family's situation in terms of the community in which they live, their household, and the individual family members involved. I then describe limitations of the work as well as my research stance and background.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is concerned with helping researchers "understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (Merriam, 1998, p.3). The goal of my study was to understand why this family of African American women chooses to read and share Urban Literature books with one another and how they read, understand, and make sense of them. Through this endeavor, I hoped to come to a better, more nuanced understanding of why such books are important

and should be considered by those who are concerned with promoting and providing

literacy instruction. In addition, I wondered what attracts the members of this family to

Urban Literature books, what that can teach me about their literacy practices, and what

these particular books offer that other "school-sanctioned" (Finders, 1997; Thein, 2009)

books do not.

How schools structure knowledge and skills and accept and/or reject the

knowledge and skills that students have beyond those sanctioned by the school is

intricately related to how students experience school. As such, the methodological

underpinnings of this study lie in a mix between interpretive and critical research

orientations. According to Merriam (1998),

> In *interpretive* research, education is considered to be a process and school is a
> lived experience.…In the third orientation—*critical research*—education is
> considered to be a social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction
> and transformation. (p. 4)

For this study, combining these qualitative methodologies puts the Walker family and

their stories at the center of the research. I conducted two in-depth interviews with

Cheryl, the mother, and four of her daughters. I also interviewed a fifth daughter, the

eldest, as a "knowledgeable other" since she was not living in the home when the study

began. Lastly, I joined the family to discuss one book they chose to read and discuss with

me. Our discussion included a lot of references to another book they read prior to the start

of the study. The purpose for these encounters was for me to come to a better

understanding about how the Walkers practice literacy and why they make choices to

read certain books.

As stated by Merriam (1999), although the primary interest of qualitative research

is gaining knowledge and understanding of the participants' perspectives, the researcher

is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The questions I asked and the data I collected have everything to do with who I am and my own socioculturally situated understanding of Urban Literature and the people who write and read such books. I used a case study design that borrowed elements of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997) to document the ways this African American family of women read and interact regarding Urban Literature books and how their reading lives intertwine with their identities and gender.

Case Study with Elements of Portraiture

I chose a case study approach informed by portraiture as a means to capture a level of description and perspective centering on my participants' lives and perspectives. Merriam (1999) describes a case as "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). In this instance, the case is a family of African American women, specifically, a mother and four of her daughters. Of particular interest was the fact that the mother *and* her daughters to some degree engaged in reading Urban Literature books, not only passing them to each other to read, but recommending and discussing them among themselves. As a demonstration of outside-of-school literacy practice, this offered a unique case study involving a genre of books often criticized and rarely acknowledged or used within English/language arts classrooms. The purpose of this investigation is not only to arrive at an understanding of what Urban Literature offers to readers such as the Walkers, but to also understand how the Walkers' talk and interactions regarding Urban Literature texts are socially constructed within their family and more broadly as African American women responding to Urban Literature texts.

I use elements of portraiture to center this case study around its participants'
perspectives and experiences. According to Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), portraitists
"seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are
studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and
wisdom" (p. xv). Though the purpose of qualitative research centers around gaining an
understanding of the phenomena studied through the participants' perspective,
researchers are also a product of the cultural, historical, and social communities and
institutions of which they are a member. It is my belief that a study of why people like
this family of African American women choose Urban Literature and the kinds of literacy
practices that they demonstrate within their home and environment is a sensitive
endeavor. What I count and discount, how I represent and portray the members of this
family, their literacy practices, and the genre of Urban Literature shapes the way that
others come to know and understand the participants and their reading. As Linda Tuhiwai
Smith (1999) argues,

> …many researchers, even those with the best of intentions, frame their research in
> ways that assume that the locus of a particular research problem lies with the
> indigenous individual or community rather than with other social or structural
> issues. For example, researchers investigating poor health or educational under-
> achievement among indigenous communities often focus on the community as the
> sole source of the problem and, because this is their focus, obviously fail to
> analyse or make sense of the wider social, economic, and policy contexts in which
> communities exist. Often their research simply affirms their own beliefs. (p. 92)

In my own reading of the research, time and time again, a significant portion of
the literature regarding African American underachievement, particularly in literacy
development and attainment, is a recapitulation of old stereotypes of African Americans'
rejection of or opposition to literacy, and implies there is a connection between African
American families' inability or failure to ensure that their children are "ready to learn"

upon entry into kindergarten. Often, it is implied that such orientations to literacy are due to cultural and/or economic factors. Although there was a time when I would have accepted such perspectives without question, I have learned that through a sociocultural lens, one can better see that the disassociation from school-sanctioned texts many African American students experience are more the result from the ways in which education sanctions some literacy texts and practices over others and how this is impacted by a historical dominant White power structure. As such, my approach has been to consider the literacy practices of members of this family as they occur, on their terms, within their own environment.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) states that portraiture "seeks to illuminate the complex dimensions of *goodness* and is designed to capture the attention of a broad and eclectic audience" (p. xvi). That is what I sought to accomplish within my study. As a result, I focused on studying what the members of this family of African American women choose to read and how they engage with each other and the texts. I used what I learned to come to some general theorized reasons why they chose Urban Literature. My intention was to spotlight the positive and beneficial aspects of their reading practices in a way that seeks to understand the complexity of how their choices are situated within their background experiences, family interaction, and other sociocultural factors that may otherwise have been more obscure.

> The portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences. The portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image. The encounter between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and is crucial to the success and authenticity of the rendered piece. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 3)

Complexity is at the heart of this study where understanding the ongoing dance that members of this family engage in as they choose to read, share, and discuss Urban Literature with each other and how they identify with and make meaning of these texts.

I am keenly aware of the various ways my own work is impacted by the victim-blaming, negative approach. Having said that, rather than continue the tradition of doing my study *on* African Americans, I seek to hear what the members of this family as representative "indigenous peoples" (Smith, 1999) have to say about their reading habits and practices, and about Urban Literature books. As a grandchild of the Civil Rights Movement, I hope that the research utilizes "[p]rocesses [that] are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate" (Smith, 1999, p. 128). Therefore in an effort to "resist [the] tradition-laden effort to document failure," (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 9), through portraiture, I seek to enact what Featherstone (1989) calls "a people's scholarship" (as cited by Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997, p. 10) that is written in such a way that people outside the academy are invited along into the portrait as they follow the unfolding stories of the family involved with this study.

The Research Setting

Prairie Heights

To a newcomer, Prairie Heights is an idyllic location. A late spring day when it's still cool enough to benefit from the cool breeze through the open windows reveals a community where children still play up and down their neighborhood streets. The sound of children playing suggests that this is a place where it is safe for kids to be kids. Throughout the summer there are public events like the Arts Festival, Jazz Festival, Summer Night Concerts, and Movies in the Park. People shop in locally owned specialty

stores, enjoy dining and nightlife and mill around a small, five-square block downtown area throughout the day and into the night. The local university and other entities provide a number of summer programs for children of all ages. In addition, the city offers 41 parks with miles of trails to walk, ride, or run. During the autumn, children roam the streets with their bags, going house-to-house to trick-or-treat. Many of the neighbors decorate for the occasion, with a few going as far as turning their homes into haunted houses. The winter brings snowmobiling and sledding as two activities of choice. For a family, there are many advantages.

At the forefront of advantages is that Prairie Heights is a university town, which provides relatively stable home prices and low unemployment due to the constant influx of university professors and other personnel, in addition to a number of supporting industries. The university and its College of Education also ensure that the K–12 schools have a very educated teaching population. In addition to the university, Prairie Heights has a solid economic history with several large and mid-range employers that employ people ranging in technical and educational skills from entry-, basic-skill level to more highly skilled personnel. Prairie Heights' public schools continue to value arts and music as well as a variety of school-sponsored sports and other activities. In addition to these are a plethora of community-based extra curricular activities, including club soccer, baseball and football, professional music and art lessons, and a number of other activities such as Boy & Girl Scouts and 4-H. For less affluent parents, there are three neighborhood centers and a number of recreation centers that provide activities to entertain youngsters across the age spectrum. Though more pricey than most areas in the

state, Prairie Heights still has a decent standard of living. In general, the citizens of Prairie Heights see themselves as liberal and open to diversity.

However, within the last 10 years, Prairie Heights has experienced a small, yet noticeable demographic shift. Much like the Great Migration during the 1930s through early 1970s, when African Americans living in the South moved to northern and western cities in mass numbers in order to take advantage of better housing and living conditions as well as better employment opportunities, African Americans living in the northern cities are beginning to move to suburban and more rural environments. As a result of gentrification, many large cities have begun to redevelop previously run-down and inexpensive housing projects and neighborhoods. Coupled with a variety of other social concerns such as crime, poor schools, and limited job opportunities, urban residents are increasingly relocating to suburban and small towns dotted across the United States. Between the 2000 and 2010 Census, Prairie Heights and its adjacent communities Village Marine and Independence, have seen the following population growth in the overall and the African American populations. See Table 3.1 for the population data in Prairie Heights and the surrounding communities. Within a relatively short period of time, Prairie Heights has experienced a demographic shift in the percentage of African Americans within the community, which has fueled both concern and debate, despite the community's view of itself as a welcoming and inviting place.

Why I Chose This Family

My research focused on what the members of a family of African American women read, how they came to make meaning and understand these texts, and why they

Table 3.1

Population Data for Prairie Heights and Surrounding Communities

	Prairie Heights	**Village Marine**	**Independence**
2010 Population	67,862	18,907	13,374
2000 Population	62,200	15,123	5,347
2010 African American Population Percentage	5.8%	7.8%	4.5%
2000 African American Population Percentage	3.7%	4.2%	1.5%

were attracted to them, so I chose this family for the following reasons. First, as a single African American mother and graduate student, I have been privy to many conversations regarding "the changing demographics," which is a community euphemism for the growing number of poor African Americans moving from large urban centers. Within those conversations are residents' expressed concerns about safety, the quality of education, and other factors related to an anxiety regarding the perceived pitfalls in having more African Americans from the "inner city" living in a place like Prairie Heights.

Second, one of the common concerns is around the quality of education. As a university town, Prairie Heights' residents perceive themselves to be well educated and to value education. Prairie Heights has a reputation within the state for maintaining high standards and earning top scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS)/Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED), so much of the concern educationally has been around the impact of the "changing demographics" on test results—Prairie Heights is currently designated as a District in Need of Assistance (DINA) with several Schools in Need of Assistance (SINA), (both designations related to No Child Left Behind) most of which involve the schools with the higher populations of African American students.

Third, as a by-product of this concern regarding the quality of education, as a former English teacher, I am most interested in how to improve students' engagement with literacy within the classroom. Research regarding literacy practices and literacy development has increasingly focused beyond the classroom to students' out-of-school literacy practices. Educational researchers interested in out-of-school literacies have devoted their efforts towards building awareness of students' out-of-school lives and literacy practices (Hull & Schultz 2002; Mahiri, 2004; Morrell, 2004; Moll et al., 2005; Smith & Whitmore, 2006) and have documented the various ways that students read and write outside the classroom in order to express who they are and their understanding of the world. This is how I have come to focus on Urban Literature and the social function (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994) and how it plays in the interactions between the Walker women. Lastly, I have come to *this* topic within *this* community because much of the research regarding African American literacy practices in general and particularly those that focus on Urban Literature (Venable, McQuillar & Mingo, 2004; Morris et al., 2006; Hill, Pérez, Irby, 2008; Marshall, Staples & Gibson, 2009; Tatum, 2009; and Gibson, 2010) seems to specifically focus on or take place in within large urban centers. For example, Morris et al. (2006) argues the following about "street lit": "Inner-city African American teenagers, particularly females, are devouring this genre as if it were the newest installment in the Harry Potter series" (p. 20), implying that those who live outside of the "inner city" aren't as interested or fascinated with Urban Literature. The conversations regarding out-of-school literacy practices (Hull & Schultz 2002; Mahiri, 2004) are often framed as a singular concern or consideration of teachers of urban students. As Table 3.1 suggests, Prairie Heights is a relatively small area, even when

combined with adjacent communities. However, within the state, this community is considered an "urban center" though it is not large enough to be considered a true urban center. This is an important part of the sociocultural context which the Walker family negotiates in the community, at work, at school, and even at home. It also is part of what helps to inform our understanding of the complexity of literacy practices, as well as provides an additional dimension to the research. Much of the literature on African American students, and especially on Urban Literature, focuses the gaze on adolescents *living in* large urban centers. In this case, the Walker family presents a case of a family *from* an urban center, who have chosen to leave and begin a new life in a small Midwestern community. As with all sociocultural research, this change in context adds another dimension to the approach, understanding, and interpretation of the Walkers' reading and talk about Urban Literature.

Research Participants

As I conceived of this project, I was initially very interested in the out-of-school literacy practices of African American junior high and high school-aged girls. As I interacted with girls in a summer program that I created and directed, I learned that many of the girls read Urban Literature books. Having known members of the Walker family through my summer program work, I learned that not one or two, but all the members living within the home were avid readers of Urban Literature. This provided me with a unique opportunity to learn about a single family with multiple participants for this study. Table 3.2 is a chart of the family members who participated, their ages when they enrolled in the study, their status in school, and their participation within the study.

Table 3.2

Study Participants

Pseudonym	Age	School Status	Participation
Cheryl	38	Enrolled in college	2 interviews; book discussion
Chanel	18	Graduated high school; enrolled in community college	1 interview
Cleo	17	Graduated high school; enrolled in community college	2 interviews; book discussion
Cy'Marie	16	High school sophomore	2 interviews
MaKiya	15	High school freshman	2 interviews; book discussion
Suki	13	Eighth grader	2 interviews; book talk

It is important to note that Chanel wasn't enrolled as a full participant since she did not live in the home at the time this study began. Instead, she is included as a "knowledgeable other" participant, which is why she was only interviewed once. In addition, although we tried to include everyone in the book discussion, Cy'Marie was at work when we finally had the book discussion so she was unable to participate.

Data Sources

I used the following data sources, collected primarily in late 2010 to mid-2011:

- Field notes and observer comments (Merriam, 1998) on the physical setting and interactions and conversations among participants (4);

- Interviews (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Merriam, 1998) (12)

- Audiotapes of interviews and book discussion (12)

- Transcripts of audio of interviews (11) and audio and video of the book discussion (1)

- Family artifacts such as awards, ribbons, and other achievements (50+)

- Pictures taken of different elements of the home including décor, awards, movies and books, etc. (37)

Data Collection

Table 3.3 outlines the process of data collection. I started collecting initial interviews in November 2010 and concluded with a family book discussion involving four of the participating members in May 2011. Each of the interviews was audio-recorded. During the interviews, I wrote notes on the interview protocol sheet, and when possible wrote field notes and observations after the interviews. My notes reflected elements of the interviews such as comments the participants made and pieces of biographic information they shared. Table 3.3 shows the data collection timeframe.

Table 3.3

Data Collection Timeline

Initial interviews with individual family members	November 2010 – December 2010
Observations	January 2011 and March 2011
Second interviews with individual family members	March 2011
Book discussion	May 2011

Due to their competing schedules (Cheryl and two of the daughters work), as well as my own, the interviews and book discussion all happened during the weekend or times when school was out, which accounts for the spacing of data collection. In addition, I transcribed as many of the initial interviews as possible before conducting the second interviews. During the second interviews, I discovered that Cheryl keeps files on each of her children, systematically collecting their various achievements, recognitions, and awards. Therefore, as I interviewed the girls individually, I also collected and

photocopied their files and returned them to Cheryl during my next visit. In addition, I decided to both audio- and video-record the book discussion because I suspected that participants would have a fast-paced discussion with multiple speakers talking at once. In an effort to preserve as much of the conversation as possible, I wanted to ensure that I took every precaution to capture every word.

The primary sources of data were the interviews I conducted with the research participants. Although I prepared questions with each set of interviews (see Appendix A), I often diverged from those questions to find out more information or perspectives about issues, background, and experiences that the participants brought up. The initial interviews lasted about 45 min to 1 hr, and all of the second interviews lasted between 1 hr and 1 hr 30 min. I participated in one book discussion regarding a book selected by Cheryl called *Rage Times Fury* (2004). A second book they read previous to the start of the study, and that they highly recommended that I read, called *Mina's Joint* (2005) was referred to frequently during the discussion. Although I prepared questions about the book ahead of time (see Appendix B), I was more interested in allowing the conversation to develop naturally and did not really use the questions, though I did keep them in mind.

Having had previous experience with three of the girls as participants in my summer program, I had a familiarity with Cheryl and the family as a whole and had previously been to their home. Our prior knowledge and experiences with one another facilitated my ability to move more quickly into interviews that were more conversational than might have otherwise been the case. This is particularly evident in the book discussion since it was completely free-form and was a representative demonstration of how the women of this family interact with one another and talk about books.

Data Analysis

I strived in my analysis to understand the ways in which the Walker family engaged in reading Urban Literature and how they talk with one another about the Urban Literature they read. As Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) expresses,

> It was against this colorful historic canvas—from Rousseau to James to Dewey to DuBois to Geertz—that I began to draw the artistic and scientific forms that overlapped to shape my version of social science portraiture. I was not only inspired by the long legacy, but also by my resistance to many of the dominant canons and preoccupations of social science. I was concerned, for example, about the general tendency of social scientists to focus their investigations on pathology and disease rather than health and resilience. This general propensity is magnified in the research on education and schooling, where investigators have been much more vigilant in documenting failure than they have been in describing examples of success. (p. 8)

I did not want to contribute to the history of documenting failure. I wanted to carefully construct an understanding of this family, their literacy practices, and their interactions and perspectives with respect and credence to their own worldview instead of my own. As such, I attempted to use elements of Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1997) portraiture to emphasize that context matters; "[c]ontext becomes the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space as a resource for understanding what they say and do" (p. 41).

While initially collecting data, I tried to reflect on how each participant responded to the interview questions and what those responses might imply. For example, early on, I became aware of the tension between their resistance to identify themselves racially as "Black" or "African American," insisting that that is not how they view themselves or would choose to identify, yet within the interview and through observations, they clearly indirectly identified themselves as "Black" and/or "African American" in the language they used, referring to "we" and "us" when talking about African Americans or Black

people as a whole. Thus, themes such as "racial identity" were themes that I noted early on in my data analysis. I came to see this as part of a larger social and cultural practice of asserting their right of self-determination, which is explored later in Chapter Four.

Charmaz (2006) describes grounded theory as "generat[ing] the bones of your analysis" (p. 46) and coding as "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes and accounts for each piece of data" (p. 43). By this time, I had transcribed many of the initial interviews and had not yet conducted second interviews. I began to employ Charmaz's (2006) notion of "min[ing] early data for analytic ideas to pursue further data collection and analysis" (p. 46).

After collecting my second interviews, transcribing them, and participating in the book discussion, I began to analyze the data in more detailed ways. I started with "line-by-line" coding which involved "naming each line of [my] written data" (p. 46). This yielded a list of potential codes that were illustrative of the various frames and perspectives I could take in drawing conclusions. More importantly, this process allowed me to see that there were rich interactions between the participants about reading, their lives, and how they made sense of the world. I created a document called "first-pass codes" to capture the impermanence of these initial codes. Next, I employed a method called "open coding" (Strauss, 1987), which involved creating large categories of the data. Some of these are included in Table 3.4, see below.

Next, I created separate documents for the sections of transcribed interviews that were in each category. This allowed me to see emerging patterns in the data and gave me a better idea of the emerging analytic frames. I incorporated the second interviews into

Table 3.4

Initial Open Coding Categories and Sub-Categories

Being Educated 　　1.　Perceptions about school
Chicago vs. Iowa 　　1.　Education 　　　　　a.　Story about school in Iowa vs. Chicago 　　2.　Everyday life 　　3.　Background about moving from Chicago to Iowa
Aspirations
Drama 　　1.　Fun drama 　　2.　Bad drama
Family
Identity—Self-Perception 　　1.　Story about identity/self-perception 　　　　　a.　Story about school 　　2.　Racial identity 　　　　　a.　Story about being Black in Iowa 　　　　　　　i.　At school 　　　　　　　ii.　Race at work 　　2.　Racial identity and school (how school frames) 　　3.　Identity as a learner in general 　　4.　Identity as a learner at school 　　　　　a.　Relationship with teachers
Reading Practices 　　1.　Family 　　2.　Access to books 　　3.　Other literacy practices
Reading Urban Literature 　　1.　Conversation exchanges (8) 　　2.　School assigned books 　　3.　Story plots

these large categories and expanded them into 15 main categories.

Using my research questions and consulting recent research on "street lit," I

focused on specific elements of the codes that had developed. These were "reading

practices," "reading Urban Literature," and "identity" and they became the analytic frame

for understanding why the Walker family reads Urban Literature. Next I transcribed the

book discussion. I started by transcribing those elements that seemed to capture *how* the family reads and interacts with one another about the books they read. Once I had a better sense of what the book discussion contained, I returned again to the research about reading practices. I found that the Walker women in their often overlapping talk made multiple connections among many texts as they read texts and interacted with one another. A microanalysis of intertextuality allowed me to look more scientifically at their talk without having to sacrifice my respect for their own worldview, which I maintained by focusing on what the Walker women brought to complex discussion. I intertwined elements of Lawrence-Lightfoot's (1997) portraiture to demonstrate how intertextuality played a role in the content of the Walkers' book discussion. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) also emphasize the social and contextual elements of discussion.

> The set of texts that can be related to each other within a class of local events (e.g., reading-group events within a particular classroom) constitutes a broader cultural ideology…It is not just what texts can be related that constitutes the cultural ideology. Part of the *in situ* cultural ideology is formed by how texts are juxtaposed…by where in a sequence of turns-at-talk the intertextual relationship is inserted, by how the intertextual relationship's coherence with the topic being discussed and genre of ongoing conversation is established, etc. (p. 312)

The particular relationships and contexts that the Walker women create in their discussions of books is at the heart of understanding the intertextual relationships within their discussion. As such, portraiture alone did not provide the level of detail and understanding between the substance and processes of their intertextual processes and employing an intertextual analysis.

To examine the Walkers' discussion for intertextual relationships, I transcribed the entire discussion, which lasted 1 hr 17 min 11 sec. One of the difficulties of transcribing the video and audio recordings of the discussion was that there was so much

happening at one time and the pace of the discussion was extremely fast. In many instances, the Walkers overlapped their comments, sometimes completing each others points, other times, sensing the point one member was about to make and extending it further while other times proposing new elements within the sub-topic under discussion. As a result, I decided to code the data in turn-by-turn units in order to preserve the complexity of how members often responded to multiple points at the same time as they extended one or more of them. From there, I re-watched and listened to the discussion taking notes of the major elements of the discussion. This helped me to narrow in on a specific segment of the discussion that was useful for further analysis. I selected the segment because of the richness and complexity of intertextual dimensions it represented and the intertextual links it contained. It demonstrated *how* the Walker read a text, in this case *Rage Times Fury,* and the kinds of interactions they had as they discussed why they didn't like the book. This segment was a short 6 min16 sec segment from the whole discussion, composed of 145 turns; all the participants took turns to make and extend meaning within the discussion.

I adapted many elements of Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) procedures in order to fit this particular context and these participants. The purpose of using intertextuality was to demonstrate the ways in which the Walker women make and build meaning through an informal collaborative discussion. I used the following four components to analyze the social construction of intertextuality:

(1) I described the individual turns each participant made and the relationship between the speaker and those she addressed;

(2) I identified the form and function/strategy of each turn, which helped to

establish the linguistic/communication nature of each turn;

(3) I marked whether a turn represented a proposal, recognition, and

acknowledgement of intertextuality embedded within the turn itself, which

also involved establishing the social significance of the comment made during

the turn and identifying, when appropriate, the identity frames participants

used;

(4) I located the uses and references to textual links they used throughout each

person's turn.

Using these methodological tools for exploring this segment of the longer discussion

allowed me to explore "intertextuality as a social construction rooted" (Bloome & Egan-

Robertson, 1993, p. 320) within the discussion. This provided me with a method of

explicating the complexity of the Walkers' discussion about the text in a way that

respected and honored the positive and beneficial aspects of their reading practices and

subsequent interactions regarding their reading.

Limitations

The limitations in this study mainly pertain to my own gathering and handling of

the data. I believe that when it came to trying to describe the Walkers' experiences

within African American neighborhoods and communities, my own identity made this

difficult, causing me at times to conflate class and racially based experiences together.

This section explains the three limitations of my research.

One limitation came from my inability to take comprehensive field notes that

went beyond what the participants said to capture my own responses, thoughts, and

connections. In many cases the limited notes I took (in some cases, I was not able to take any field notes at all) pertained mostly to elements captured within the interviews themselves. As I returned to these notes later, they did not help to identify early frames for analysis or early codes. As such, I struggled to triangulate my data with more data outside of the interviews themselves, which I think resulted in less than full portraits of the Walkers and their lives.

Another limitation included choosing to focus on creating a unified view of the Walker women's reading practices and subsequent interactions. I consider this a limitation because narrowing my focus meant that I did not use all of the data I collected. Specifically, I tended not to use much of the second set of interviews I collected. Those interviews tended to focus more on the school versus home comparison than on establishing what the Walkers read and why. Perhaps in the future, I will be able to come back to these interviews and draw from them to extend some of the findings here or even determine new findings.

A third limitation was my difficulty in finding the language to accurately describe and represent the Walkers' references to their experiences living within predominantly African American communities in a large urban center. As a Black person, I have come to recognize a set of experiences and related knowledge within a broad sense of "the Black experience." This is not to mean that this experience is broad and comprehensive of every individual Black person's experience, but is to mean that there are some common themes, information, frames of references, cultural models, and lived experiences that many African Americans commonly draw from. However, describing "the Black experience" is deeply encumbered by social class. Although I grew up

economically "disadvantaged" among other economically "disadvantaged" and working-class African American families, my mother, as a Jesuit-educated, middle-class woman, raised me to have a very White middle-class cultural model. As a result, trying to depict the Walkers' experiences, which in many cases typified my own experiences growing up in poor urban neighborhoods, at times created stereotypes that *all* African American neighborhoods share certain characteristics. This is something I think is inherent in American language as well as within Americans' understanding and perpetuation of institutional racism, which is particularly evident in the ways our language and cultural models make some descriptions of behaviors, actions, ways of being, and situations *appear* to be *natural*, when, in fact, they are social constructions that continue to be perpetuated through our social institutions, including scholarly research. Unfortunately, even as intentional as I have tried to be in avoiding such traps, I too am still a product of the systemic racism that pervades our language, culture, and institutions.

Researcher Stance and Background

My stance as a researcher in this study was primarily as a participant-observer (Merriam, 1998). Since I had a history with the Walkers as a founder and director of a summer enrichment program in which three of the Walker girls had participated, I strove to be vigilant in my own positioning as a learner of reading Urban Literature. As such, because we did have some history, I was more readily invited into the conversation, even challenged at times when my points did not align with theirs. However, I strove at all times to minimize the assertion of my own points of view and perspective in order to privilege theirs.

In addition, as the "illegitimate" child of an African American single-mother who had little college education, I know down to my marrow what it is like to struggle—to know at some level that the bills are not being paid and that we may have to leave behind almost everything we have and start in a new place. For these reasons, I hold a great respect for families that are marginalized by a system that frames them in a number of negative ways: entitled[1], lazy, poor, ill-prepared, disadvantaged. As such, I strived to promote a strengths-based approach, preferring to recognize families such as my own as well as the Walkers as "at-promise" (Arnold, 1995) rather than as at-risk.

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[1] This represents recent political rhetoric to represent those who expect and/or receive government handouts such as Medicare and food stamps.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF READING URBAN LITERATURE

> …we move beyond the familiar notion of reading as an isolated encounter
> between reader and text as at the ways in which meanings and tastes are
> socially established and circulated. Rather than merely concentrating on
> how young people read particular texts, we also want to consider the *social
> function* that their readings perform. Broadly speaking, we want to move
> away from a notion of reading as merely a matter of individual "response,"
> and to redefine it as a part of a broader process of social circulation and use,
> which we might term culture.

David Buckingham & Julian Sefton-Green, *Cultural Studies Goes to School*

Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) posit that people engage in particular reading practices as a part of a larger social and cultural "circulation and use" (p. 18). If this is true, then it is important to study reading practices as they take place in the settings where they commonly occur. In this case study, I studied a family of African American women, including a mother and four of her daughters. The focal point of this chapter is to explore *what* and *why* the participants choose to read the books they do and to construct an understanding of these literacy practices that accurately reflects both their reading choices as well as their cultural identities.

Though as a family they did not all read the same books, Cheryl and her daughters did share an enjoyment of a relatively young genre of books, often referred to as Urban Literature (also known as street lit, hip-hop lit, gangsta lit, ghetto fiction, hip-hop fiction, urban fiction, Black pulp fiction) (Gibson, 2010; Hill, Pérez & Irby, 2008; Morris, Hughes-Hassell, Agosto, & Cottman, 2006). In order to understand exactly what the genre is and its attraction to its fan base, it is important to define the genre and its origins.

Defining Urban Literature

In their article "Street Lit Flying Off Teen Fiction Bookshelves in Philadelphia Public Libraries," Morris, Hughes-Hassell, Agosto, and Cottman (2006) state, "Since the late 1990s, more than one hundred street lit titles have been published, and at least three publishing companies have been formed for this genre: Urban Books, Strebor Books International, and Triple Crown Press" (p, 17). With the formation of these companies, Urban Literature has grown in the last 20 years from a genre of books bought, sold, and traded in small urban bookstores, sidewalk vendors, and hair salons to major bookstore retailers and school and public libraries. The term Urban Literature refers to "the genre of novels whose plots, characters, and settings focus on everyday life in contemporary urban neighborhoods" (Hill et al., 2008, p. 76). More specifically, but not exclusively, Urban Literature is written by and for African Americans. Urban Literature books appeal to primarily African American women and girls aged 13 through 30, however, it is important to point out that men and boys are a small, yet growing portion of readers (Stovall, 2005). Although many of the Urban Literature books are authored by African American women, men are increasingly writing Urban Literature books as well. Many authors are ex-convicts, recovering drug addicts, and those who penned their books while serving in prison (Morris, et al, 2006). In fact, ex-convict Vickie Stringer started Triple Crown Press, the largest publisher of Urban Literature, after she experienced difficulty publishing her own novel, *Let That be the Reason* (2009).

Shortly after Stringer began attending Ohio State University, she met and started dating a drug dealer named Chino. She became involved in his drug operations and after their breakup continued in the "drug game" and became "the Columbus connection"

(Ferranti, 2008) for heroine and cocaine. She was arrested and eventually pled guilty to one count of money laundering and conspiracy (Ferranti, 2008), spending several years in prison. When she completed her prison sentence and could not publish her book, Stringer immediately put the same skills and sensibilities she learned in the drug game into getting her book out to eager readers. Today, by many accounts, she is "The Queen" of Urban Literature (Tyre & Springen, 2004; El-Amin, 2006; Ferranti, 2008) and since she started her company in 2003, Triple Crown has become *the* name in Urban Literature, selling more than 1 million copies by 2008 (Ferranti, 2008), and featuring more than 40 authors. In Ferranti's (2008) article, "The Real Vickie Stringer," she is quoted as saying the following:

> When I was a hustler I used to put packages in shorties' hands and I thought I was giving them a chance but really I was dealing them death.…There's people that I gave packages to that are doing life in prison, people who wound up getting murdered trying to sell drugs I gave them. So now, when I'm able to give someone a book deal, I'm giving them life. God gave me a second chance, so I use that opportunity to give others a second chance, too." (paragraph 10)

Features of Urban Literature

Urban Literature stories are often set in the ghettos of large cities like New York (Harlem and Bronx, specifically), Los Angeles, Baltimore, St. Louis, and Chicago (Morris, et al., 2006), typically using real street names and landmarks of neighborhoods as backdrops to the story. The characters typically deal with the following:

> …daily life in the ghetto, featuring young female protagonists coming of age with dramatic complications to consider, such as drug dealing, drug trafficking, graphic domestic violence, and sexual encounters. The male protagonists usually stand some kind of turning point in their lives, often struggling to become successful drug dealers or to leave the world of drugs behind. (Morris et al., p. 19)

Urban Literature is often ridiculed and criticized for its focus on and featuring of drugs, violence, sex, and gang activity. In fact, in his article, Stovall (2005) refers to the genre as "fast food for the mind" (p. 6). The books are fast-paced and full of dramatic twists and turns that are resolved by the end of the book, which is part of their appeal.

A Brief History of Urban Literature and Connections to Hip Hop

It is important that though considered a young genre, Urban Literature has both literary and cultural roots. Progenitors of today's Urban Literature, late 1960s and early 1970s authors Iceberg Slim and Donald Goines's writings are described as "gritty depictions of street life and shady characters" (McQuillar & Mingo, 2004). Referred to by Greg Goode (1984) as "Black experience novels" (as cited by Hill et al., 2008), books by Slim and Goines became famous for their realistic depictions of ghetto life in Chicago and Detroit, which helped the authors establish their credibility because "they themselves were involved with drugs and served jail time for various crimes" (Morris et al., p. 17). Slim published books such as *Pimp: The Story of My Life* (1967), *Mama Black Widow* (1969), and *Airtight Willie and Me* (1979), while the more prolific writer Goines published 16 books within a five-year period including *Dopefiend: The Story of a Black Junkie* (1971), which he published while serving time (Morris et al, 2006; Hill et al, 2008). Beyond that, according to Hill et al. (2008), "Goines's narratives have shaped the lyrical content of rap artists, many of whom directly credit Goines's books for both artistic inspiration and creative direction" (p. 78). From the beginning, the formation and rise of hip hop and what is currently called Urban Literature were intertwined.

Hip hop was born in the void that came in the post-civil rights and Black Panther Party movements that ranged from the 1950s to the 1970s and consisted of the four-part

expression of the situation and conditions found in their economically devastated communities: deejaying, rapping, graffiti, and break dancing. African Americans and Puerto Ricans in large urban areas like the Bronx lived with the rhetoric of integration, yet they continued to live in communities blighted by the stark reality of economic devastation (Cheney 2005). In fact, when Ronald Reagan visited the Bronx during his first campaign for president, he characterized the urban decay of the Bronx as being consistent with a war zone (*And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip Hop,* 2004). In article after article, the birth of hip hop is said to be a response to "the social, political, economic and cultural conditions confronting young black Americans" (Cheney, p. 71). This is important to keep in mind because Goines's books and themes were sources of inspiration and direction for some of the founders of hip hop (Hill et al., 2008), and a common element among Urban Literature books is the presence of hip-hop music, language, and culture.

As Bakari Kitwana (2002) states, the "hip-hop generation" includes those born between 1965 and 1984. As the generation on the forefront of this political and social movement of sorts, hip hop can also be characterized as being the unplanned, spontaneous response to the pent-up frustrations with the everyday experiences, limited options, and living conditions in places like the Bronx. However, many believe the "Godfather" of hip hop, Kool Herc, and other hip-hop founding fathers were essentially "making something out of nothing" (*And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip Hop,* 2004). The early emphasis was on creating a "feeling," and extending the "moment" (*And You Don't Stop: 30 Years of Hip Hop,* 2004) and the hip-hop generation is now raising a generation where hip hop is an integral facet of their day-to-day interactions. Watkins

(2005) describes the thinkers of this generation as "hip-hop intelligentsia" (p. 234).

Specifically Watkins (2005) states,

> What has emerged is a body of thinkers who articulate a wide range of ideas that, in their unique way, map out the contradictory currents, ideas, and worldviews that percolate throughout the phenomenal world of hip hop. From spoken-word artist to academic scholars hip-hop intellectuals are translating the movement into a vast mix of critical commentary and artistic expression. The results both energize and expand the image and imagination of the hip-hop intelligentsia. (p. 234-235)

This is, in Watkins' (2003) view, nowhere more evident than in Urban Literature because it advances a movement or forms a critique through a form of artistic expression.

All of these elements—the emergence of the Black experience novel and the birth of hip hop as more than entertainment, but also as a culture and movement—came full circle in the publishing of *The Coldest Winter Ever* (1999) by Sistah Souljah, which sold over 400,000 copies (Watkins, 2005). Sistah Souljah's accomplishments and notoriety as a recording artist and emcee helped to fuse the relationship between hip hop and Urban Literature. According to Watkins (2005),

> The book established a tone—raw and uncompromising in its prose, action packed, and populated by a cast of characters fighting for survival, respect, and upward mobility in the underserved and underhanded ways of the ghetto underworld—that has become the trademark of hip-hop lit. (p. 235)

And like hip-hop and rap music, Urban Literature serves not only as a function of artistic expression but also as a means of representation of a body of experiences, a worldview, and a means of both identifying with a group as well as identifying as an individual.

Connecting the Pieces: Urban Literature and the Walker Family

I have chosen to refer to this genre as Urban Literature rather than use the various other names that are often associated with it to highlight the social function of naming

and its relevance to what is named. One of the predominant features of the genre is that it is often set within specific neighborhoods in large cities, hence the use of "urban." But more than that, the stories and conditions most often relayed in Urban Literature are decidedly negative connotations that are synonymous with decay, degeneration, and lack. In contrast, the term *Literature* is most often used to connote canonical texts that are reified, held up as models of craft, and expressions of culture and value. There are many critiques of Urban Literature for its promotion and promulgation of sex, violence, drugs, and illegal lifestyles, which are elements that mainstream society typically marginalizes. Yet, I have found in my own reading and understanding of the texts, and from the Walkers' that it is academics and educators (and others in similar positions of power) who more often than not exercise "uncritical readings" (Hill et al., 2008) of not only these texts but also those who read them. As a result, we focus solely on the negative denotations rather than try to understand the positive values and strengths that are indeed present within Urban Literature texts. Therefore, as a means to both call the uncritical reading practices into question as well as honor those who have chosen to participate in this study, I have found Urban Literature to be the most appropriate title for this multifaceted, ever-growing, and popular genre of fiction.

  This chapter describes the connection between the social functions that reading Urban Literature has for the Walkers in relation to how it adheres to their cultural models. As stated previously, cultural models (Gee, 1996) are "pictures of simplified worlds in which prototypical events unfold" (p.78). In other words cultural models help people to form symbolic representation and understandings of their cultural, social, and lived histories, informing their values, beliefs, behaviors and interactions. Analyzing the

Walkers' statements provides a glimpse into the underlying, sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious figured worlds they draw upon to guide their reactions and interactions. This provides a better perspective of why the Walker women read Urban Literature and the social functions such literacy practices hold for them as a part of the Walkers' broader social and cultural practices.

The Walker women read Urban Literature, for the following four social functions: (a) as a connection to urban life; (b) as a form of entertainment; (c) as a collaborative activity; and (d) as a means constructing and defining their own identities. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the ways the Walkers enact these social functions and discuss what the research literature demonstrates regarding these social functions.

Social Functions of Reading

Reading as Connecting with Urban Life

In 2007, the Walker family moved from Chicago to the mid-sized city, Prairie Heights. They had moved from The Gardens, a well-known South Side housing project to various places in and around the South Side of Chicago like Harvey, Illinois, a predominantly African American, lower-income community. In 2007, after an incident involving her oldest child Brian and a neighbor, Cheryl decided that it was time to leave the city altogether. As Cheryl states,

> I got tired of Chicago, so I relied on God, jumped on a bus and came to, Iowa…I did research on Prairie Heights about the schooling and, it seemed like it was not that far away. I didn't want to be too far, but I didn't want to be too close either. (personal interview, December 2, 2010)

Prior to making the move to Iowa, Cheryl explains in the following excerpt that one night a few hours before her 5:00 a.m. work shift, a group of people from the neighborhood

"jumped out of the car on my son" Brian (personal interview, December 2, 2010). In the

conflict and drama following this incident, Cheryl says,

> **…**Immediately, the police officers thought that I was out to do some crime cause I was wearing all black. You know, and the fact is, once they got a hint of all my police reports, got a hold of all my police reports, and I produced those, then they realized that, it was all in defense. It was in self-defense. And the thing is, the, they made it a joke 'cause me and my son both got locked up for that night. I was in jail for 24 hours. That was enough for me. I was like, it's time to go. It was time to go, that was my last straw. I was like, 'cause I will really, I will really hurt somebody. When I felt myself going back to that angry teenager, and I saw it flash, I could've hurt that lady and everybody in her family. And my thing is, I never wanna be pushed to that point. I never wanna be pushed, so, when I got pushed to that point, I left. (personal interview, December 2, 2010)

Prior to this statement, Cheryl explained how she had grown up angry and how during

her youth she was in a lot of physical altercations, but when she was 17, she adopted a

new attitude and tried to steer clear of drama. This excerpt demonstrates that, for Cheryl,

life in Chicago was fraught with complications and drama. Although she tried to avoid it,

problems continued to put her and her children in situations that caused her to be angry

and want to respond in violence. In addition, this experience represents a clear time when

the life and safety of her one of her children was threatened as well. Her statement

reveals that Cheryl places value in not using violence to solve issues, except when she

feels pushed, as she says in an earlier portion of the following statement:

> And I try to avoid it as much as I can, and although I teach, I've taught my kids some verbal skills, I will hate for them to have to use [violence]. Although, I'm for if you're provoked enough, then you do whatever you have to do to defend yourself. By all means, do not be a pushover, but definitely defend yourself. (personal interview, December 2, 2010)

Cheryl demonstrates a value that people must keep their cool and not resort to violence,

and in many cases refers to this stance as a change in attitude, when she continues to say,

"… you definitely have ta, you have to change the fact that you wanna be bothered with drama, cause that's how conflict starts… (personal interview, December 2, 2010).

Cheryl's cultural model reveals the notion that conflict is a part of life and how one handles conflict, preferably by avoiding it and the drama that ensues, is through controlling one's actions, attitudes and approaches to it. In continuing to justify why she left Chicago, Cheryl says,

> Yeah, it like okay, it's time for you to go. And I prayed that week I had to go to court, and, cause they charged me with disorderly conduct and assault with a weapon. Now mind you, I'm, I'm no lawyer, but, you know, you got to produce some evidence. Where's the bat that I supposed to hit her wit', is my finger prints on that bat? That was my first thing. The lawyer looked at me like I was crazy. No, I ain't crazy. Produce the bat. Produce the fingerprints. We, we takin' it all the way through, 'cause I'm not pleading for nothing. And, I had to let 'em know, if I had a bat in my hand, last thing I'm gonna do is hit that lady in the leg, not for jumping out the car on my son, naw, you've been terrorizin' my kids, not at all. I'm angry, it would have been baseball season. Everybody head would've rolled. Then you would've had me in here for murder and not assault. So, you know, that was, that was part of the reason [she laughs], so, and I cha, that's the thing that I definitely don't want my kids to be. I don't want them to…I don't want them to be violent because they, they are truly my kids and you can tell in their attitude, and I try ta, my whole thing is, the conflict and the drama, and all that, all that needs ta change in order for people to make it. (personal interview, December 2, 2010)

Cheryl does not believe that law enforcement and the justice system works in favor of people like her. Here she expresses skepticism, and even challenges her lawyer who she seems to insinuate has encouraged her to plead guilty to the charges. Rather, she uses her knowledge about the gathering and use of evidence to challenge the pressure to plead. Again, as she indicated, in defense of her son, Cheryl demonstrated that she is capable of becoming violent, but that her change in attitude is a leading factor for why she abstains from the kind of violence she suggests she grew up with, and why she moved in order to protect her children from the same.

In discussing this pivotal moment, Cheryl reveals a belief that life, particularly life in Chicago, is full of conflict, in the form of "person-against-person" and "person-against-society" (Morris, et al., 2006) but through a person's attitude, he or she is able to control one's actions and avoid escalating or getting swept up in the conflict and drama. In addition, she believes that although violence should be avoided, people should not be pushovers; instead, there are appropriate times when it's necessary to respond with violence or otherwise take matters into your own hands. Lastly, she expressed the desire to move her children to an environment where they did not need to rely on violence and anger in order to live their day-to-day lives, which is the impetus for why she decided to move to Iowa. These are important considerations when understanding how the plots, characters, themes, and depictions of inner-city life align to Cheryl and her family's cultural models, which are embedded in their lived worlds (Thein, 2009).

When they arrived in Iowa, Cheryl was 35 and her children were Brian (19), Chanel (15), Cleo (14), Cy'Marie (13), MaKiya (12), and Suki (10). Brian joined the Army shortly after their arrival, leaving the family. Many of the girls' formative experiences were shaped by their young childhoods primarily in Chicago, which affects their cultural models that they draw upon in selecting material that aligns with these values, beliefs, and viewpoints. As such, the texts this family chooses to read, both as individuals within the family, and a shared experience among the different members of the family are related to their cultural models and lived worlds (Thein, 2009).

A reoccurring theme that emerged from discussions about Urban Literature was how the books were more realistic than books assigned in school. In my conversations with family members, the notion of Chicago being their *home* became quite clear.

Although the oldest sister, Chanel, was not a full participant in the reading portions of the study, she was considered a "Knowledgeable Other" who helped to establish the sequence of events leading to the family's move to Iowa, and she provided additional insight into their notions of home (in this case, where they are from). In an interview, Chanel talked about how the Walkers came to move to Iowa.

> ….like Chicago's my home and then we jus' had to up and leave and come out here which I didn't, and it was like Iowa, like I didn't even know anything about Iowa…. (personal interview, March 28, 2011)

This helps to establish Chicago as the locus of much of their identity and the place/space they access as they read Urban Literature books. MaKiya told me, when talking about *Dice* (2007) by T.N. Baker,

> Since I grew up in, you know, of the, I guess people call it the bad part of Chicago, you know, I you know, I've seen like, people in real from this book, I've seen, like I, I, I've seen people, you know, gambling on the corners and stuff and you know, like people going, like, people trying to shoot people over stupid stuff like [xxxxx] Yeah, like I've seen like some of the stuff that go on in this book, so…. (personal interview, November 20, 2010)

In our conversation, MaKiya offered an extensive summary of the book.

> Well, it's about um, I forgot his name. I dunno, I forgot his name. Um, he had a gambling problem and so, he was always on the streets, and he always playin' craps. And so this one dude came up and he was like, "Let's get a game of dice going." So, you know, he said like, "If, no, the banker's gonna start at $50,000," and he's like, "Every time we don't hit trips, we gonna add an extra 10,000 in there." And dude was like, he was real good at like dice or whatever, so he thought, "Okay this is easy money, like I know Ima win this," or whatever, but he wind up losing. And so, then he had to pay dude $80,000, and so he was like, he only had $40,000. And so, he was like, "Man, I ain't got the whole, I ain't got it all right now," or whatever so he was like, "Okay, give me half of it, but I want your girl, tho." And so, he was like, "Nah, man you can take my chain," cause he had a chain that was like worth $10,000 or whatever, so he was like, "You can take my chain or whatever, you're not getting my girl, tho." He was like, "Nah man, that ain't gonna work, I want your girl." So his girl had just pulled up wit half of the money. And so then, he was like, "I got ta talk to her." So, he talked to her, whatever, but his girl was like, "Nah I ain't 'bout to go wit him, like I don't even know him." And so then he was like, "Okay then, I'll jus leave, and I'll die,

and I'll leave you the $40,000. Have a good life." And he walked off, tryin', you know, play the guilt trip, like, "You're not gonna do it and now I'm gonna die." 'Cause he said that, "Okay, If I don't get my money, or I don't get your girl, I gonna kill you." So, he's like jus' gonna go and walk over there to my death. Bye. Love you," and walked off. And so he was like, she like, "Nah wait. Ima do it, Ima do it." And so then, she wind up, you know, goin to the motel with him, or whatever. And then when she had got back, you know, they had a fight or whatever, and so now they broke up and she wound up goin wit ol' dude, and it's all about, like him, you know, like both of them, like they both like depressed and stuff after they broke up with each other because they was together for like two years and now, over something stupid, over a gambling game, they break up. (personal interview, November 20, 2010)

These two interview excerpts demonstrate that one of the attractions that MaKiya has to Urban Literature is the genre's exploration of familiar activities and themes. MaKiya's interest is supported by Gibson's (2010) documentation that mainly African American teenage girls read Urban Literature because of the taboo themes of sex, drugs, and violence and the fast-pace of the action, all of which resemble the lived worlds and cultural models developed in neighborhoods like those depicted in Urban Literature. That is not to suggest that the readers of such fiction have *actually* engaged in the activities depicted in such novels, but that they have either first-hand or second-hand knowledge of such activities, and the activities align with their cultural models and lived worlds. Within the mainstream, and certainly within school-sanctioned texts, students are rarely introduced to activities such as playing dice and the implications that such illegal activities can present. Nor do school-sanctioned books demonstrate dilemmas for how to resolve conflicting issues, often involving choices between least desirable options, nor do they depict a text world where life is generally portrayed as a daily struggle to survive at the same level as those depicted in Urban Literature. In these mainstream lived and text worlds, people are not faced with the same kind of competing choices, leading too often

to violent confrontation that the Walkers would find more familiar to their lives and the circumstances they have experienced.

In addition, the lifestyle the Walkers were exposed to prior to moving from Chicago was no longer available to them in Iowa. Cleo describes her first impression of Iowa, "It was dead…It was no one, okay when I first came out here, it was the summer time, extra hot, you, we didn't see no people. No people whatsoever, no cars, no nothin'. It was jus' extra dead, wasn't nobody around" (personal interview, December 27, 2010). This comment points to the notion that members of this family read Urban Literature to compensate for missed experiences and activities as a result of having moved to Iowa. As eldest daughter Chanel says about living in Iowa, "It jus' like this quiet boring place, like, it's jus', jus' a place you can be neutral, like I guess. I don't know. I don't really know what this place is like" (personal interview, March 18, 2011). As Gibson (2010) emphasizes, part of the allure of Urban Literature is as an "escape or diversion" (p. 567), except in this case, rather than from schoolwork, it is from the non-dramatic or "dead" life in Iowa.

In their discussion and small study of a group of adolescents who engage in a book club offered through the public library, Morris et al. (2006) point out that among the main reasons African American women and girls aged 13 through 40 find Urban Literature (they refer to the genre as Street Literature) so appealing is that readers "know people who live the lifestyles depicted in these books" (p. 21). Cheryl and her daughter Cleo had the following exchange regarding a book series:

> **Cheryl:** I read *Gansta* last night. *Gansta* is a book that is part of a series and trying to read the books out of order doesn't make sense.

Cleo: Gurl, I found out, the only reason why I didn't read that books, cause I had to read *Gangsta* first.

Cheryl: I think Gang, I think *Gansta* and um *Gutter*, it's a, it's a nice book. It tells about the street life that they live. (personal interview, November, 20, 2010)

Within this conversation, Cheryl describes to her daughters and me why she likes Urban Literature, "I like them because it tells, it tells…the true story on why gangsta became gangstas. Why the, why the reason that they chose the street life. [It's] their story…, because I've been there, it is a true story for me" (personal interview, November 20, 2010).

Morris et al. (2006) suggest that those who engage and read these books are "seeking confirmation and validation of their lives, as well as legitimization of inner-city culture" (p.22). In addition, according to Morris et al. (2006), Urban Literature also provides a means for learning how to negotiate social situations and the pitfalls and conflicts to avoid. In fact, MaKiya states about reading *Dice*,

> Imn, it's like, tells you like, you know, ever, like…people make stupid mistakes, you know, and you can't blame other people on that mistake, it was your fault. Like, you decided to do it, you know….It gives you a different take on life. Like, you know, people be tryin' ta say, "Oh life is easy. You jus' have ta do like 20 something years of schools and then, you're all good." [xxxxx] But then like, like the girl in there, she's like tryin' to go to school for like fashion. And so then, you know, he was by her side the whole time. So, you know, it's jus' like life is not a, you know, bowl of roses and stuff. Like, life has its ups and downs. It gives you a different take on life than what people tell you. (personal interview, November 20, 2010)

In addition to connecting on a personal level with Urban Literature texts because they provide a familiarity in contexts and situations, Urban Literature provides a space for readers like the Walker girls to imagine how they might handle similar situations in their relationships and interactions as well as to learn how to resolve conflicts, real or imagined. The only way for this confirmation, validation, and learning to occur is for the

books to realistically depict the kinds of activities, behaviors, attitudes, values, and beliefs that students have encountered within their experiences. Put simply, *these books* ring true.

Reading as Entertainment

Beyond some of the more complex reasons for why the Walker women read Urban Literature is the "pure enjoyment" (Cheryl personal interview, December 2, 2010) of reading a good "page-turner" (Cy'Marie, personal interview, November, 28, 2010). Morris et al. (2006) support this notion by arguing, "The action is always fast-paced and the final resolution comes quickly" (p. 19). That is to say that part of the appeal of Urban Literature is that they are entertaining and are a relatively quick read. The girls confirmed this function as we talked about their reading preferences. As one of the oldest of the four girls, Cy'Marie says,

> I guess, I dunno like, it's jus' so, it gotta be interesting, it gotta be like a thing that will pull you in, ta like keep me reading cause, I, I probably would read the book up until like the third chapter. If the third chapter not interestin' then I will put the book down and not read it ever again. (personal interview, November 28, 2010)

It is clear that the primary reason Cy'Marie reads Urban Literature is for the entertainment value. An important aspect of this is that if a book does not catch the reader's interest, whether that is within three chapters as Cy'Marie outlines, or the first few pages for other readers who may struggle more, then readers do not persist. A key ingredient to the success of Urban Literature is its entertainment and immersive appeal. *Because* they are fast-paced and easily read, girls like Cy'Marie and the other girls and women in her family find them entertaining. Cy'Marie goes on to say,

> I only read urban fiction. They're funny and exciting. 'Cuz, like, I, I guess it's a page-turner and I'm not goin' ta give away the book, you jus' haveta read the

book in order to get why they're exciting…'Cuz like, you know it, it's
unexplainable how they're exciting. (personal interview, November 28, 2010)

However, within the entertainment value of Urban Literature are the aspects of character

and themes to which readers easily connect. Gibson (2010) argues the following:

Regardless of their socioeconomic class or exposure, all African American
females can relate to the characters within urban fiction texts based on their
positions within society.…Adolescent African American females are searching
for representations of themselves, irrespective of the positive or negative
attributes of those characters. (p. 568)

In further comparing Urban Literature to the books assigned in school, Cy'Marie's

younger sister MaKiya states,

They're more interesting. Like, they kind of, you know…like some books, they
have the same kind of problems as I do, you know. And…I like books that, you
know, like, you know people have the same opinion as I do and like, th-, these
books are like more interesting than the ones at school. They make us read like,
books, you know, that, I don't know. (personal interview, November 28, 2010)

This is an issue that is illustrated both through Cy'Marie's and MaKiya's comments

comparing school assigned books with Urban Literature. Part of this reveals that the

interest or entertainment value of Urban Literature stems from the similarities between

the problems or situations that characters face in the books and those that African

American woman and girls face in their own lives. Their view of Urban Literature as

entertainment is connected to the types of characters and situations these books depict,

especially when compared to canonical books they are assigned to read in school. The

following comment from Cleo alludes to this distinction:

Um, they differ because, the one that assign to you is mostly talkin' about
[xxxxx]//no, uh, they mostly talk about, they take it all the way back to slavery
time and different things about how people was raped and killed during that time,
it's like it, it's not that I don't like reading about that cuz that is too sad and then
it's like, it's like, boring, like if you're, if you watch movies like *Roots* and stuff
like that, you understand basically half of the books you read. [xxxxx] So I don't
read 'em. The books that I read that's/[interesting to you?] Yeah, um, [xxxxx]

because they have more drama, more, it's more funnier. The other books when you read its jus' like you don't feel dead when you read it.…I feel I'm in the books when I read, when I pick the book on my own. If I can pick the book on my own and really sit down and read it with no problem, I feel like I'm right, I'm one of the characters in the book. You'll know I'm not reading the book when I'm like, "Ookay," right at the beginning of the book, it's boring. (personal interview, December 27, 2010)

In this description, Cleo describes her desire to lose herself during her reading experience so she can be "in" the books and "really sit down and read" and that it is important for her to feel like she is "one of the characters in the book" (personal interview, December 27, 2010).

Taken together, the Walkers' comments reaffirm the suggestion that reading Urban Literature is both satisfying and entertaining. In contrast, in her conversation about "other books" Cleo said that many of them are about "slavery and different things." Embedded in my understanding that Cheryl taught children to value self-determination, I took Cleo's comment to mean that school sanctioned texts that often depict African Americans as powerless victims by the hands of others result in Cleo feeling "dead when you read it." An important distinction to make is that whereas Urban Literature might seem to replicate the same powerlessness in the face of certain adversities (e.g., other people's actions, the environment) and violence, the characters are certainly not depicted as powerless victims. Rather, the characters are active in their environment and choices, even if the end result is not always positive. MaKiya's previous statement, "…you can't blame other people on that mistake, it was your fault" (personal interview, November 28, 2010), suggests that another important element of Urban Literature, for the Walker women, is that it aligns with their cultural model of personal responsibility. Cheryl has

ensured that her children are expected to take ownership for their own actions and behaviors.

Alfred Tatum (2009) says African American students especially need books that they can engage with. Cleo's comment regarding books outside of Urban Literature making her "feel dead when you read it," speaks to this need for African American adolescents to be especially connected to books that matter to them and with which they may engage. Among the practical steps to engage African American students in powerful reading experiences, Tatum (2009) suggests the following:

> *Identify texts that engage.* Identify texts—literary and nonliterary, conventional and nonconventional—that are fast moving, deeply penetrating, and relevant to the essential questions. Lead students in discussing the texts, making sure to honor their voices…. (p. 41)

The essential questions, as Tatum (2009) lays out, are those questions that capture the readers' attention and help them to gain insights into their identity, and "tap into pressing issues African American adolescent[s]…face in school and society" (p. 41). However, the point to understand here is that Urban Literature, though still very much considered "controversial" (Gibson, 2010), engages some readers in ways that school sanctioned books do not. Another illustration of this is what Cleo says about books that are assigned to her in school.

> I can read anything long as it catch my attention, if it don't catch my attention, I will not read the book, but if it's assigned I will like, I believe it's called cheating, but I'll go to *Spark Notes* and jus' get all the information I needed, but it's better than not, it's better than not ta do the material and still pass the class, but I ain't gotta read it, I jus' gotta jus' get the main point of each chapter so. If I can do that and pass the class, I'll be fine. But, there's one book when I was in ninth grade I read called…I don't remember, but [xxxxx] um, it was two books that my teacher assigned, it was *To Kill a Mockingbird.* I don't like that book and I don't like the movie, I would not read that book ever in a lifetime. But I read one of the books, it's about an African American family all the way back then, all the way when they was owning they own farm and all that stuff. It was a very good book. Um [I

furnish the title of the book, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*?] There you go! That's my favorite book and I [xxxxx] I actually love that book, I read that book all the time and I'd actually read it again, um. That's the only book I actually liked that was assigned to me. I really didn't get books that was assigned to me, cause most of my Engli—once you get older in school you, eh, they get to tell you, you get to pick your book long as it match its like a year to go back for it…Yeah, so basically when you're a freshman, I think they pick the book for you but I do, as you get older they let you choose your own. So. They books pretty good, I jus', it's jus', too old for me. I jus don't like reading old books. (personal interview, December 27, 2010)

Here Cleo is really making two statements. The first is that for her, the biggest value in reading is in capturing her interest. Clearly, she states that she will read *anything*, as long as it captures her interest. Secondly, Cleo's statement implies that part of capturing her interest and attention involves creating characters that she can recognize and identify with. Specifically, Cleo mentions, *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* (1976). This Newberry Award winning book by Mildred Taylor is about an African American family trying to stay together amongst harsh racial tensions in the Deep South during the 1930s. It is important to emphasize that *Roll of Thunder* fits within what Tatum (2009) calls "enabling texts" which are "meaningful and significant to their lives. These and other texts [lead] them to think deeply about their existence" (p. 69). Much of Tatum's (2009) advocacy of African American students' exposure to literature written by African Americans that contains historical, cultural, and social significance is because it represents a level of power and advocacy.

To clarify, I'm not stating that Urban Literature represents the level of power and advocacy which Tatum (2009) talks about at length; rather, Urban Literature books are broadly engaging in ways that more "traditional literary" books, or in the way Cleo describes them "old books" are not. It is important to consider the elements of engagement and entertainment as a potential bridge between Urban Literature and those

texts that both educators and others consider more "acceptable" and "literary." In their work with a small "Street Lit Book Club," Morris et al. (2006) make the following point:

> More importantly, the teens began to request alternatives to street lit fiction—books that still accurately reflected their lives but lacked the hard, gritty details apparent in most street literature. They began to read and discuss more mainstream young adult urban titles…. (p. 21)

Therefore, the power in reading Urban Literature is that readers find books that they can read and enjoy, thus establishing a habit of reading. When nurtured, this habit can and often does extend beyond Urban Literature to books that are more "mainstream" and "literary" texts.

Reading as a Collaborative Activity

Much of Alfred Tatum's book, *Reading for their life* (2009), centers on advocating and researching the literacy practices of African American male adolescents. However, Tatum (2009) states, "Historically, African American reading and writing were collaborative acts involving a wide range of texts that held social, economic, personal, political, or spiritual significance" (p. 17). He describes Negro literary societies where men came together to read and discuss books, which were abundant during the late 1800s and early 1900s. In his description of the purposes of these societies, the formal nature in content and structure of reading practices Tatum (2009) is in stark contrast to the informal collaboration exhibited by the women in the Walker family. The primary purpose of Walkers sharing books involves establishing and confirming common interests and tastes in contrast to Tatum's societies where the primary purpose involved building a collection of books or reading texts for political or social enlightenment of the group.

The importance of the history of literary society as a collective activity is supported by McHenry's (2002) positioning of today's book groups, many, but certainly not all of which are women-led, as providing a "…relaxed combination of the social and the intellectual [which] facilitates conversation that would not take place in any other forum" (p. 303). The Walker family engages in the various Urban Literature texts in similar ways. In the following conversation, Cheryl, Cleo, and MaKiya are recommending books I should read for this study:

> **Cleo**: *Mina's Joint* is a good book that she wrote [referring to the author Keisha Ervin].
>
> **MaKiya:** *Hold U Down*, you got it in your room.
>
> **Chanel**: *Hold U Downnn.*
>
> **Suki**: I don't think you've read that.
>
> **Cleo:** It's a good book, but I rather see you, you should read *Mina's Joint* if you're gonna read a book….She's a good author.
> **MaKiya:** And then *Torn,* and there's not doubt, read *Me and My Boyfriend.*
>
> **Cleo**: That is not, that's not a sequel. (personal interview, November 20, 2010)

This short piece of the conversation illustrates that Cheryl and the girls share books in common. No one has to explain or describe either the book or the author because they are *all* familiar with Keisha Ervin and the multiple books she has written.

In his text, Tatum uses the following example of a colleague's experience as a young man with the book *They Came Before Columbus*:

> They coordinated the book's return and immediate re-check out from the university library, which imposed a four-week limit, and they met in a dorm room or some other location to discuss the book…They had created what I refer to as "purposeful literacy cooperative.." (p. 23)

In much the same way, the women within the Walker family all have their own library cards and take turns checking out urban literature books from the local library. Often, when one is finished, books are passed along to the next member of the family who is interested in reading them. Again, this is evident during our book discussion. Cheryl, Cleo, MaKiya, Suki, and I are talking about Keisha Ervin's *Mina's Joint*, which they recommended that I read. In the middle of retelling the plot, Cleo is momentarily confused by a plot twist in another book.

Cleo: [overlapping] Wait, wasn't there a wedding at the, the end of that?

Valerie: No, they didn't have a wedding. They didn't get married.

Cheryl: No.

Cleo: Okay, I'm thinking about another book, 'cause there was a wedding.

Cheryl: [overlapping] Yeah, it's another book, I know which one you talkin' about.

Cleo: [overlapping] 'Cause there was a weddin' at the end and then those dudes, they was in the elevator, they got shot.

Suki: That's uh…

Cleo: Give me the name of it, come on.

Suki: *Every Thug Needs a Lady*

Cleo: You sure?

Suki: Yes.

Cleo: You right, you right.

Suki: Cause, uh, with whatshisname and 'em. Tre and 'em

Cleo: Oh that book was off the chain. (book discussion, May 17, 2011)

The interesting point here is that for much of this conversation, Suki is present, but contributes little to the conversation. As the youngest member of the family, she seems to select specific times and places where she joins, which in this case seems to be even more significant because it clearly demonstrates that books circulate among the family members. She behaves as a legitimate peripheral participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in that she hovers on the edge of the conversation, yet when she does decide to assert her full participation, she does so without the other members questioning or challenging her participation or her comment. Specifically, in this instance, not only does she provide the title of the book that Cleo is actually thinking of—the one where the characters do have a wedding—but she begins to give details to support why Cleo was initially confused.

These two examples demonstrate that *this* family of women/girls has formed an informal literacy collaborative, much the same way that communities of practice work (Lave & Wenger, 1991), in which they share and swap books freely among themselves as participants in a shared activity. McHenry (2002) says that such book groups often "provide a sense of community and a network of support that is often missing from their lives" (p. 305). One of the important aspects to the way Cheryl has raised her children is to ensure that they stick by and support each other. This is evidenced in her statement about what it means to be a member of her family.

> I think to be a member of this family, it, it means a lot because we stand by each other, regardless of what we do inside the household. What goes on, we can argue, fuss, fight in the household, but we still stand by each other, regardless ta what's [xxxxx], thick and thin. It means a lot to even becom—be one or our friends, cause we stand by it. I've raised them to believe in your friends, stand by your friends, support your friends. If that's your friend, then that's what you need to do. If you're gonna call them your friend, that means a lot. (personal interview, December 2, 2010)

This statement demonstrates that as part of the Walkers' cultural models is the notion that family members stick together and as such, they form a network of support for one another, which Cheryl stresses can also extend to people close enough to consider as friends. As part of this orientation, the Walkers' informal collaborative discussions maintain and strengthen their relationships through their discussion of books as McHenry (2002) suggests. The multiple examples of the Walkers' easy talk with one another and the fact that their comments build and extend from one another demonstrates reading and sharing Urban Literature texts is a culture of practice within their family where they build and sustain their relationship with one another. More specifics regarding the kinds of intertextual links that build the connective tissues of their talk about books and their relationship with one another will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Reading as constructing and defining their own identities

One of the interesting developments of the interviews with the Walkers was a repeated ambivalence with identifying themselves as African American. For example, when I asked what it means to be African American, Cheryl stated:

> That's not a term that I would use, 'cause I'm not from Africa. [xxxxx] If you want to look up my history, last I know, my great-grandmother is complete Cherokee, that will make my grandmother part Cherokee something, so that would make my mother and them, Cherokee and Black, 'cause that's my grandfather, but I don't know his side of the history, oh no, he's mixed, he's White and Black, so when you come to my mother and them, I'm multicultural. So, I tends, I, I don't check anything. I feel that it's not everything. I feel that it's not necessary. I have a mixture of everything in me, so…I believe…my thing is, I don't, I don't pretty much look at what people look, how people look at me. I don't even worry about it, longs as I know who I am. And who I am, I'm Cheryl, so…. (personal interview, December 10, 2010)

Here Cheryl expresses a stronger sense of the importance of being seen as an individual over belonging or affiliating with a particular group, in this case racial or ethnic group. In

fact, Cheryl's response is centered on her belief of the importance of being able to exercise self-control. Much like the characters in Urban Literature who must take their lives into their own hands, Cheryl's approach to identifying herself racially seems to suggest that it is her own right, not society's or anyone else's, to define herself, and by extension, to take her life on her own terms. This demonstrates her cultural model of having a strong belief in self-determination. This fits the notions of self-control expressed earlier in this chapter.

In terms of their reading habits, though distancing themselves from being labeled by society as Black might seem problematic *if* they do not consider themselves African American, I would argue that this brings them closer to the text worlds of the books they read because, like them, many of the characters in Urban Literature struggle to define themselves on their own terms. So although they choose to identify themselves outside of mainstream racial categories, their reading habits suggest more identification with being Black or African American than Cheryl admits. As stated previously, much of Urban Literature centers on the lives and experiences of African Americans. This suggests, as earlier excerpts have demonstrated, that the Walkers strongly identify with those characteristics that are African American. Since many of the characters engage in struggles to determine their own future on their own terms and these themes fit with the Walkers' own cultural models, the excerpts here suggest that they identify with Urban Literature characters, themes, and storylines.

Throughout the various interviews and conversations with the Walkers, it became apparent that Urban Literature formed the majority of the books they chose to read and were the books they shared the most amongst their family. According to Buckingham and

Sefton-Green (1994), "…defining one's tastes—even in the apparently 'neutral' context

of a questionnaire—is in itself a social act: it is part of the broader process whereby

young people construct and define their social identities" (p. 21). Therefore, if simply

choosing to identity oneself as reading a particular book on a questionnaire is seen as a

social act, then the Walkers' identification and informal literacy collaborative helps to

both construct their relationship as individuals and as family members, as well as define

their identity. In this case, however, it is important to consider that perhaps the Walkers

do not identify themselves as Black or African American *because* they are trying to

distance themselves from what others may consider less desirable, more "ghetto" African

Americans who have also moved to this mid-sized community in Iowa. In her

conversations about African Americans moving from large urban centers to places like

Prairie Heights, Cheryl says,

> Well, it's, it's not even a Chicago thing, I think its jus' a ghetto thing. [xxxxx]
> Cause, ghettoness comes from everywhere cause not everybody's from Chicago.
> They jus', they jus' tie it in because Chicago is a, I'm mean, it, it has gotten bad.
> And they jus' tie it in when, you must be from Chicago. [xxxxx.] So, I think its
> jus' all about ghetto and everybody tryin' to prove themselves. And, I, I think
> that's the difference that I brought down here. My thing is, I came down here with
> a new attitude, a new way of life, a new start and I carried that forward. Most
> people that came down here with an assumption of a new start, but they didn't
> change they attitude, hence, why they still over there in [The Village] in the same
> environment that they left. [xxxxx] So if you left a um,…so, if you left a ghetto
> environment and you didn't bother to change your attitude, then you brought your
> attitude to a new place, so that mean that you didn't do nothing, you might as
> well stay where you was at. (personal interview, December 2, 2010)

Again, this reveals Cheryl's belief that the locus of control of one's actions reside in

one's ability to adopt an appropriate "attitude" towards changing oneself in order to

create a better life. As Morris et al. (2006) state,

> Female characters are typically young adult African American or Latino women
> in some type of turmoil, usually because they are in love with the wrong kind of

man. Although most come from very harsh childhoods and want to get out of the 'hood…a few grow up very privileged and wan to get *into* the 'hood…. (p. 19)

These texts present interesting cases of how the protagonists make pivotal decisions and adopt the "right" attitudes that will get them what they want and where they need to go. Again, this aligns with the kinds of cultural models that have led Cheryl to move her children out of an environment where they faced exposure to gangs, drugs, violence, and conflict to a relatively "peaceful" (Cheryl, personal interview, December 2, 2010) life they established for themselves in Iowa. This metaphoric peaceful space created in order to protect the Walkers is also evidenced in the distance Cheryl keeps between her family and others African American families who have moved from Chicago.

"The Village" is a neighborhood well identified within the community as the "African American" section of town. Marked by Section 8 housing, and the presumption of higher crime and disturbances than other parts of the community, The Village has the reputation as being "the ghetto." For Cheryl, it is important that she and her family disassociate themselves from "these people," who as she describes came to Prairie Heights with the notion of a fresh start, yet did not (as she suggests) change their attitudes in order not to find themselves involved in the same types of behaviors and problems that plagued them in places like Chicago. I believe this is one of the reasons that they disassociate themselves with being African American or Black. In this context, it becomes a liability of sorts to be thought of as "those people" from "The Village." However, this does not mean that there is not something that they value in having come from Chicago and being African American. Building from Buckingham and Sefton-Green's (1994) notion that identifying reading choices is a social act, Staples (2008) states,

> …reading acts as an aspect of culture and provides ways for individuals to make sense of social situations that affect lived experiences, then…[readers] have ways of making meaning from texts and assisting their understanding of the world they live in. (p. 57)

The Walkers, as stated earlier, read Urban Literature because it is familiar and aligns with their experiences as African American women who must artfully deal with conflict in ways that demonstrate their efforts to escape the 'hood. The characters, the environments, and the situations in which the characters find themselves ring true. Cheryl and Cleo talk about why they like Urban Literature.

> **Cheryl**: I like them because it tells, it tells, it tell the true story on why gangsta became gangstas. Why the, why the reason that they chose the street life. Their story and if, because I've been there, it is a true story for me.
>
> **Cleo**: 'Cause most of them gotta decide if they live the street life, 'cause in most of the books, they don't live the street life. They jus' been around it so much because their father in it, or whatever.
>
> **Cheryl**: But, but they know, yeah.
>
> **Cleo**: And they don't have no other choice but to grow up wit it.
>
> **Cheryl**: Like in this book, wit Gutter and um.
>
> **Cleo**: Yeah, they grow up good, but they grow up because of they father and mother. (personal interview, November 20, 2010)

This conversation reveals that, to some degree, the characters and the experiences they face in the course of the books is realistic to the Walkers' experiences prior to moving to Iowa. In conversation, Cheryl stated that much of the contents of the books she read were familiar in that they were experiences she shares or knew about while living in Chicago. I would argue that although they live in Iowa and are likely to stay, in order to be happy here they need to have some measure of "home" with them. In this case, home means the "raw and gritty" tales of urban life that they derive through the books they read. Although

race and ethnicity are never stated as part of the "realness" of these books, one could presume that as readers who value the authenticity of the content of these books, they like them precisely because they can identify with them racially.

It is important to note that identity is a complex, multi-faceted, ever-changing process. It would be a mistake to generalize and use these findings to explain all reading choices made by African American girls and women. These findings describe only the time and context where these interviews, observations, and book discussions occurred. From my perspective, part of the Walkers' attraction to Urban Literature is that it is a "coming home" of sorts where the characters, settings, and situations are familiar to a place that they knew and loved. Urban Literature also aligns with the ways in which they have come to understand their lived worlds. At the same time, however, Urban Literature also provides a safe space to explore taboo topics and confront dangerous situations without having to *live* those experiences and deal with the negative ramifications of such associations. Essentially, as a family, trying to make their way in an environment that is unfamiliar, they read Urban Literature for three reasons: (a) to form a support structure, both individually and as a group, as they continue to define themselves; (b) to identify with each others' experiences and struggles as well as other African Americans like and not like themselves; and (c) to maintain a part of their former experiences.

Conclusion

I have discussed only a few of the myriad reasons the women of the Walker family find this genre so attractive. These reasons should not be used to generalize the motivations of all African American women readers or readers of Urban Literature. In this particular case, the Walker family reads Urban Literature to connect with urban life,

especially in comparison to life in Iowa; as a collaborative activity, or "something we do" as a family; as a means of constructing and defining their own identity; and as entertainment. These four social functions help to demonstrate the ways in which the plots, themes, and characters in Urban Literature adhere to the Walkers' cultural models regarding self-control, self-determination and the importance of having the right attitude, especially when facing conflict, in order to create a successful life beyond the 'hood.

CHAPTER FIVE

**"THERE WAS NO RAGE OR NO FURY": AN INTERTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF
THE WALKER WOMEN'S BOOK DISCUSSION**

As illustrated in Chapter Four, the Walker women choose to read Urban

Literature as part of a larger social and cultural "circulation and use" (Buckingham &

Sefton-Green, 1994, p. 18) that aligns with their cultural models. This chapter aims to

move beyond the "social function" of their reading practices to explore "the social (and

cultural) processes involved in how [the Walker women] act and react to each other"

(Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, p. 308) as they juxtapose multiple "texts" in their

discussion of *Rage Times Fury* (2004). In many ways, this is an extension of the brief

discussion in the last chapter regarding the informal collaborative nature of the family's

book sharing and discussing. This chapter demonstrates how members of the family talk

with one another about an Urban Literature text, and the role intertextuality plays in

linking the content of their talk with texts including and beyond *Rage Times Fury*. This

activity also demonstrates how the Walkers participate in building a collaborative

understanding of what does and does not make a good Urban Literature book in their

discussion of why they think *Rage Times Fury* is not a good book.

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how reading books like *Rage Times

Fury* is part of the social functioning of the Walker family as individuals participating in

a whole. Whereas Chapter Four focused on the *what* and *why* the women choose to read

Urban Literature, this chapter focuses on *how they read and discuss* Urban Literature.

Borrowing from the concern of Hill et al. (2008), that those who most criticize Urban

Literature are those who read it uncritically, this book discussion example demonstrates

how intertextuality plays a role in the Walker family's critical discussions of the text.

Book Discussion Context

On one Saturday afternoon in May 2010, I sat down to discuss two Urban Literature books with the Walker family. I arrived in the early afternoon, just after I finished teaching a Composition I class at the local community college blocks from their house. In the week leading to this discussion, I talked with Cheryl to make sure it was a good time, and with a couple of the girls to see if they were available. When I arrived, I expected to find Cheryl, Cy'Marie, MaKiya, and Suki. Cy'Marie was not able to participate in the discussion as planned, but Cleo, who was one of the more avid Urban Literature readers in the family, joined us instead. Therefore, our discussion, which lasted 1 hr 17 min, included Cheryl, Cleo, MaKiya, and Suki.

When I arrived, I began to set up a digital camera in order to record the conversation. At first both Cleo and MaKiya somewhat objected—they were concerned about what I would do with the video—but once I explained to them that I was only using it for my own reference in order to more accurately transcribe the conversation, they consented to let me film. I sat on the far end of the sofa closest to the camera. Cheryl sat on the other end of the sofa with her back mostly against the sofa arm facing me. MaKiya sat on an ottoman between the sofa and the matching arm chair. Suki sat in the arm chair, which also had an ottoman, and throughout the conversation either lounged on both the chair and ottoman, extending her legs onto it, or sat up leaning forward into the conversation. Finally, when Cleo agreed to join us, despite the camera, she pulled up a chair from the kitchen table and positioned herself close to MaKiya, facing her mother.

The living room is furnished with a camel-colored furniture set consisting of a sofa, two arm chairs and two ottomans, all of which had dark brown wooden accented

legs. The sofa is positioned across the entryway of the living room so that when anyone

comes in through the front door, they have to go left through the kitchen and come

around to enter the living room. Shoes are customarily deposited behind the sofa in front

of the door, on the patch of carpet not covered by the sofa. One of the arm chairs is

positioned at the entry into the living room, just off the kitchen. Next to it is a white

glass-top end table decorated with a number of framed and unframed family pictures and

a "Responsible Leader" award Cy'Marie received.
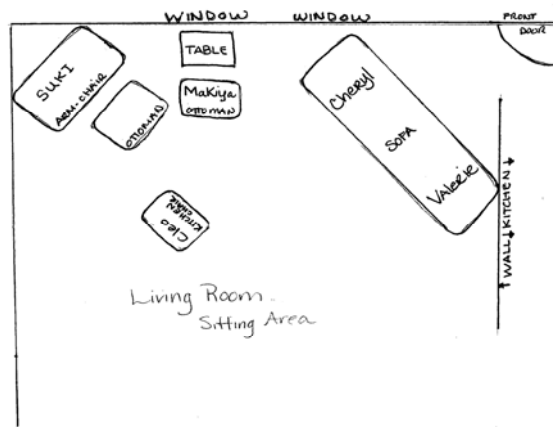
Figure 3. Sketch of the sitting area in the Walker living room.

There is evidence that readers and students live here. Underneath the glass top is a

shelf where the chess/checker set is kept alongside a number of magazines. Next to the

table is a DVD tower and next to that is a dark wood TV stand with a flat screen TV.

There are few wall decorations, besides the "Reach for Your Potential" Award Cleo

received from Prairie High School, which is hung on the far wall in the living room not

far from the television. On the day we held the book conversation, we were arranged in a

small group together using the sofa, two ottomans, and a chair both in order to facilitate

the conversation as well as to ensure that everyone is sitting within the view of the video camera. See Figure 3 for a sketch of the sitting area.

Like any typical Saturday, the living room and furniture were littered with odds and ends; some flip-flops and shoes were on the floor next to the ottoman in the main seating area. Other items left out—a water bottle, a pen on the floor, and a number of towels slung over the back side and arms of the sofa—indicated that this space is homey, a sign that this family believes in living in their home rather than just decorating it.

Although this was a planned event, I decided not to use any formal or informal protocols for the discussion. However, in my interactions with the family leading up to that day, I framed the event as a *book discussion.* This, coupled with my prior experiences with this family in my role as an English teacher and summer program director, were significant factors in the context of the discussion. My intention was to garner as natural a discussion as possible, much like the many short impromptu conversations I was privy to when others joined some of the semi-structured interviews.

The data segment used for analysis in this chapter comes from a book discussion that lasted 1 hr 17 min. Within that conversation we talked about the two principal books, *Mina's Joint* (2005), by Keisha Irvin, and *Rage Times Fury* (2004), by Trustice Gentles. Initially much of the discussion involved retelling the plots of the books, and including many links with "texts" (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993) within and beyond *Rage Times Fury* such as the following:

- Slang, such as "dairy queen" (a slang term for a Black gay man who prefers or is interested in partnering with White gay men);

- Fashion and clothing—specifically what Cleo planned to wear for graduation—elements of what passers-by wore on the street outside their house;

- Other Urban Literature books (e.g., *The Coldest Winter Ever, Midnight, A Hustler's Wife, Forever A Hustler's Wife, Natural Born Hustler, Bitch, Thug Love, China Black,* etc.) including discussion about some plots and characters;

- Urban Literature authors (e.g., Wahida Clark, Sistah Souljah), specifically talking about the quality of their books;

- Pop culture (i.e. Tyler Perry movies and plays); and

- Elements of the family members' lives and experiences as they pertained to the different books and meanings they made.

Within the entire discussion, everyone took turns participating and even somewhat leading the conversation through asking probing and extending questions, or via "capturing the floor" with pointed comments.

I use the words "discuss" and "discussion" to describe the entire family discussion as a whole in order to make a distinction between the type of talk that is more naturally generated as people casually talk with one another and the kind of talk that is framed by a particular context. In the literature about intertextuality, this kind of distinction could be termed as a difference in genre, meaning that language is so profoundly embedded in the context in which it is used that people use different words, content, and registers in different situational contexts (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993).

When I first approached the Walkers regarding having a book discussion, I expressed my desire to focus on an Urban Literature text. They immediately identified

Mina's Joint because many of the Walkers felt that this text best exemplified Urban Literature. Since no one had read it recently, I urged them to include an additional text. This is how *Rage Times Fury* was chosen. Cheryl read the synopsis and wanted to read it. I purchased enough books for four participants (that was the number of people who volunteered to participate in a book discussion) and myself so we each had our own book. Though I admire and value the fact that the Walkers often read books and pass them along, given the time constraints, I wanted to save the time it takes to read the book and pass it to the next person in order to meet sooner to discuss it. Throughout the discussion, I positioned myself as legitimate peripheral participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the form of a participant observer (Merriam, 1998). Based on Lave and Wenger (1991), as a relative newcomer to the Walker household and as a novice Urban Literature reader, I positioned myself in this Urban Literature book discussion community of practice with the intention of learning through my observations and limited participation. As such, I withheld comments and attempts to intentionally direct the discussion towards more school-like *textual meaning making* (Thein, 2009) in favor of learning how the Walkers more naturally talked about and made meaning as part of their enjoyment of and engagement with Urban Literature.

The data segment used for analysis in this chapter is a six-and-a-half minute segment from the larger discussion that is primarily about the second book, *Rage Times Fury* (2004). Prior to the start of the study, no one in the family had read this book or any other book by this author, so we all entered the book discussion with the same exposure. In contrast, all the women read *Mina's Joint* in the year or more prior to the start of this study. *Mina's Joint* made a more difficult focal point for the discussion since it had been

a long time since many of the women read it. However, *Mina's Joint* was an excellent point of comparison for discussing *Rage Times Fury*. While the Walker women unanimously believed that *Mina's Joint* most exemplified many qualities of good Urban Literature, they equally felt the opposite was true about *Rage Times Fury*. To further substantiate a point from Chapter Four about the prominence of Triple Crown Publications as a leader in publishing and distributing Urban Literature, it is important to note that both *Mina's Joint* and *Rage Times Fury* are published by Triple Crown Publications.

Data Segment Overview

The data segment analyzed next is a small portion of the overall discussion that lasted 1 hr 17 min 11 sec. The data segment began at 14 min 24 sec and ended at 20 min 40 sec. It is embedded in a segment of the discussion about *Mina's Joint*, which extended to a discussion about what does and does not constitute a proper Triple Crown Publications text. Though the first few lines were a comparison between *Mina's Joint* and *Rage Times Fury*, the majority of this segment is a discussion focused on why *Rage* is not a good book. This data segment begins at a shift from discussing *Mina's Joint* to Cheryl's explanation for how she decided to read *Rage Times Fury* based on the title. During an awkward moment of silence, I initiated the comparison between *Mina's Joint* and *Rage Times Fury*.

I chose this segment of the discussion for analysis because it is a "natural conversation," much like frequent, brief conversations I observed and participated in during interviews. The conversation progresses quickly with many overlapping and intertextual references in a short amount of time. The segment ends with Cleo's comment

about someone she saw outside through the picture window. Within this segment each

member participates and builds a shared understanding and meaning with very little input

or direction from me. During the 6 min 16 sec segment consisting of 145 turns, I take 10

turns. Table 5.1 indicates how many turns each participant took with an approximate

percentage of her portion of the conversation. Appendix C provides a full transcript of the

6 min 16 sec segment used for analysis in this chapter.

Table 5.1

Number and Percentage of Turns for Each Participant

Participant	Number of Turns	Percentage of Discussion
Cheryl	52 turns	37%
Cleo	41 turns	28%
MaKiya	24 turns	17%
Suki	16 turns	11%
Valerie	10 turns	7%

Rage Times Fury (2004) is the story of Malik Ford, a young African American

father of two living in Brooklyn, New York, and the decision he must make about how to

respond when a neighborhood drug dealer shoots his son. In the story, up to this point,

Malik has strived to live a legitimate life outside of the drug and gang scene so prevalent

in his neighborhood. However, when his son is shot, Malik must decide whether or not to

take "street justice."

Most of the women's focus in this segment was on their shared view that elements

of *Rage Times Fury* do not realistically portray the actions of the characters in ways that

aligned with their lived experiences and cultural models. Their opinions were based on

the title, book description, and their own experiences, and they explored these through

retelling plot elements of the story. In addition, there was some discussion about the fit of the book title and cover art in relation to the plot and characters.

After a brief overview of intertextuality, I demonstrate through the analysis of the data set how the family constructed the argument that *Rage Times Fury* is a "bad book" and identified their criteria for evaluation, which they construct throughout their discussion.

Intertextuality

The notion of intertextuality provides a way to describe the complexity the Walker women demonstrate as they engage in and talk about *Rage Times Fury*. Building from a foundation established in Chapter Four of the social functions of the Walkers' reading habits and the collaborative nature of their discussion, intertextuality provides a way to identify the various links the Walkers make during their discussion, links that demonstrate their process of socially constructed meaning-making through their talk.

Although the "simple" definition of intertextuality is the juxtaposing of two texts (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993), in this chapter the use of intertextuality enables me to demonstrate a "broader view of social interactions as a linguistic process" (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, p. 305). I use intertextuality as a lens to understand and document Walkers' discussion, which demonstrates how their interactions with one another are embedded within a linguistic process where they co-create and share meaning. In the growing body of literary, linguistic, and educational research about intertextuality, few studies examine intertextuality in out-of-school reading contexts. What makes the notion of intertextuality so inviting in this case is that it helps to demonstrate the "multiple and complex juxtapositions of many different…texts" (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, p.

305), which are located in the speakers' language. I adapt Bloome and Egan-Robertson's (1993) approach, in which intertextuality is viewed "as a social construction, located in the social interactions that people have with each other" (p. 308). Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) outline their approach through the following five constructs:

(1) The basic analytic unit is not the individual but the interaction of a group….a person is acting and reacting in response to other people, what they have done, what they are doing, and what they will do.

(2) People act. That is, they are strategic in what they do, acting on the/their situation.

(3) People react. People react to actions in the immediate past, to actions that occurred sometime earlier, and to sets, groups, and patterns of action. People also react to future actions.

(4) The actions and reactions people take to each other are not necessarily linear and they are not necessarily contiguous.

(5) People may act and react to each other through sequences of actions and not just through a single act. (p. 308-309)

These are important constructs for my analysis because they help me understand that the Walker women's engagement and sharing of Urban Literature books is more significant than is immediately apparent. As Thein (2009) discusses in her analysis of a working-class White adolescent's engagement with school-sanctioned literature, the Walker women's talk about Urban literature is "narrow or limited by academic standards" (p. 287). Much like Molly, in Thein's study, the Walkers primarily share their opinions based upon their reactions to the portrayal and actions of the character. Specifically, their reactions form the criteria they create for not liking *Rage Times Fury* (2004) and are based on their reactions to the main character, Malik, and the degree to which his actions adhere to their cultural models. As established in Chapter Four, part of their cultural model involves the desire to take control in order to protect one's family. Another part of

their cultural model emphasizes the importance of how a person's attitude influences

their actions. The degree to which the main character and his actions adhere to their

cultural models influence the content of their talk. For example, the majority of the

intertextual links the Walkers' make in this segment are ones based upon their lived

worlds (Thein, 2009) as low-income African American women from the South Side of

Chicago.

As such, not only do their reading choices reflect who they are and where they

have come from, but so do the ways in which they interact and *read* as they discuss the

text. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) state,

> From this perspective, language is always social, inseparable from the social
> contexts (social actions and reactions) of which it is part (Labov, 1972). It is
> through language that social relationships come into being (e.g., parents-
> son/daughter; teacher-student), social acts are created, conducted and organized
> (e.g., marriage, graduation, litigation, education), and social groups are formed
> (e.g., through names such as *class, team, family*; and through use of lexicons,
> registers, and dialects associated with class ethnicity and gender (p. 309).

Therefore, this perspective of intertextuality reveals *how* the Walker women read and

discuss the text through their language, which in many respects reflects who they are as

they constitute themselves through their reading and language practices.

Intertextual Analysis of the Data Segment

One element of intertextuality that the Walker women display often is "competing

intertextual connections." According to Varelas and Pappas (2006) intertextual

connections are the following:

> …the juxtaposing of other texts to any current text being read and discussed. In
> the context of our research, intertextuality means making sense of the "texts"
> from other contexts that [people] bring to, and instantiate in, …the sessions of the
> unit as they juxtapose these meanings with the meanings from current texts. (p.
> 215)

In this study, as in others, text is not limited to books, but has a broader definition. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) define text as "the product of *textualizing*. People textualize experience and the world they live in, making those phenomena part of a language system (broadly defined)" (p. 311). For my purposes, the very language the participants use during their discussion forms a text of its own. Therefore, even when the women do not literally juxtapose two physical texts (e.g., books), the discussion itself forms a text based on their choices and uses of language. The text that composes their discussion is juxtaposed throughout the data segment with the (book) text and other texts that are more experiential than physically tangible. According to Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993),

> Text can be written, oral, signed, electronic, pictorial, etc. A text can refer to a string of words, a conversational or written routine or structure (such as sharing-time routines), a genre of written language (e.g., poetry), as well as a genre of social activities or event types (e.g., eating events). (p. 311)

Table 5.2 provides a list of the various texts the Walkers link to as they collaboratively construct meaning from and evaluate *Rage Times Fury* within the segment. See Table 5.2 below.

I chose a 6 min 16 sec segment of the 1 hr 17 min 11 sec discussion when the intertextual links, dimensions of intertextuality, and main focus on the talk were straightforward and clear. In addition, within the context of "having a book discussion," this segment contains recurrent elements of school-like book discussions with one person guiding the discussion through questions and probes and others responding with various degrees of school-like language and support for their points of view. Lastly, in terms of talking about what they *did not like* about the book, it is a segment that differentiates what constitutes "good" Urban Literature as opposed to "bad" Urban Literature according

Table 5.2

List of the Text Links Used During the Analyzed Segment of the Walkers' Discussion

Text	Description
School Discourse	This relates to the ways in which participants use probing and clarifying questions much like those teachers use in classroom-based literature discussions. This also positions the participant as the discussion facilitator.
Text—*Rage Times Fury*	These are specific references to events or aspects within the text itself.
Personal Experience	This refers to opinions, beliefs, values, and perspectives shared based on the participants' actual experiences.
Family Membership	Based on their cultural models which are situated within their lived worlds, this refers to attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions that align to their experiences of what it means to be a member of the family.
Urban Literature	This refers to opinions, beliefs, values, and perspectives shared based on other Urban Literature books or on the participants' knowledge and experiences reading Urban Literature novels.
"Street" Practice	Based on their cultural models which are situated within their lived worlds, this refers to attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions that align to their experiences about how people who are part of the "street" or "gang" culture act and react .
Low-Income African American Community Knowledge	Based on the cultural models that are situated within their lived worlds, this refers to attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions that align with their experiences of how people who live in low-income "ghettos," like those depicted in Urban Literature novels, act and react.

to the Walker women.

Elements of Turn Taking

Although specifics regarding the methods used to analyze the data are in Chapter

Three, Methodology, it is important to define some key terms needed to understand how

the data was studied, coded, and analyzed. Each turn is identified with the speaker's

initials and the relationship between the speaker and primary addressee. I chose to

examine the data turn-by-turn because I was interested in how the Walker women built

shared meaning, and juxtaposed their meanings as they talked to one another. Whole turns included visible elements of speakers juxtaposing, sharing, and building meaning and understanding from one another.

In the sections that follow, using each participant's turn as a unit of analysis, I describe the elements of their turns according to Form, Function/Strategy, Intertextual Dimensions, and Intertextual Links. I identified the relationship between the speaker and the "addressee" because the situational context affected *what* was said and *how* it was said. I was able to identify the primary addressee through careful review of the video recording. Appendix D is a diagram of the turn-by turn description and analysis of the 6 min 16 sec segment of the Walker family's discussion of *Rage Times Fury*.

Form and Function/Strategy

In the coding the segment of discussion used for analysis in this chapter, "form" names the kind of message in a turn, for example a question, statement, or response. This is important to note because each individual message unit is part of the process of making meaning. Function/strategies are the linguistic, communicative function or strategy used within the turn (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993). Identifying the speaker and addressee, and the function or strategy of a given turn puts each turn into relationship with the turns before it. As Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) argue, "…participants themselves must use what has previously occurred in the event as well as the message unit itself to understand what is being done at the time" (p. 314). Identifying the function/strategy of each turn revealed the intertextual (or lack of intertextual) relationship between turns and showed how turns were related.

In some cases, one participant's turn had more than one function. Table 5.3 shows

Turns 6–11, when four participants interacted with one another, and their turns

represented more than one function/strategy. See Table 5.3 below.

Table 5.3

Excerpt of the Data Segment of Turns 6–11 Describing Form and Function/Strategy.

Turn	Speaker	Form	Function	Function	Function	Strategy	Transcript
6	Cleo	Question				Probing	So you think the title should have been different and you would've liked it?
7	Cheryl	Response	Opinion	Disagreeing			Ah, no, I still wouldn't have like it!
8	MaKiya	Statement	Eval/ Assessing	Opinion		Gaining the floor	The book should've been different!
9	Suki	Statement	Eval/ Assessing	Opinion	Agreeing		The book should have been WAY different!
10	Cheryl	Other	Other				Because w… [overlapped]
11	Cleo	Question	Request	Extending Prior Point		Probing	[Overlapping] What's the name of that book?

Within these few exchanges, the Walker women employed a variety of functions

and strategies. Meaning that each individual turn served different purposes and created

different relationships between that turn and the previous turn(s). I coded turns as

"strategies" when it seemed that the participant positioned herself beyond the role of

discussion member (whether as a full participant, peripheral participant, or discussion facilitator). I use the term strategy to recognize that the speaker strategically chose to add another element to the discussion, such as in turn 6 when Cleo started the segment with a question about the title. In doing so, Cleo is both responding to her mother's comment about the title while at the same time opening up additional explanations for why Cheryl did not like the book. For the most part, MaKiya positioned herself as a peripheral member and did not seek to actively engage and assert her membership in the discussion. In Turn 8, after several turns in which she said nothing, she contributes to the discussion with a statement about the title *Rage Times Fury*. She expressed that it was not just a matter of the title needing to be different in order for her to have enjoyed the book, but that, as she stated emphatically, "The book should've been different!" In this moment, she took center stage. This moment is given more significance when her point is echoed by her sister Suki (who also remains quiet during much of the discussion), who substantiates MaKiya's claim. To turn attention back to the title discussion as well as to make her own assessment, Cleo closed the segment with a request for information by asking, "What's the name of that book?" By asking for the title, again, she called attention to it, and prompted herself and the others to consider the title in relation to the story more explicitly than they had previously. These are strategic statements and questions that slightly changed the orientation and topic of the discussion, which in this segment is about the disconnect between the title and the story.

Function describes *how* the speaker responded to the addressee. For example, in Turn 7, Cheryl's first response to Cleo's question was disagreement—in this case with Cleo's suggestion that changing the title of the book (presumably in order to better fit the

story) would have made her like the book. The same turn has the function of stating an opinion that supports why she thinks that the title itself was not why she didn't like the book. However, a single turn can have more than one function, such as in Turn 8 when MaKiya made the statement, "The book should've been different!" she stated an opinion as she simultaneously provided an evaluation or assessment of the book itself. Another example is Suki's Turn 9. Although Suki repeated MaKiya's earlier statement, she also added emphasis by stating "WAY" to the statement. In doing so she added agreement to her evaluation/assessment and opinion. Lastly, in Turn 11, Cleo's question seems to both intentionally turn the discussion back to the book title, which is where this segment started, but she also requests information. In this way, Cleo extended her question of whether or not Cheryl would have liked the book better if the title had been different and introduce a question pertaining to the relationship between the book title and their expectations for reading the book. These functions demonstrate the linguistic and communicative relationships between participants' turns in response to one another as well as in response to the larger context of the discussion. Essentially, here the Walkers are exploring whether or not a different title would have improved their reading of the book. They seem to agree that this text needed more than a title change in order for them to consider it a good book.

Intertextual Dimensions

This section will describe the intertextual dimensions of the data segment in which the Walker women discuss why *Rage Times Fury* is not a good book. Identifying how each turn is related to the next helps establish the relationship between them, which is important to establishing intertextuality. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) state,

"People, interacting with each other, construct intertextual relationships by the ways they act and react to each other. An intertextual relationship is proposed, recognized, acknowledged, and has social consequence" (p. 311). In the following example, consider how one idea grew from one participant to the others. It is important to note, however, that the process of recognizing and acknowledging is not necessarily an overt or conscious move on the part of the participants (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993). Rather, the interpretation of these connections between turns resides in the interpretation of the social situation and context. In other words, the Walkers' are not explicitly attempting to propose, recognize, and acknowledge each other's intertextual links. They are instead involved in a discussion where their overlaps and subsequent comments to each other act as recognition and acknowledgement. My knowledge of their background and the context leading to this discussion supports this argument.

In this section, Cheryl, Cleo, MaKiya, and I discussed the shooting of Malik's son. This excerpt followed a discussion about how easily, from the beginning of the book, Cheryl and Suki predicted that someone would get shot.

44   **MaKiya:** It was stupid because he, um, took them to the park and had them walk around, but then he felt like something wrong was gonna happen, but then he left them outside.

45   **Cheryl:** Exactly. But he, he didn't leave them outside by theyself. They was outside wit' his um, with they auntie.

46   **Valerie:** Wasn't it their grandmother?

47   **MaKiya:** Auntie.

48   **Cheryl:** No, it was their auntie. It was um, his girl's sister and that's when he got shot. That's when the baby got shot, got shot by, and you know who did it. There would be no calm in me. None. He was too calm. [slightly overlapped]

49   **Cleo:** [slightly overlapped] He knew who did it?

50   **Cheryl:** He knew who did it. He knew wh-, he knew exactly who to go to ta settle the score. [slightly overlapped by CP xxxxx] He was too calm wit' it.

51   **Cleo:** With who, did he settle it?

52   **Cheryl:** Yeah, he settled it, but it wasn't [overlapped]

53   **Cleo:** [overlapping] It wasn't dramatic like it would have been if it was another book.

54   **Cheryl:** Right! You know when you say rage and fury, that means you jus' goin' off.

55   **Cleo:** [overlapping] Yeah.

56   **Cheryl:** That all you see is rage [overlapped]

57   **Cleo:** [overlapping] Rage, hmmm mmm.

58   **Cheryl:** [overlapping] there's not calm.

59   **Cleo:** [overlapping] 'Specially when your child got shot. Hold on nigga, you got me, hmmm mmm.

60   **Cheryl:** Yo' baby in there fightin' for his life. (book discussion, May 17, 2011)

Proposition, Recognition, and Acknowledgement

I selected Turns 44–60 to demonstrate the concepts of proposition, recognition, and acknowledgement that resulted in some degree of social significance. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) state, "[i]n order to determine what constitutes the interactional unity, researchers must use the same contextualization cues available to the participants" (p. 314). Therefore, in this case, I used my knowledge of *Mina's Joint* and *Rage Times Fury*, my familiarity with background information about the Walkers and their experiences in Chicago prior to moving to Prairie Heights, and my awareness of

references they make to experiences, events, and in some cases (not applicable in this case) to other texts.

The initial turn in this segment (Turn 44) began a new topic when MaKiya made the point that the plot and the characters' motivations didn't make sense from what she knows about similar neighborhoods, and the explicit foreshadowing that occurred in the book. In this turn, MaKiya shifted the discussion from identifying where Malik and his family lived in terms of the kind of neighborhood and how Cheryl and Cleo came to know this, to focus on Malik's choices and actions.

In her initiation of a new topic, MaKiya proposed that given the dangerous nature of the neighborhood, Malik's action of allowing his children to play in the park did not fit the situation, especially since he already had a feeling something bad was going to happen. MaKiya juxtaposed the actions and motives of Malik's character with her own personal knowledge of living in similar neighborhoods—this was established a few turns before this section—and also of other "typical" responses from members of similar communities.[2] Although the other two "texts" are not written texts, they certainly are "genre[s] of social activities" and meanings that MaKiya used to inform her reading of the novel.

Since MaKiya's comment represents a non-sequential comment—in that it does not immediately connect with the comment before it regarding "where they stayed"— others within the group could have ignored it. However, Bloome and Egan-Robertson

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[2] For example, when I was a young child, my mother often did not allow me to play outside when we lived in neighborhoods that were prone to violence or other activities she did not want me to witness or be cognizant of. A decision to protect children by keeping them inside, or only allowing them to go outside when supervised by a trusted adult, is very familiar for parents who live in poor and/or violent neighborhoods.

(1993) argue, "The identification of recognition and acknowledgement may involve explicit statements, or actions based on implied recognition and acknowledgement" (p. 319). Cheryl's response, "Exactly…" indicates her recognition that MaKiya's point was an appropriate juxtaposition of texts. In order to assist with better marking instances of instant connection between recognition and acknowledgement, I label the instances of recognition and acknowledgement to show the connection. Table 5.4 demonstrates the intertextual dimensions of Turns 44–60. See Table 5.4 below.

Building from MaKiya's Turn 44, in Turn 46, my contribution to this segment of the discussion was a question intended to clarify MaKiya's comment regarding who supervised the children outside, which furthered the interaction. However, the important point between recognition and acknowledgement is that one speaker recognizes Cheryl's juxtaposed text during Turn 48 when she further clarified that it was indeed the aunt, not the grandmother as I had thought, who was with the children. This is interesting because in this turn, Cheryl recognized MaKiya's original comment from Turn 44 as well as my question from Turn 46. She simultaneously acknowledged both turns at the same time, and she furthered the discussion by pointing out that Malik's response to the shooting was not realistic because, as she said, "There would be no calm in me. None…" at the end of Turn 48. Cleo picked up and changed the question slightly in Turn 49 regarding whether or not Malik knew who shot his son, which was discussed further in Turns 50, 51, and 52. Yet, MaKiya's original point in Turn 44 about the lack of realism resurfaced in Turn 53 when Cleo juxtaposed the plot and "drama" of *Rage Times Fury* against the genre of Urban Literature when she said, "It wasn't dramatic like it would have been if it was another book."

Table 5.4

Excerpt of the Data Segment of Turns 44–60 Describing Intertextual Dimensions
Regarding Proposition, Recognition, and Acknowledgement.

Turn	Speaker	Intertextual Dimension	Transcript
44	MaKiya	Proposition	It was stupid because he, um, took them to the park and had them walk around, but then he felt like something wrong was gonna happen, but then he left them outside.
45	Cheryl	Recognition	Exactly./But he, he didn't leave them outside by theyself. They was outside wit' his um, with they auntie.
46	Valerie		Wasn't it their grandmother?
47	MaKiya		Auntie.
48	Cheryl	Recognition	No, it was their auntie. It was um, his girl's sister and that's when he got shot. That's when the baby got shot, got shot by, and you know who did it. There would be no calm in me. None. He was too calm. [slightly overlapped]
49	Cleo		[slightly overlapped] He knew who did it?
50	Cheryl	Acknowledgement	He knew who did it. He knew wh-, he knew exactly who to go to ta settle the score. [slightly overlapped by CP [xxxxx] He was too calm wit' it.
51	Cleo	Recognition	With who, did he settle it?
52	Cheryl	Acknowledgement	Yeah, he settled it, but it wasn't [overlapped]
53	Cleo	Acknowledgement	[overlapping] It wasn't dramatic like it would have been if it was another book.
54	Cheryl	Acknowledgement	Right! You know when you say rage and fury, that means you jus' goin' off.
55	Cleo		[overlapping] Yeah.
56	Cheryl	Acknowledgement	That all you see is rage [overlapped]
57	Cleo		[overlapping] Rage, hmmm mmm.
58	Cheryl	Acknowledgement	[overlapping] there's not calm.
59	Cleo	Acknowledgement	[overlapping] 'Specially when your child got shot. Hold on nigga, you got me, hmmm mmm.
60	Cheryl	Recognition	Yo' baby in there fightin' for his life.

This is the pivotal argument in the women's discussion about why *Rage Times*

Fury is not a good book. The participants were working out to what extent the events and

emotions of the characters fit the title of the book, *Rage Times Fury,* and made it a good or bad book. The participants proposed, recognized, and acknowledged in their respective turns to build a shared understanding and meaning for the book and their points of view and understandings of the book. The segment started with MaKiya's proposal that the book was stupid because Malik's actions did not fit what she knows about people's actions in violent neighborhoods where they are trying to survive with themselves and their kids intact. In Turns 54–60, the other Walker women recognize and acknowledge MaKiya's juxtapositions of texts and conclude that Malik's actions and emotions did not fit with the significance the situation as they evaluate the text based on their cultural models.

Social Significance and Identity Frames

The next dimension of intertextuality is social significance. Adapting Bloome and Egan-Robertson's (1993) notion of this dimension, I marked the social significance whenever a participant's turn implicitly or explicitly recognized the significance of an earlier turn which contributed, extended, and even refuted elements of the discussion. I acknowledge how the talk shows how the participants define themselves and their social positions as readers. In doing so, I focus on identity frames. According to Cynthia Gordon (2009),

> The notion of *frame* (or an "interactive frame") can be understood as "a definition of what is going on in interaction" (Tannen & Wallat 1993: 59). Interlocutors must have a shared sense of this definition to create mutual understanding of individual utterances as well as activities in general. Because meaning-making entails looking beyond the boundaries of a single text or conversation, framing is, I suggest, best understood as inextricably intertwined with intertextuality. (p. 11)

Therefore I coded the turns as "identity frames" that link turns to the ways the Walker women identified themselves as readers. In other words, I tried to identify the times when the Walkers' turn established them within particular identities within the discussion.

In terms of the social context, the Walker women expected conversations with me to be school- or education-related, and in the initial stages of gaining consent, two members asked if this was "going to be like school" or "going to be like the program" (field notes, November 20, 2010). The women constructed themselves as readers. In several instances Cheryl makes a point to say that they all have library cards, "which is more than you can say for most" (personal interview, December 2, 2010]), and more specifically, they construct themselves as readers of Urban Literature. This identity frame (Gordon, 2009) is embedded in the types of talk regarding the content and language of their turns as well as the intertextual links they make.[3]

In Turns 44–60, there were a number of instances when participants placed social significance in a previous turn in order to position themselves within certain identity frames. Gordon's (2009) study of intertextuality within a family setting identifies the term *frames* as the following:

> … a means of exploring how human beings make sense of—and create—everyday situations. Goffman (1981:52) suggests that as participants create frames, they also construct particular *footings* which can be conceptualized as alignments between participants as well as between participants and topics of talk. (as cited in Gordon, 2009, p. 12)

In addition to framing themselves as readers, and readers of Urban Literature, the Walker women also constructed themselves as students who internalized and at times resisted the conventions and expectations of school, or school-like values about Urban Literature.

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[3] The next section will explore the concept and use of intertextual links.

The identity frames I identified throughout the book discussion included the following:

Reader, Urban Literature Reader, Discussion Participant, Discussion Facilitator, African

American Community Member, and Family Membership. These frames and social

constructs shaped the content of what was said and the types of juxtapositions the Walker

women used throughout the discussion. A key example occurred in Turn 50 when Cheryl

stated,

> 50   **Cheryl:** He knew who did it. He knew wh-, he knew exactly who to go to
> ta settle the score. [slightly overlapped by CP xxxxx] He was too calm
> wit' it. (book discussion, May 17, 2011)

Cheryl recognized the social significance of MaKiya's comment about the stupidity of

Malik's decision to allow his children to play outside. Cheryl extended MaKiya's point

by emphasizing that Malik understood who was responsible the moment his son was shot.

Her comment gave social significance to MaKiya's point and constructed herself within

the context of being a member of an African American community similar to the one

portrayed in the book. She did this with the words "settling the score," in that it is

important not to appear to be a pushover.

Cheryl's childhood and adolescent experiences with violence were established as

cultural models in Chapter Four. In Cheryl's figured world, she does not want her

children to respond with violence, and she has explicitly taught them how to use talk to

resolve situations. She states, "Although I'm for if you're provoked enough, then you do

whatever you have to do to defend yourself. By all means, do not be a pushover, but

definitely defend yourself" (personal interview, December 2, 2010). In this way, through

her language she further constructs herself as an African American who has grown up in

a community where, although regrettable, violence is sometimes necessary in order to

address or resolve a conflict. In this way, appearing to be a "pushover" is more damaging than the consequence of using violence.

In more affluent, middle-class neighborhoods, law enforcement is believed to be the best means to handle situations when harm is inflicted on one person by another. However, in economically disenfranchised neighborhoods like those depicted in *Rage Times Fury*, which often have a somewhat adversarial relationship with law enforcement, the police are not looked upon as willing or able to resolve or solve crimes such as shootings. Therefore, on the "street" or in the "ghetto," it is not uncommon for people to handle such events by retaliating. One of Cheryl's cultural models involves a distrust about how law enforcements handles similar situations. Regarding the time Cheryl's son was assaulted which led her to decide to move to Iowa, Cheryl stated,

> I put on my work clothes…We had to wear all black, so I put on my work clothes. Immediately, the police officers thought that I was out to do some crime cause I was wearing all black. (personal interview, December 2, 2010)

Following the incident, her lawyer advised her to plead guilty. She followed this approach:

> And I prayed that week I had to go to court, and, 'cause they charged me with disorderly conduct and assault with a weapon. Now mind you, I'm I'm no lawyer, but, you know, you got to produce some evidence. Where's the bat that I supposed to hit her wit', is my fingerprints on that bat? That was my first thing. The lawyer looked at me like I was crazy. No, I ain't crazy. Produce the bat. Produce the fingerprints. We, we takin' it all the way through, 'cause I'm not pleading for nothing. (personal interview, December 2, 2010)

My point in repeating these statements is that, within the Walkers' discussion about Malik's responses, these cultural models are "taken-for-granted understandings" that reveal Cheryl's values and beliefs regarding violence and law enforcement. There is no need for any of the Walkers to make these links explicitly within the discussion.

Exploring the ways the Walkers use language to build on each other's statements reveals

social significance and identity frames the Walkers draw upon in their responses to the

events and characters' actions.

Cheryl's comment, "He was too calm wit it," constructed her as an Urban

Literature reader because, as her daughter says in Turn 53, this book does not exhibit the

same level of realism and drama as other books, presumably Urban Literature books.

Cheryl and her daughters spoke about a time when Cy'Marie was being harassed at

school. When the situation finally came to a head, her sisters, Chanel and Cleo, went to

the school to help defend their sister, which caused the school authorities to want to

suspend Chanel and Cleo from school. Cheryl's response was the following:

> "No, 'cause I've warned you for several years about these same little girls." And
> I've told 'em, when they get tired, you ain't gonna be able to stop 'em, I'm not
> gonna be able to stop 'em. So, it, it was a lot. And then theys was like, "Well yeah
> we should've did somethin." I don't wanna hear about what you should've done,
> they not getting suspended, suspension need ta come off they record. (personal
> interview, December 2, 2010)

In this context, Cheryl's statement regarding Malik's calmness fits in the identity frame

as Family Membership, meaning that to be a member of the family, you must protect and

defend your family, which is situated within the social and cultural practices that inform

Cheryl and her daughters' cultural models based on their lived worlds.

Cleo was the primary addressee for much of what Cheryl said (and vice versa),

even though Cleo and Cheryl recognized and acknowledged MaKiya's proposition in

Turn 44. In Turn 59, Cleo said,

> 59   **Cleo:** [overlapping] 'Specially when your child got shot. Hold on
>   nigga, you got me, hmmm mmm. (book discussion, May 17, 2011)

In Turn 59, Cleo's response is directly connected to MaKiya's Turn 44, as well as Turns 45, 48, and 50, and especially those between Turns 53 and 58. As the heart of the discussion, Cleo's statement is a recognition and acknowledgment, which Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) consider necessary elements of intertextuality. Cleo draws from the identity frame Family Membership much as Cheryl does in the preceding comment. By saying, "Hold on nigga, you got me…," Cleo invoked a strong African American community member affiliation. This is especially punctuated by her use of the "N-word," which within the African American community, generally, is an allowable way to describe themselves and other Black people, for dramatic effect, and as a derogatory expletive. (For someone outside of the community to use such terms is considered racist.) Like Cheryl, Cleo acknowledged and gave social significance to the lack of adequate connection between the portrayal of the plot and character development in the *Rage Times Fury* to the experiences she had in similar neighborhoods and as a member of her family, where blood is thicker than water.

Repetition

Lastly, in my analysis of this portion of the discussion, I noted the degree to which the Walker women repeated each other. Gordon (2009) notes that repetition is an important way of connecting within a family through language. Specifically, Gordon states,

> …repetition, especially intertextual repetition, functions as a means of binding people together…because it is a metalinguistic strategy; it directs a hearer or reader back into their memory as if to say, "Pay attention to this again" (Johnstone et al.,1994: 13). It thus affirms interlocutors' shared history, mutual access to a set of prior texts, and membership to the same group. In doing so, it aids in the creation of what Tannen (2007 [1989]: 12) calls *involvement*, which refers to "an internal, even emotional connection individuals feel which binds

them to other people as well as to places, things, activities, ideas, memories, and words"…. (p. 10)

Even though I selected a very short example, within the 145-turn segment, there were some instances of repetition. In Turns 56 and 57, Cleo echoed Cheryl's emphasis about the degree of rage that one might expect from a man whose child is innocently shot in a drive-by.

56 **Cheryl:** That all you see is rage [overlapped]

57 **Cleo:** [overlapping] Rage, hmmm mmm (book discussion, May 17, 2011)

Like Gordon (2009), I take these instances, however small, to be moments when the Walker women rhetorically connected and affirmed one another throughout the discussion through the use of repetition.

Intertextual Links

As stated earlier, an essential part of intertextuality is juxtaposing different texts within a social interaction. Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) argue,

In comprehending a written text, students bring to the reading comprehension task their experiences in reading other texts (Cairney, 1990; Hartman, 1991, in press), influenced by various classroom factors (Short, 1986, in press). The intertextual links they make may be at a variety of levels (content, text structure, genre) and of various complexity and explicitness. (p. 307)

I believe the same kinds of connections and experiences happen outside the classroom, like those I observed within the Walker household. When we as educational researchers begin to examine the literacy practices and skills used, developed, and extended within the home, we can use such perspectives to better inform our classroom interactions. Therefore, I selected a segment of the data that expresses the heart of the conversation: the lack of emotional drama and connection between what they thought the book would

be and what it actually was. The "texts" that were the most prevalent included school discourse, the text *Rage Times Fury*, personal experience, Urban Literature, family membership, and African American cultural knowledge.

Table 5.5 describes the intertextual links the Walker women used as this segment of the discussion drew to a close and as they built meaning about why they agreed that *Rage Times Fury* is not a good book. See Table 5.5 below. Several "texts" were evident in the Walker family's discussion. Within Turns 124–145, the predominant texts links made were direct references to *Rage Times Fury*, personal experiences, cultural models of what it means to be a member of a family, references to Urban Literature in general, and references to the Walkers' cultural models and lived worlds as participants in African American culture.

It is notable that not every participant made multiple intertextual links. In fact, there are several turns, such as 129, 135, 139, 140, 142, and 145, that do not involve any intertextual links at all. However, as noted in Table 5.5, it was typical for the Walkers to have two to three intertextual references within a single turn. For example, in Turn 124, Cheryl returned to the title to state that it does not match the plot elements of the book and the emotion and drama she predicted for the characters. In order to take this position, Cheryl referred directly to the title when she said "it says" which signified that she was talking directly about the book. Then in her second short sentence, "When you say rage times furys…," which was overlapped by her daughter's next comment, she used "you" which not only indirectly includes herself but presents a broader cultural and local knowledge. In order to do so, she drew from her own experiences and lived worlds, her cultural models revealing her values and beliefs, and expanded on her comments earlier

Table 5.5

Excerpt of the Data Segment of Turns 124–129 Describing Intertextual Links

Turn	Speaker	Link 1	Link 2	Link 3	Link 4	Transcript
124	Cheryl	Text	Family Membership	Urban Literature	AA Cultural Knowledge	[Overlapping] it says rage times fury. When you say rage times furys, [Overlapped]
125	Suki	Text	Family Membership	Urban Literature	AA Cultural Knowledge	[Overlapping] There was no rage or no fury anywhere in there.
126	Cheryl	Text	Personal Experience	Urban Literature	AA Cultural Knowledge	you ask anybody what that means.
127	MaKiya	Text	Personal Experience	Urban Literature	AA Cultural Knowledge	DRAMA [over emphasizing both syllable] to the core.
128	Cheryl		Personal Experience	Urban Literature	Family Membership	I mean, rage times fury, that's to the utmost. [CP makes a comment not caught on audio and SB and MS laugh in response] There's no calm. It's like straightforward. You don't see, you don't see the actual, you don't see the [turns towards CP and MS, MS and SB start laughing]
129	Cleo					You can finish talkin'.

Table 5.5

Continued Excerpt of the Data Segment of Turns 130 –137 Describing Intertextual Links

Turn	Speaker	Link 1	Link 2	Link 3	Link 4	Transcript
130	Cheryl	Personal Experience	Family Membership			You don't see the, um, what is it, you don't see the logic behind things when you say rage times fury. Logic, [overlapped]
131	Valerie	Text	Personal Experience			[Overlapping] He was very calculating.
132	Cheryl	Personal Experience	Family Membership	Urban Literature	AA Cultural Knowledge	logic don't come into play.
133	Valerie	Text	Personal Experience	"Street" Practices		But did you, like at least admire the fact that, he might not have been as angry as you wanted him to be, but at least he was tryin' to be smart about how he got his revenge? [MS and SB are whispering little things as I talk.]
134	Cleo	Urban Literature				How he being smart, ain't nobody [overlapped slightly]
135	MaKiya					Yeah but
136	Cleo	Text	Family Membership			your child got, it was self-defense.
137	Cheryl	Text	Personal Experience	Urban Literature		He was, it was smart the way he got revenge [overlapped]

Table 5.5

Continued Excerpt of the Data Segment of Turns 138–145 Describing Intertextual Links

Turn	Speaker	Link 1	Link 2	Link 3	Link 4	Transcript
138	Cleo	Text	Personal Experience			[Overlapping] I knew he was angry.
139	Cheryl					But
140	Valerie					But
141	Cheryl	Text	Family Membership	Urban Literature	AA Cultural Knowledge	It doesn't match the title.
142	Cleo					Oh you [she turns her head away from the camera and audio recording and is overlapped]
143	MaKiya	Text	Personal Experience	Urban Literature	AA Cultural Knowledge	[Overlapping] It could have been smart and dramatic at the same time.
144	Cheryl	Text	Family Membership	Urban Literature	AA Cultural Knowledge	Right, it didn't have no dr, drama into it. It was not dramatic at all.
145	Cleo					CP: Her dress match that tree.

in the discussion when she stated emphatically that her own anger would have eclipsed

main character, Malik. Suki, in Turn 125 extended Cheryl's point by saying, "There was

no rage or no fury anywhere in there" which similarly drew on a shared reference to

personal experiences and lived worlds, her cultural models revealing her shared values

and beliefs, knowledge and understanding of Urban Literature and as co-participant in

African American culture.

Essentially Turns 124–145, as well as the entire 6 min16 sec segment, demonstrate why the Walker women felt that *Rage Times Fury* did not fit well within the larger genre of Urban Literature: It failed to depict the drama and believability of other books like *Mina's Joint*. Malik, his wife, and even his lifestyle as they were written do not match the Walkers' personal experiences in similar neighborhoods or nor their own or other characters' lives in other Urban Literature books. It is not a matter of changing the title, as Cleo initially suggested in Turn 6, rather, as MaKiya expressed and Suki repeated, "The book should've been different!" Turns 124–145 reveal the intertextual links between the various "texts" they juxtaposed in order to form the building blocks of meaning and understanding that helped them draw their conclusion, "there was no fury anywhere in there" (Turn 125).

Within their 145-turn discussion segment, the Walkers' talk about *Rage Times Fury* reveals that their evaluation and opinions about the weakness of this text are embedded in their cultural models and lived worlds. In their discussion, they draw upon sometimes explicit, but more often implicit beliefs, values and frames of reference in their creation an intertextual discussion. They drew these conclusions by tapping into the following:

1. Their experiences in Chicago neighborhoods similar to those depicted in the book;

2. Their belief in the cultural model of not acting as a pushover and the need for families to stick together, which informs their understanding of the code of conduct and/or "street code" in such neighborhoods;

3. Their wider experiences reading Urban Literature and other books, which help them to see the foreshadowing so early in the book that Suki decided not to read past the first few pages because, "I predicted that at the beginning" (Turn 24).

Conclusion

I adapted the procedures from Bloome and Egan-Robertson's (1993) study of intertextuality to understand the collaborative nature of how the Walker women talk about books. I closely analyzed one 6 min16 sec segment of the Walker women's discussion of *Rage Times Fury*. The analysis identifies the family's cultural and social intertexual connections, which reflects their literacy strengths. Within this segment the women take turns proposing new points, responding to them, questioning and probing further thoughts and in doing so, build intertextual links from their own experiences, knowledge, and cultural models that comprise the various "texts" of their lives. This analysis of their intertextual links showed how the Walkers used intertextuality in their talk to achieve the following:

1. Define themselves as readers and students—but even more to defined themselves as avid readers of Urban Literature;

2. Use methods such as repetition to strengthen their bonds as members of the same family;

3. Identify and validate their cultural models and prior lived experiences based on their shared social and historical perspectives.

The main goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that this family of African American women holds complex and often critical discussions about the content, character development, and overall realism of the literature they read.

CHAPTER SIX

READING OUR LIVES

I started this case study as an outgrowth of a phenomenon I observed with some of the girls who participated in a summer enrichment program for African American high school students that I founded and directed from 2008 to 2011. Each morning before class started, a small group of girls talked about and sometimes shared Urban Literature books. One of the key purposes of the summer program is to offer a curriculum focused on African American literature and history and that honors African American culture. Therefore, each year, I selected texts like *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933) and *The Other Wes Moore* (2010) which I thought students would identify with and see aspects of themselves and their lives reflected in the material. However, each year, students complained about their lack of interest in the books and the difficulties they experienced making connections. This was true despite the fact that after the 2008 summer session, my assistant director and I began teaching single-gendered classes. My decision resulted in text selections intended to address the interests and needs of female African American students and included *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), *Laughing in the Dark* (1995), and *The Black Girl Next Door* (2009).

Therefore, when I began my study, naturally, I wanted to work with girls I knew from the program. In my initial discussion with a couple of the Walker girls, both of whom were participants in the program, I learned that reading Urban Literature was not just an activity that they, as teenage girls, participated in, but was something that their mother did as well. This intrigued me since much of what I read about Urban Literature claimed that African American women and girls aged 13–40 (Morris, et al., 2006) find

this genre appealing. Urban Literature appeared to be a topic that would help me understand the relationship between the Walkers' "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and reading. As I began the study I wondered why the Walkers were attracted to reading Urban Literature. What purpose did it serve or need did it fill?

What purpose does reading Urban Literature serve in the lives of the Walker women?

In Chapter Four, I discussed how reading is part of a larger social and cultural practice related to who the Walker women are and their social and cultural histories. As such, reading Urban Literature serves a larger purpose than just for pure entertainment, although that is one of the important social functions it serves (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994). An important element to understanding their attraction to Urban Literature is examining and understanding their cultural models (Thein, 2009; Gee, 1996) that are greatly influenced by the girls' having spent their formative years growing up in South Side Chicago. Their mother Cheryl describes her young life as a fight and struggle and expresses her desire for her children to grow up in a different environment. In addition, through their upbringing, the girls have come to create figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) wherein defining oneself on your own terms is important to knowing who you are and being able to direct your own course in life. In addition, life is full of important decisions that determine the outcome of your course in life, which is dependent upon the attitude you choose to have.

These are all elements the Walkers recognize in Urban Literature with themes and plots in which the characters, often women, struggle through difficult situations, and in the process, must make decisions that impact the direction of their lives. As such, these texts adhere to their cultural models related to their lived world and Chicago experiences,

lending an element of tangibility and believability to their reading of these texts. Although the Walkers did not exclusively read Urban Literature, it did compose the majority of their non-school reading. Understanding the Walkers' attraction to Urban Literature emphasizes the important role that out-of-school reading plays in the lives of young people. In addition, as an outgrowth of understanding children's "ways with words" (Heath, 1983), research further documenting adolescents' reading practices is increasingly important.

In addition to adhering to their cultural models, the Walkers reading Urban Literature served the following four key social functions:

1. as a connection to urban life;

2. as a form of entertainment;

3. as a collaborative activity;

4. as a means constructing and defining their own identities

These findings augment an understanding of the significance and purpose chosen books play in the Walkers' social and cultural practices. Reading Urban Literature helped to ease this African American family's transition when they chose to relocate to a small Midwestern community; it layered familiar elements of home and city life over what they described as their often boring and anticlimactic lives in Iowa. In addition, since Cheryl went to great lengths to separate herself from other African Americans who also moved from places like Chicago, without adopting what she felt was the attitude needed to create a different life for themselves, Urban Literature provided an element of catharsis that helped the Walker girls to avoid becoming involved in "drama" and other behaviors that their mother would have disapproved of. Reading, therefore, was a joint activity in which

the girls could all participate and share as they relied more on their immediate family than they did on outsiders. As such, this study suggests that girls like the Walkers demonstrate valuable purposes for why they choose to read some texts over others.

Lastly, this entire case study is embedded within the context of the Walkers' home. All the conversations, interviews, and the book discussion took place in this space, which is their own. Early in my data gathering, Cheryl shared with me that originally, when they first moved to Prairie Heights, they lived in an apartment close to The Village. Wanting to distance herself from people whom she considered as not having the right attitude, she worked closely with the Prairie Heights housing authority to find a different location. In all of my interactions with the Walkers through my summer program—since its inception in 2008—they continued to reside in the same rental house. As such, their residence had become a home, an inner sanctum. Marc Lamont Hill's (2011) study of Rasul, a popular West Philadelphia Black bookstore, refers to the notion of an inner sanctum as a "counterpublic space" (p. 39). In ways similar to Rasul's, the Walkers' home acted as a counterpublic space where they are able to "sustain the tradition of resistance, self-empowerment, and self-determination" (p. 49) within their own four walls. Similarly, Carmen Kynard (2010) in her study of the participants in a listserv used by African American female students attending a predominantly White university, referred to the virtual space it provided for these young ladies as a "hush harbor" (p. 30). Within this space, participants were able to "share and create knowledge and find their voices" (p. 30). Similarly, the Walkers' home acted like the hush harbor that united the Walkers in sharing a space where they were safe to be themselves. Therefore, reading Urban Literature, particularly within the confines of their own home, allowed them a

space and voice to exercise "…astute readings of the world [which] are based on their racial, gender, and other social identities and experiences" (Richardson, 2007).

How does the Walkers' talk about books reveal intertextual links between the text and their cultural models, and social and cultural lived worlds?

As I analyzed the data, I realized through the Walkers' retelling of book plots, as well as their evaluations of the texts, much of their overlapping talk created an intricate web of understanding that they continuously negotiated and substantiated as they participated within the discussion. Intertextuality (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993) provided a method and a lens for understanding the links that the Walkers made in their talk that I may have otherwise missed.

Although intertextuality is a growing socioculturally embedded analytical heuristic used to understand classroom interactions, much still is unexplored in terms of applying intertextuality to out-of-school contexts. As such, this study provides valuable insights into a naturally occurring book discussion between Cheryl and three of her daughters. The analysis of a six-and-a-half minute segment, which is from a longer discussion about two books, revealed that the Walkers made a number of intertextual connections between their lived worlds and *Rage Times Fury* juxtaposed against other Urban Literature novels, and elements of their cultural models. I connected data in the book discussion to cultural models, not as a formal methodological approach, but as way to mark instances where the Walkers relied upon their figured worlds in order to interpret the reading and link it to other "texts" in order to build and share meaning. As such, their talk about *Rage Times Fury* revealed a high degree of intertextuality as each participant

within this community of practice drew from multiple texts in order to evaluate whether *Rage Times Fury* was a good text.

In the context of the Walkers' discussion of *Rage Times Fury,* intertextuality provides a way to demonstrate how the Walkers socially construct shared meaning through juxtaposing various "texts" in their reading and talk. Table 6.1 lists the intertextual links the Walkers made during their discussion. See Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1

List of the Text Links Used During the Analyzed Segment of the Walkers' Discussion

Text	Description
School Discourse	This relates to the ways in which participants use probing and clarifying questions much like those teachers use in classroom-based literature discussions. This also positions the participant as the discussion facilitator.
Text—*Rage Times Fury*	These are specific references to events or aspects within the text itself.
Personal-Experience	This refers to opinions, beliefs, values, and perspectives shared based on the participants' actual experiences.
Family Membership	Based on their cultural models which are situated within their lived worlds, this refers to attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions that align to their experiences of what it means to be a member of the family.
Urban Literature	This refers to opinions, beliefs, values, and perspectives shared based on other Urban Literature books or on the participants' knowledge and experiences reading Urban Literature novels.
"Street" Practice	Based on their cultural models that are situated within their lived worlds, this refers to attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions that align to their experiences about how people who are part of the "street" or "gang" culture act and react.
Low-Income African American Community Knowledge	Based on their cultural models that are situated within their lived worlds, this refers to attitudes, beliefs, values, and opinions that align with their experiences of how people who live in low-income "ghettos," like those depicted in Urban Literature novels, act and react.

The analysis of their intertextual links showed how the Walkers used intertextuality in their talk to achieve the following:

1. Define themselves as readers and students—but even more to defined themselves as avid readers of Urban Literature;

2. Use methods such as repetition to strengthen their bonds as members of the same family;

3. Identify and validate their cultural models and prior lived experiences based on their shared social and historical perspectives.

Citing Rabinwitz and Smith (1990), Thein states, "…reading is like assembling and using an object, it's useful to understand both the kind of object one is putting together and the intended function of the object relative to other objects one has put together in the past" (p. 305). As the Walkers' discuss *Rage Times Fury* (2004) they assemble a shared meaning relative to their experiences. They determine that *Rage Times Fury* is not a good book because the main character's, Malik's, actions and reactions to his son's shooting do not align with their cultural models of what it means to protect a family member; how to not be perceived as a pushover; and other applicable socially and culturally embedded practices. These cultural models are juxtaposed against the text worlds of other Urban Literature texts, which more often than not, align more closely with their cultural models than *Rage Times Fury.* As such, this segment of the discussion captures the various intertextual links drawing upon school discourse, explicit references to the text *Rage Times Fury*, personal experiences, family membership, their knowledge and understanding of Urban Literature, and their cultural models of "the street" and African American communities such as the one depicted in the text.

This intertextual analysis of their talk about *Rage Times Fury* demonstrates the kinds of texts that the Walkers are accustomed to reading and the kinds of talk that such reading generates. The importance of this finding may apply to improving teachers' understanding that when they ask students to examine texts, they must attend to the kinds of links students make and the kinds of texts they choose to read out-of-school.

Though educational literature has focused attention on Urban Literature as an out-of-school literacy, much of the work remains conceptual in nature. For example, in her essay "Critical Readings: African American Girls and Urban Fiction," Gibson (2010) emphasizes the importance of finding a space within the classroom for urban literature. This study demonstrates that understanding how students like the Walkers *talk* about these books can achieve the following:

1. Legitimize their reading practices and encourage more interaction;

2. Create ways of connecting home and school;

3. Help students better engage in and find entry points into teachers' lessons.

Although evaluative in nature, the Walkers' talk reveals a web of understanding and collaborative meaning making when different participants participate in the shared construction rather than hover on the periphery or not participate at all. Though Suki initially positioned herself as a peripheral participant in the book discussion (which she said was because she did not read the book), when she asserted her right to full participation, her contributions were greeted and responded to as if she was always a full participant. In addition, the sheer speed at which they discussed and the degree of overlapping talk reveal that the Walkers were fully engaged in the discussion, proposing

and building on one another's comments so rapidly that they often overlapped one another.

As a former high school teacher, analyzing this discussion has helped me to understand the importance of allowing a conversation to naturally develop. Though it may seem "narrow or limited by academic standards" (Thein, 2009, p. 287), participants' responses reveal more about their lives and the way they see and experience the world.

Implications for Further Research

The study suggests that more needs to be done to invite the issues and themes that students *choose* to read outside-of-school into the classroom. Beyond entertainment, this study demonstrates that Urban Literature texts illustrate a truth or reality regarding readers like the Walkers' lived worlds, which they draw upon to make decisions and direct their paths. As such, Urban Literature forms important foundations for helping them to build bridges and further their understanding beyond those that are summative and evaluative in nature.

The first step is for teachers to recognize that their own lived worlds impact their reading practices and preferences. In Shirley Brice Heath's seminal work, *Ways with Words* (1983), Heath engaged teachers from the Carolina Piedmonts in conducting anthropological studies of their students and their families. In doing so, the teachers became aware of their own cultural and social practices, which helped them to better understand those of their students. Similarly, one implication of this study is to encourage teachers to learn more about their students' various entry points (e.g., out-of-school texts, as well as ways of reading and talking about texts) into literature which in many cases are different from their own.

As such, understanding the ways in which a student's cultural attributes learned within the home can be utilized within the classroom helps to emphasize what does and can work, rather than simply point out what does not. Therefore, the studies included within the literature review (Chapter Two) highlight a progression of thought and research that emphasizes: (a) connecting with students' home cultures within the classroom; (b) understanding the intricacies of students' home knowledge and skills; and (c) connecting the preceding two elements with the ways in which students choose to engage in literacy practices, often in more enriching and rewarding ways than those they engage in within the classroom. This study builds upon this foundation to suggest that Urban Literature deserves educators' attention in order to enhance learning and provide important connections between school assigned and sanctioned texts and those students choose to read on their own.

A second step is to recognize that engaging in literature goes beyond identifying with the characters or reading for interpretive meaning. For the Walkers, Urban Literature in some ways is an extension of who they are and what matters to them. Although the sex, violence, and drugs often depicted in these texts can be problematic for teachers, they open up windows into who students are and what is important to them. Gibson (2010) states, "an understanding of this…may provide opportunities for teachers to create bridges between nondominant leisure-reading practice and those texts that are failing to capture the interests…" (p. 569). This study suggests that more needs to be done in order to make connections between family-embedded skills, practices, and frames of reference and instructional practices in classrooms.

A third step is to envision the classroom as a space where students come to participate within a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The Walkers demonstrate that having a space where they could "participate in a community of practitioners [where] the mastery of knowledge and skills requires newcomers to move toward full participation" (p. 29) is an important concept for classroom learning. After all, learning is fraught with multiple intersections of power and ideology that are both visible and invisible to classroom participants. This study increases understanding about the reading practices of students outside-of-school, the implication of which demonstrates the possibilities for how engaging in shared activity with other readers of the same material could create an environment where the "teacher recognizes the significance of the social and cultural influences upon the learning outcomes for students" (Gibson, 2010, p. 570). However, in order for this possibility to occur, teachers need to value students' out-of-school lives and experiences and be willing to bring those into the classroom as legitimate sources of cultural knowledge and socially embedded frames of reference. In this study, I sought to create a window into these reading practices from which educators can draw on to better inform the strategies and practices they encourage and promote within their own classrooms.

Final Thoughts

With the adoption and adaption of the Common Core State Standards in many states, English/Language Arts teachers are asked to teach students higher levels of knowledge and understandings of a variety of texts. By better understanding the kinds of connections that students from various backgrounds make, teachers can better prepare and differentiate the pedagogical strategies they use to increase students' understandings.

This study demonstrates that even through Urban Literature, students and their teachers can use the material to engage in critical conversations that allow for students to use and rely upon a wider set of texts than those currently contained within the cannon.

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APPENDEX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<u>Initial Interview</u>

Personal Background

1. Can you tell me about yourself? How would you describe yourself to a stranger?

2. Can you tell me about your family? What do you know about your family history?

3. If you could pick one story that characterizes your family, what is the story? What do you take from that story?

4. What do you know about your family's education background? What's the highest level of education anyone has obtained? How "educated" is your family?

5. What do you know about your family's work history? What kind of jobs do the people in your family do? How does that relate to what you want to do when you grow up?

6. What is it like to be African American? How would you describe what it means to be African American to someone who doesn't know anything about race?

School Related

7. How do you describe yourself as a learner? What is the best way for you to learn?

8. Can you describe what school is like for you? What do you think of school and why?

9. What do you think about your classes? How do you see yourself as a learner when you're in school?

10. Describe your English class? What is your English teacher like? What's your relationship like with your English teacher?

11. What does it mean to you to be African American at school? How do you think the school views African Americans and why?

12. As a student, what do you think it means to be considered "at-risk?" Do you consider yourself "at-risk"? Why/Why not?

Outside of School

13. What do you like to do on your free time?

14. According to your initial questionnaire, you indicated that you participate in the following: (state specifically the kinds of out-of-school activities they participate in) Can you describe to me why you're interested in (specify)? What is it about it that draws and maintains your interests?

15. If you were to describe the things you do outside of school, how would you say that they are similar? How are they different?

16. How do you feel about yourself when you're doing the things you like to do?

17. How do these activities reflect who you? How are they related to how you want others to perceive you?

Second Interview

Home and Family Relationships
1. How would you describe your relationship with everyone who lives in your house?

2. What influences your relationship with your parents, siblings, others?

3. Who are you most like? What makes you say that?

4. How would you describe a typical day in your house? What kind of customs and routines do you participate in within a typical day?

5. What kinds of activities does your family engage in during a typical day?

6. What are the rules and customs that guide your interaction with your family? How are those communicated and enforced?

Literacy Practices
7. How do you handle the papers and material you receive from school each day?

8. Where do you keep notes, reminders, etc?
9. What do you do with any certificates, awards, or other recognitions you receive from school or from your teachers?

10. How do you define literacy? What are the skills literacy entail?

11. What role does traditional reading and writing play in your daily life? How much time do you think you spend reading and writing? Who or what do you read and write for? How do you feel about those reading and writing activities?

12. What kinds of electronic media do you engage in each day? How much time do you think you spend texting, IMing, blogging, etc.? Who or what do you engage in those electronic media habits for? How do you feel about those electronic media activities?

13. What are the rules and customs in your household regarding electronic media?

14. What role does television play in your daily routine? What kinds of shows do you watch? Why do you watch those particular shows? What do you get out of watching those shows?

15. What are the rules and customs in your household regarding television watching?

General

16. Who do you want to most be like when you grow up? Why?

17. Can you share with me your vision of yourself in the future?

18. Can you share with me a family story that best illustrates who you are?

19. What influences who you are—how do you know to "be" and "act" the way you do?

20. To you, how does being African American influence who you are?

21. Do you feel that your teachers know who you are and use that to help you make bridges and connections to what they teach?

22. How do your schooling experiences help or hinder your ability to become who and what you want to become?

APPENDEX B

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Mina's Joint

The Book
1. What is *Mina's Joint* about?

2. I've noticed a number of themes in this book, including: drama, profanity, casual sexual relationships, status, domestic violence, class wars, homosexuality/down low, and financial/social stability. What do you think about some of the themes this book explores?

3. Who is your favorite character? Why?

4. Who do you most identify with? Why?

5. To what degree does the Matthews family represent a typical Black family?

6. To what degree does the book's portrayal of the Black community accurate? Why/Why not?

7. Why do you think material possessions are so important to Mina and Mo?

8. What role does hip hop culture play in this book? How important is it to the book? How important is it to other books like this that you've read?

9. How does this book demonstrate Black womanhood? How is that related to what you think about your own femininity/womanhood?

10. How does this book demonstrate Black manhood? How does that related to what you think about the men/boys you like and date?

11. One description of books like this states, "The protagonist often surmounts barriers by relying on her sensuality as well as her abilities to manipulate dangerous situations," how accurate of a description is this for *Mina's Joint* and other books?

12. How are books like *Mina's Joint* different from books assigned in school? Why do you feel this way?

Rage Times Fury

The Book
1. What is *Rage Times Fury* about?

2. Why did you pick this book?

3. Unlike *Mina's Joint,* which was told from third person, this was told from first person. Did you like that approach? Why/Why not?

4. Also, in this book, the main character is a man, Malik, who wants revenge for his son getting shot. How interesting was this story plot to you? What made it interesting or uninteresting?

5. How realistic is the story in this book? Why/Why not?

6. I noticed that in this book, the main themes were violence, the drug scene, domestic violence, revenge, and profanity, but there was a lack of sex. What did you think of the themes this book explores? To what degree did the lack of sex impact what you thought of the story?

7. On the back cover, it states, "*Rage Times Fury* is a heart-wrenching, page turning story that examines one father's emotional dilemma, as he struggles with moral issues of right and wrong." Do you think this accurately describes the book? Why/Why not?

8. Do you identify with any of the characters in this book? If so who? If not, why don't you think you identify with any of them?

9. The main character Malik seems to make a clear distinction between himself and other men like Drugs and Trip because he has a "legit" job and instead of shooting up people, they took their revenge in other ways. To what degree do you think this makes Malik's character a "better person"?

10. How are men portrayed in this book? How are women portraying in this book? Do you think these are accurate depictions of real men and women? Why/Why not?

11. How is this book similar or different from *Mina's Joint*?

12. How is this book similar or different from the kinds of books assigned in school? Why do you feel this way?

Urban Literature in General

1. I've heard you talk about the "reality" that books like these portray. What do you consider realistic in these books and what do you consider strictly fiction?

2. I've heard you mention a number of times that books like this are for entertainment, is that the only reason to read books like these?

3. When I say, "books like these," how would you describe these kinds of books? If you had to recommend one of these books to someone who'd never read one, how would you describe such books?

4. Some say that girls and women who read these books learn clues about how to interact and respond in their relationships with boys/men and other women/girls. How accurate do you think this description is? Why?

5. According to one article, "Readers of urban street fiction may not necessarily related to the characters or see themselves in the protagonists; however they may find themselves titillated, provoked, and challenged by the characterizations, situations, and language in such books (Gibson, 2008)" (Marshall, Staples & Gibson, 2009). To what degree do you agree with this description? Why do you read these books?

6. Some have stated that that attraction that books like this have to readers is that they explore taboo topics like sex, relationships, sensuality, drugs and abuse. To what degree do these topics attract you to books like these?

7. To what degree does the fact that urban fiction centers on Black characters matter to you? Why/Why not?

8. What other kinds of stories (i.e. fairy tale, hip hop, etc) do these books draw from to make them more familiar to you?

9. How do books like *Mina's Joint* and *Rage Times Fury* and other books present different views of Black people and other people of color than books assigned in school?

10. Urban literature has been described as being part of a social movement. To what degree do you agree or disagree with this? Why/Why not?

APPENDIX C

TRANSCRIPT OF 6.16 MINUTES OF THE *RAGE TIMES FURY*

BOOK DISCUSSION

Table C1

1	VN: [Overlapping] So what's the difference between
2	CW: Between what?
3	VN: Between these two books?
4	CP: That book is boring [referring to *Rage Times Fury*], and that book is good [referring to *Mina's Joint*].
5	CW: [overlapping] This is, this is, no, this book descri, this book actually go into details. It, it fits the rage. It fits everything about Mina. Everything. It tells about how she begins, how she started, what happened between…it starts from beginning to end. What? [MS holds up *Mina's Joint* as CW points]…So that, that's the difference. This book [*Rage Times Fury*] has nothing to do, the title and actually readin' it has nothing to do with it.
6	CP: So you think the title should have been different and you would've liked it?
7	CW: Ah, no, I still wouldn't have liked it!
8	MS: The book should've been different!
9	SB: The book should have been WAY different!
10	CW: Because w…[overlapped]
11	CP:[overlapping] What's the name of that book?
12	Everyone: *Rage Times Fury*
13	CP: Rages times fury…[voice trails off]
14	CW: And it has, [overlapped]
15	CP: [Overlapping] I wouldn't have picked that title at all.
16	CW: It has no rage. It has no fury in it [overlpapped]
17	CP: I wouldn't have picked that book at all.
18	CW: [Overlapping] 'Cause the things that happen in there [overlapped]
19	MS: [Overlapping] Just the fact that his kid got shot.
20	CW: [Overlapping] And, uh and the fact is it that he's a Black man and anything that happened ta anybody's child, you have a whole different type of rage. He didn't have that. It did not portray him at all. No. It was phony…[overlapping voices]
21	SB: [Overlapping] Wait, his child got shot?
22	CW: [Overlapped] …it was fake.
23	MS: [Overlapping] His child got hit in the stomach. [Overlapped]

24	CW: [Overlapping] They should not be an author. [Overlapped]	25	SB: [Overlapping] See, that's why I ain't read it because I predicted that at the beginning [Overlapped]

Table C1 Continued

26	CW: [Overlapping] I don't even know why Triple Crown even took that book.	27	SB: [Overlapping] that his child was gonna get shot.
28	CW: Yeah, I figured out at the beginning, at the beginning of the book I figured out the total end. [Overlapped]		
29	CP: What his child do?		
30	MS and SB: Nothing.		
31	SB: It was just a stray bullet and the bullet caught him in the [points to her stomach] stomach.		
32	CP: No, I'm sayin' like how did you figure out, how did you figure it out. [Overlapped]		
33	SB: [Overlapping] Because they was talkin' about um…	35	CW: [Overlapping] They stayed in the ghetto.
34	MS: People getting' shot and then [Overlapped]	37	CW: [Overlapping] This is where they stayed, they stayed in…
36	SB: [Overlapping] And I'm like, oh he's talkin' about his sons all the time… [gestures to her head like it's an idea]	39	CW: [Overlapping] They stayed, you could tell they stayed in like one of those projects, [slightly overlapped]
38	SB: [Overlapping] I thinking that one of them is gonna get shot.	40	CP: [slightly overlapping] Like in uh [doesn't finish articulating thought]
41	CW: like in the Gardens, the cul de sac. [Gesturing and looking at CP who is nodding in support]		
42	CP: Hmmm mmm.		
43	CW: You could tell that's where they stayed. And it's always some type of violence goin' on around there, so he was very cautious with the kids being out.		
44	MS: It was stupid because he, um, took them to the park and had them walk around, but then he felt like something wrong was gonna happen, but then he left them outside.		
45	CW: Exactly./But he, he didn't leave them outside by theyself. They was outside wit' his um, with they auntie.		
46	VN: Wasn't it their grandmother?		
47	MS: Auntie		
48	CW: No, it was their auntie. It was um, his girl's sister and that's when he got shot. That's when the baby got shot, got shot by, and you know who did it. There would be no calm in me. None. He was too calm. [slightly overlapped]		
49	CP: [slightly overlapping] He knew who did it?		
50	CW: He knew who did it. He knew wh-, he knew exactly who to go to ta settle the score. [slightly overlapped by CP xxxx] He was too calm wit' it.		
51	CP: With who, did he settle it?		
52	CW: Yeah, he settled it, but it wasn't [overlapped]		
53	CP: [overlapping] It wasn't dramatic like it would have been if it was another book		

Table C1 Continued

54	CW: Right! You know when you say rage and fury, that means you jus' goin' off.
55	CP: [overlapping] Yeah
56	CW: That all you see is rage [overlapped]
57	CP: [overlapping] Rage, hmmm mmm
58	CW: [overlapping] there's not calm.
59	CP: [overlapping] 'Specially when your child got shot. Hold on nigga, you got me, hmmm mmm.
60	CW: Yo' baby in there fightin' for his life.
61	MS: [overlapping] It wasn't like, like a little baby…
62	CW: He, he was like, what two…
63	CP: How old was he?
64	Multiple voices: two, four five
65	VN: No, it was the oldest…of the two.
66	CW: Right, so the oldest.
67	Multiple Voices…we agree that the child was about five.
68	MS: And the two year old was like, "Why they tryin' to kill my brother" and all this stuff. I'm like
69	CP: [Overlapping] How would he know that? How would he know that? Thank you.
70	CW: [Overlapping] And my thing is, my thing is, if they come out with a sequel, even if the father didn't get revenge, the little brother was.
71	MS: Yeah, that's how they should have had it, cause that would have been raw.
72	CP: But the little brother's like two [overlapped]
73	VN: The little brother is two.
74	CP: How did he know about killin', killin' my brother? [overlapping voices] No I'm saying, the boy is like two years old, that's what he said?
75	MS: Yeah
76	CP: Again, why do your son know about killin'?
77	MS: Exactly
78	CP: At two years old
79	MS: Exactly, he could barely talk at two years old.
80	CW: He don't know about killin' but he was right there when his brother got shot. So he questioned, "Why did they shoot my brother?"
81	CP: Oh
82	CW: And he questioned his father and my thing is, [overlapped]
83	CP: [overlapping] Why you didn't go after the people [overlapped]
84	CW: [overlapping] Right, " Why you not goin' after the people that, that shot my brotha." [overlapped]
78	CP: At two years old
79	MS: Exactly, he could barely talk at two years old.
80	CW: He don't know about killin' but he was right there when his brother got shot. So he questioned, "Why did they shoot my brother?"

Table C1 Continued

81	CP: Oh
82	CW: And he questioned his father and my thing is, [overlapped]
83	CP: [overlapping] Why you didn't go after the people [overlapped]
84	CW: [overlapping] Right, " Why you not goin' after the people that, that shot my brotha." [overlapped]
85	CP: [overlapping] All right, I'm gonna kill you, you might as well have killed me when I was a kid [CP and SB high five each other].
86	CW: He was too calm. He was too calm for his own son.
87	CP: And the daughter was two years, [she laughs] eh, wow, how did the auntie feel?
88	MS: She felt like it was her fault.
89	CW: Yeah, she…
90	VN: Really bad, yeah…oh that's right, it was a family, it was his, his wife's friend who was watching the kids.
91	CW: Yeah
92	VN: Yeah
81	CP: Oh
82	CW: And he questioned his father and my thing is, [overlapped]
83	CP: [overlapping] Why you didn't go after the people [overlapped]
84	CW: [overlapping] Right, " Why you not goin' after the people that, that shot my brotha." [overlapped]
85	CP: [overlapping] All right, I'm gonna kill you, you might as well have killed me when I was a kid [CP and SB high five each other].
86	CW: He was too calm. He was too calm for his own son.
87	CP: And the daughter was two years, [she laughs] eh, wow, how did the auntie feel?
88	MS: She felt like it was her fault.
89	CW: Yeah, she…
90	VN: Really bad, yeah…oh that's right, it was a family, it was his, his wife's friend who was watching the kids.
91	CW: Yeah
92	VN: Yeah
93	SB: And even his wife's ugly. [At this point, everyone starts looking towards the book/book cover that I have on the sofa. There are a couple of chuckles.]
94	CP: That's his wife?
95	SB: Yes.
96	CP: She white?
97	MS: She look like an elf.
98	SB: Yes, she ugly.
99	CW: She do look like an elf, look at her ears puffed up

Table C1 Continued

100	MS: Her ears poppin' out her head, like come on now. She look like a rat. [I pass the book to CP so she can look more closely at the book cover. Everyone is laughing. CP passes the book back.]
101	CP: Ya'll ignant, ya'll [both MS and SB start talking simultaneously, defending their point of view about the woman on the front cover].
102	CW: [Talking over the others] Well my thing is, they started off sayin' that she was the one that held him down, but, held him down from what? I didn't him do nothin'. I didn't see him being a part of nothin'.
103	SB: In the way that it explains it in the book [overlapped]
104	CP: [Overlapping] He wasn't apart of no drugs or nothing, like, but [overlapped]
105	SB: [overlapping] like if you was [starts shaking and holder her head as multiple people have jumped into the conversation at once]
106	CP: [Overlapping] they in the projects so it
107	MS: [Overlapping] No, like he used to be a drug person but then he quit [overlapped]
108	CW: [Overlapping] Right
109	MS: and he's supposed to be all "legal" [she makes the gesture for air quotes with her hand] [overlapped]
110	CW: [Overlapping] He, he worked at UPS
111	SB: [Said in a sarcastic mock "retarded" voice] "I work at the UPS store."
112	CP: They make bank.
113	CW: This was one of the lamest books I have ever read.
114	CP: They make bank.
115	MS: On the truck.
116	CW: But that's not even the point, the point is [overlapped]
117	MS: [Overlapping] He might as well have been a garbage person, even they make more money than that.
118	CW: I, I totally agree.
119	MS: That's why I don't understand. [xxxx]
120	CW: But it has nothing to do with his job [overlapped]
121	CP: [Overlapping] Thank you!
122	CW: it was the fact that [overlapped]
123	CP: Cause I had tripped from [xxxx]
124	CW: [Overlapping] it says rage times fury. When you say rage times furys, [Overlapped]
125	SB: [Overlapping] There was no rage or no fury anywhere in there.
126	CW: you ask anybody what that means.
127	MS: DRAMA [over emphasizing both syllable] to the core.
128	CW: I mean, rage times fury, that's to the utmost. [CP makes a comment xxxx, SB and MS laugh in response] There's no calm. It's like straightforward. You don't see, you don't see the actual, you don't see the [turns towards CP and MS, MS and SB start laughing]

Table C1 Continued

129	CP: You can finish talkin'.
130	CW: You don't see the, um, what is it, you don't see the logic behind things when you say rage times fury. Logic, [overlapped]
131	VN: [Overlapping] He was very calculating.
132	CW: logic don't come into play.
133	VN: But did you, like at least admire the fact that, he might not have been as angry as you wanted him to be, but at least he was tryin' to be smart about how he got his revenge? [MS and SB are whispering little things as I talk.]
134	CP: How he being smart, ain't nobody [overlapped slightly]
135	MS: Yeah but
136	CP: your child got, it was self-defense.
137	CW: He was, it was smart the way he got revenge [overlapped]
138	CP: [Overlapping] I knew he was angry.
139	CW: But
140	VN: But
141	CW: It doesn't match the title.
142	CP: Oh you [she turns her head away from the camera and audio recording and is overlapped] [Suki begins looking out the blind almost like she's looking up at a tree or tall bush outside.]
143	MS: [Overlapping] It could have been smart and dramatic at the same time.
144	CW: Right, it didn't have no dr, drama into it. It was not dramatic at all.
145	CP: Her dress match that tree.

APPENDIX D
TURN-BY-TURN MICROANALYSIS OF THE WALKER FAMILY'S BOOK TALK OF *RAGE TIMES FURY*

Table D1

Category	Item	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14
Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledge														
	"Street" Practices														
	Urban Literature				UL	UL	UL	UL	UL			UL			
	Family Membership														
	Personal Experience									PE					
	Text--*Rage*				T	T	T	T				T			T
	School Discourse	SD		SD		SD									
Intertextual Dimensions	Repetition									REP				REP	
	Identity Frames (Defining Self as)	Discussion Facilitator			Reader	Urban Lit Reader	Discussion Facilitator		Urban Lit Reader	Urban Lit Reader					
	Social Significance				SS	SS		SS	SS	SS		SS			
	Acknowledge					AK		AK							
	Recognize				R				R	R		R			
	Propose	P		P			P								
Function/Strategy	Other			O							O			O	
	Gaining the floor							GF							
	Disagreeing						D								
	Agreeing									A					
	Extending Prior Point									EPP					
	Opinion				OP			OP	OP	OP					
	Informing												I		
	Request		RQ									RQ			
	Retelling														
	Evaluating/Assessing				EA	EA			EA	EA					
	Probe						PR					PR			
	Initiating Topic	IN													
Form	Other										O			O	O
	Response				R	R		R					R		
	Statement								S	S					
	Question	Q	Q	Q			Q					Q			
Participants	Addressee	All	VN	All	VN	All	CW	CP	CP	CP	CP	All	All	S	CP
	Speaker	VN	CW	VN	CP	CW	CP	CW	MS	SB	CW	CW	EV	CP	CW
	Sister-Sister								X	X					
	Mother-Daughter(s)							X			X				X
	Daughter(s)-Mother						X								
	FamMem-Researcher		X		X										
	Everyone/Self					X							X	X	
	Researcher-All	X		X								X			
	Turn Numbers	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14

Table D1 Continued

Category		15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledg					AA	AA								
	"Street" Practices														
	Urban Literature	UL	UL	UL	UL	UL	UL		UL		UL	UL	UL		UL
	Family Membership					FM	FM		FM						
	Personal Experience														
	Text—Rage	T	T	T	T	T	T		T	T	T	T	T	T	T
	School Discourse							SD				SD			
Intertextual Dimensions	Repetition			REP											REP
	Identity Frames (Defining Self as)	Urban Lit Reader		Urban Reader		Urban Lit/Fam Mem	AA Com/Fam Mem	Discussion Part.	UL Reader/Fam Me		Urban Lit Reader	Full Dis. Mem/Reader/UL R	Urban Lit		Urban Lit Reader
	Social Significance						SS		SS		SS	SS			
	Acknowledge						AK		AK		AK		AK		
	Recognize		R	R	R	R						R			
	Propose														
Function/Strategy	Other														
	Gaining the floor											GF			
	Disagreeing														
	Agreeing														
	Extending Prior Point					EPP	EPP				EPP				
	Opinion	OP	OP	OP							OP		OP		OP
	Informing								I			I		I	
	Request							RQ							
	Retelling				RT	RT									
	Evaluating/Assessing	EA	EA				EA		EA		EA				
	Probing							PO							
	Initiating Topic														
Form	Other														
	Response		R		R	R	R		R	R					R
	Statement	S		S							S	S	S	S	
	Question							Q							
Participants	Addressee	All	CP	CW	CP	CW	CP	MS	VN	SB	VN	CP-MS	VN	CP-MS	All
	Speaker	CP	CW	CP	CW	MS	CW	SB	CW	MS	CW	SB	MS	SB	CW
	Sister-Sister								X		X		X		
	Mother-Daughter(s)		X		X		X								X
	Daughter(s)-Mother			X		X									
	FamMem-Researcher								X		X		X		
	Everyone/Self	X													
	Researcher-All														
	Turn Numbers	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28

Table D1 Continued

		29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42
Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledge						AA	AA	AA					AA	
	"Street" Practices			SP			SP	SP	SP		SP	SP		SP	
	Urban Literature						UL	UL	UL	UL	UL	UL			
	Family Membership								FM						
	Personal Experience											PE		PE	
	Text—*Rage*		T	T		T	T	T	T	T	T	T		T	
	School Discourse	SD			SD				SD						
Intertextual Dimentios	Repetition										REP				
	Identity Frames (Defining Self As)	Discussion Facilitator			Discussion Facilitator		AA Comm	AA Comm	Reader/Fam Member		Reader	Reader		AA Comm	
	Social Significance						SS	SS	SS	SS		SS		SS	
	Acknowledge						AK	AK	AK			AK		AK	
	Recognize	R				R	R								
	Propose				P										
Function/Strategy	Other														
	Gaining the floor										GF				
	Disagreeing														
	Agreeing							A							A
	Extending Prior Point						EPP		EPP	EPP		EPP	EPP	EPP	
	Opinion										OP	OP			
	Informing		I	I		I		I							
	Request	RQ													
	Retelling							RT	RT	RT					
	Evaluating/Assessing														
	Probing				PR										
	Initiating Topic				IT										
Form	Other														
	Response		R	R		R			R			R	R	R	R
	Statement						S	S		S	S				
	Question	Q			Q										
Participants	Addressee	All	CP	CP	CW/SB	CP	CP	CP	CP	All	CP	All	CW	CP	CW
	Speaker	CP	SB/MS	MS	CP	SB	MS	CW	SB	CW	SB	CW	CP	CW	CP
	Sister-Sister		X	X	X	X	X		X		X				
	Mother-Daughter(s)							X		X		X		X	
	Daughter(s)-Mother				X								X		
	FamMem-Researcher														
	Everyone/Self	X													
	Researcher-All														
	Turn Numbers	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42

Table D1 Continued

		43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56
Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledge		AA	AA			AA	AA		AA	AA		AA		AA
	"Street" Practices		SP	SP			SP		SP		SP		SP		SP
	Urban Literature	UL							UL		UL	UL	UL		
	Family Membership	FM	FM	FM			FM		FM		FM		FM		
	Personal Experience	PE	PE				PE		PE				PE	PE		PE
	Text—*Rage*	T	T	T	T	T	T		T			T	T		
	School Discourse														
Intertextual Dimensions	Repetition									REP	REP				
	Identity Frames (Defining Self As)	UL Reader/ Fam Mem	Fam Mem/ AA COmm	Reader/ Fam Member	Discussion Part		Reader/ Fam Member	Discussion Facilitator	UL Lit/ Fam Member	AA Comm	AA Comm	UL Reader	Family Member		Family Member
	Social Significance	SS	SS				SS		SS	SS	SS	SS	SS		
	Acknowledge	AK							AK		AK	AK	AK		AK
	Recognize			R			R			R					
	Propose		P												
Function/Strategy	Other														
	Gaining the floor														
	Disagreeing														
	Agreeing			A			A					A	A	A	
	Extending Prior Point									EPP					EPP
	Opinion		OP									OP			OP
	Informing				INF		INF		INF		INF				
	Request														
	Retelling	RT		RT											
	Evaluating/Assessing								EA			EA			
	Probing														
	Initiating Topic		IN		IN			I							
Form	Other														
	Response	R		R		R	R		R		R		R	R	R
	Statement		S									S			
	Question				Q			Q		Q					
Participants	Addressee	CP	SB	MS	CW	VN	MS	CW	CP	CW	CP	CP	MS	CW	MS
	Speaker	CW	MS	CW	VN	MS	CW	CP	CW	CP	CW	MS	CW	CP	CW
	Sister-Sister		X									X			
	Mother-Daughter(s)	X					X		X		X		X		X
	Daughter(s)-Mother			X				X		X				X	
	FamMem-Researcher					X									
	Everyone/Self														
	Researcher-All				X										
	Turn Numbers	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56

Table D1 Continued

Category	Row	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledge		AA	AA	AA										AA
	"Street" Practices			SP											SP
	Urban Literature														UL
	Family Membership		FM	FM	FM										FM
	Personal Experience		PE	PE	PE								PE	PE	PE
	Text--*Rage*			T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T
	School Discourse														
Intertextual Dimensions	Repetition	REP	REP					REP			REP				
	Identity Frames (Defining Self As)		Family Member	Family Member	Family Member	Discussion Part		Discussion Part					Discussion Part	Discussion Facilitator	UL Reader/ Fam Member
	Social Significance			SS											
	Acknowledge		AK	AK											AK
	Recognize				R										
	Propose														
Function/Strategy	Other														
	Gaining the floor														
	Disagreeing														
	Agreeing	A									A			A	
	Extending Prior Point			EPP	EPP										
	Opinion		OP	OP	OP										
	Informing					INF			INF	INF		INF			
	Request					RQ		RQ							
	Retelling						RT							RT	
	Evaluating/Assessing													EA	EA
	Probing													PO	
	Initiating Topic														
Form	Other														
	Response	R	R		R		R		R	R	R	R			
	Statement			S		S							S		S
	Question							Q						Q	
Participants	Addressee	CW	CP	CW	CP	CW	MS	CW	All	All	VN	All	CP	MS	VN
	Speaker	CP	CW	CP	CW	MS	CW	CP	All	VN	CW	All	MS	CP	CW
	Sister-Sister												X	X	
	Mother-Daughter(s)		X		X		X								
	Daughter(s)-Mother	X		X		X		X							
	FamMem-Researcher										X				X
	Everyone/Self														
	Researcher-All									X					
	Turn Numbers	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70

Table D1 Continued

Category	Item	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84
Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledge	AA			AA		AA		AA		AA		AA	AA	AA
	"Street" Practices	SP									SP			SP	SP
	Urban Literature	UL			UL		UL		UL		UL		UL	UL	UL
	Family Membership														
	Personal Experience				PE		PE			PE	PE		PE	PE	PE
	Text—*Rage*		T	T	T		T		T	T	T		T	T	T
	School Discourse														
Intertextual Dimensions	Repetition			REP											
	Identity Frames (Defining Self As)	Urban Lit Reader			Discussion Facilitator						Reader			UL Reader/ Street	UL Reader/ Street
	Social Significance	SS			SS		SS				SS		SS	SS	SS
	Acknowledge	AK			AK		AK	AK			AK		AK	AK	AK
	Recognize		R						R	R					
	Propose														
Function/Strategy	Other											O			
	Disagreeing														
	Agreeing	A		A		A		A		A					A
	Extending Prior Point								EPP	EPP	EPP		EPP	EPP	EPP
	Opinion														
	Informing		INF								INF		INF		
	Request				RQ		RQ								
	Retelling														
	Evaluating/Assessing	EA			EA		EA				EA				
	Probing				PO										
	Initiating Topic														
Form	Other														
	Response	R		R		R		R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
	Statement		S												
	Question				Q		Q								
Participants	Addressee	VN	VN	All	CW	CP	CW	CP	MS	CP	MS-CP	CW	MS-CP	CW	CP
	Speaker	MS	CP	VN	CP	MS	CP	MS	CP	MS	CW	CP	CW	CP	CW
	Sister-Sister				X		X	X	X						
	Mother-Daughter(s)										X		X		X
	Daughter(s)-Mother				X		X					X		X	
	FamMem-Researcher	X	X												
	Everyone/Self														
	Researcher-All			X											
	Turn Numbers	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84

Table D1 Continued

Category	Subcategory	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98
Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledge	AA	AA												
	"Street" Practices	SP													
	Urban Literature	UL	UL												
	Family Membership	FM	FM			FM									
	Personal Experience	PE	PE							PE				PE	PE
	Text--*Rage*		T	T	T	T	T	T			T	T	T	T	T
	School Discourse														
Intertextual Dimensions	Repetition								REP						
	Identity Frames (Defining Self As)	Street/ Fam Member	Family Member												
	Social Significance	SS	SS												
	Acknowledge	AK	AK												
	Recognize														
	Propose														
Function/Strategy	Other														
	Gaining the floor									GA					
	Disagreeing														
	Agreeing	A			A		A	A							A
	Extending Prior Point														
	Opinion	OP	OP							OP					
	Informing			INF		INF						INF			
	Request		RQ								RQ		RQ		
	Retelling														
	Evaluating/Assessing		EA							EA				EA	
	Probing		PO												
	Initiating Topic			INT						INT					
Form	Other								O						
	Response			R	R	R	R					R			R
	Statement	S	S							S				S	
	Question			Q							Q		Q		
Participants	Addressee	All	CP	CW	CP	All	All	VN	CW	All	SB	CP	SB	All	All
	Speaker	CP	CW	CP	MS	CW	VN	CW	VN	SB	CP	SB	CP	MS	SB
	Sister-Sister				X						X	X	X	X	X
	Mother-Daughter(s)		X			X									
	Daughter(s)-Mother			X											
	FamMem-Researcher							X							
	Everyone/Self	X								X					
	Researcher-All						X		X						
	Turn Numbers	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98

Table D1 Continued

Category	Row	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112
Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledge			AA	AA				AA			AA			AA
	"Street"Practice								SP	SP		SP			
	Urban Literature				UL		UL		UL	UL		UL	UL		UL
	Family Membership				FM		FM								
	Personal Experience	PE	PE		PE										PE
	Text--*Rage*	T	T		T	T	T		T	T		T	T		
	School Discourse														
Intertextual Dimensions	Repetition	REP							REP					REP	
	Identity Frames (Defining Self As)			AA Comm	Discussion Facilitator		Urban Lit Reader		Urban Lit Reader			AA Comm			
	Social Significance			SS	SS				SS			SS			
	Acknowledge			AK	AK				AK			AK			AK
	Recognize									R					
	Propose					P	P								
Function/Strategy	Other							O						O	
	Gaining the floor														
	Disagreeing									D					
	Agreeing	A									A				
	Extending Prior Point	EPP													
	Opinion			OP	OP										
	Informing														INF
	Request				RQ										
	Retelling						RET		RET	RET		RET	RET		
	Evaluating/Assessing		EA		EA	EA			EA						
	Probing														
	Initiating Topic			INT											
Form	Other														
	Response	R	R			R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	
	Statement			S	S										S
	Question				Q										
Participants	Addressee	MS	CW	All	All	CW	CW	All	CW	All	MS	CW	MS	All	CW
	Speaker	CW	MS	CP	CW	SB	CP	SB	CP	MS	CW	MS	CW	SB	CP
	Sister-Sister														
	Mother-Daughter(s)	X			X							X			
	Daughter(s)-Mother		X			X	X	X	X	X	X				X
	FamMem-Researcher														
	Everyone/Self			X										X	
	Researcher-All														
	Turn Numbers	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112

Table D1 Continued

Category		113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120	121	122	123	124	125	126
Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledge					AA		AA	AA				AA	AA	AA
	"Street" Practice														
	Urban Literature	UL			UL	UL		UL	UL				UL	UL	UL
	Family Membership												FM	FM	
	Personal Experience	PE		PE	PE	PE		PE	PE	PE		PE			PE
	Text--*Rage*	T				T				T			T	T	T
	School Discourse														
Intertextual Dimensions	Repetition													REP	
	Identity Frames (Defining Self As)	Readers				Reader							Family Member	Family Member	
	Social Significance	SS		SS	SS			SS	SS				SS	SS	SS
	Acknowledge	AK		AK	AK			AK	AK	AK			AK	AK	AK
	Recognize							R							
	Propose														
Function/Strategy	Other											O			
	Gaining the floor														
	Disagreeing														
	Agreeing		A				A			A					
	Extending Prior Point				EPP				EPP					EPP	EPP
	Opinion											OP			
	Informing			INF											
	Request														
	Retelling														
	Evaluating/Assessing	EA				EA		EA	EA		EA		EA	EA	
	Probing							PO							
	Initiating Topic				INT										
Form	Other														
	Response			R		R	R			R		R			
	Statement	S	S		S			S	S		S		S	S	S
	Question														
Participants	Addressee	VN	MS	CP	CP-MS	CW	MS	CW	MS	CW	CP	CW	All	CW	MS
	Speaker	CW	CP	MS	CW	MS	CW	MS	CW	CP	CW	CP	CW	MS	CW
	Sister-Sister		X	X											
	Mother-Daughter(s)				X		X		X		X				X
	Daughter(s)-Mother					X		X		X		X		X	
	FamMem-Researcher	X													
	Everyone/Self												X		
	Researcher-All														
	Turn Numbers	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120	121	122	123	124	125	126

Table D1 Continued

Group		127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140
Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledge	AA					AA								
	"Street" Practices							SP							
	Urban Literature	UL	UL			UL		UL				UL			
	Family Membership		FM		FM		FM				FM				
	Personal Experience	PE	PE		PE	PE	PE	PE				PE	PE		
	Text --*Rage*	T				T		T				T	T	T	
	School Discourse														
Intertextual Dimensions	Repetition											REP			REP
	Indentify Frames (Defining Self As)	UL Reader	Family Member		Family Member	Reader	Family Member				Family Member		Reader		
	Social Significance	SS	SS				SS								
	Acknowledge	AK	AK				AK								
	Recognize										R	R			
	Propose							P							
Function/Strategy	Other			O						O	O			O	O
	Gaining the floor														
	Disagreeing									D					
	Agreeing												A		
	Extending Prior Point	EPP	EPP		EPP		EPP	EPP				EPP			
	Opinion														
	Informing	INF				INF									
	Request														
	Retelling					RT									
	Evaluating/Assessing											EA	EA		
	Probing							PO							
	Initiating Topic														
Form	Other													O	O
	Response				R		R				R	R	R	R	
	Statement	S	S	S		S									
	Question							Q							
Participants	Addressee	CW	All	CW	All	CW	All	All	VN	VN	VN	VN	VN	All	CW
	Speaker	MS	CW	CP	CW	VN	CW	VN	CP	MS	CP	CW	CP	CW	VN
	Sister-Sister														
	Mother-Daughter(s)														
	Daughter(s)-Mother	X		X											
	FamMem-Researcher								X	X	X	X	X		
	Everyone/Self		X		X		X							X	
	Researcher-All					X		X							X
	Turn Numbers	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140

Table D1 Continued

Intertextual Links	AA Culture Knowledge	AA		AA	AA	
	"Street" Practices					
	Urban Literature	UL		UL	UL	
	Family Membership	FM			FM	
	Personal Experience			PE		
	Text--*Rage*	T		T	T	
	School Discourse					
Intertextual Dimensions	Repetition					
	Identity Frames (Defining Self As)	UL Reader		UL Reader	UL Reader	
	Social Significance	SS		SS	SS	
	Acknowledge	AK		AK	AK	
	Recognize					
	Propose					
Function/Strategy	Other		O			O
	Gaining the floor					
	Disagreeing					
	Agreeing			A	A	
	Extending Prior Point	EPP		EPP	EPP	
	Opinion					
	Informing					
	Request					
	Retelling					
	Evaluating/Assessing	EA		EA	EA	
	Probing					
	Initiating Topic					
Form	Other					
	Response		R	R	R	
	Statement	S				S
	Question					
Participants	Addressee	VN	CW	CW	VN	All
	Speaker	CW	CP	MS	CW	CP
	Sister-Sister					
	Mother-Daughter(s)					
	Daughter(s)-Mother		X	X		
	FamMem-Researcher	X			X	
	Everyone/Self					X
	Researcher-All					
	Turn Numbers	141	142	143	144	145