CLAIMING AND FRAMING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ETHOS: CASE STUDIES OF THE LITERACY PRACTICES OF TWO AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE WRITERS

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative case study project explored the literacy practices of two eighteen-year-old African American males who were enrolled in two separate predominantly White four-year universities in Northwest Ohio. I studied their literacy practices because limited research exists in Composition Studies on African American males, particularly on African American males who self-identify as successful writers. Many African American males meet the objectives of first-year writing courses the first time they take them, yet far too many of them do not succeed in those courses. Hence, it is imperative that literacy studies scholars, compositionists, and writing program administrators study successful African American male writers so they might learn how to improve the writing skills of more African American males. Findings show that four general factors contributed to key participants’ success in first-year-writing courses: 1) their acquisition of literacies at home, 2) their ability to carry literacies from home to school, 3) their use of school and non-school resources to help them further develop their literacies, and 4) their dispositions regarding formal education, which, for the most part, were shaped by their African American fathers’ perspectives on formal education. In essence, key participants’ literacy practices are only one of the primary factors that impacted their success in first-year writing courses. This project has import for Composition Studies, particularly because one of its cases includes attention to a participant's father’s voice and the pivotal role he played in the development of his son’s literacy practices. I urge writing teachers to consider the full range of students’ literacies and to integrate the voices of successful African American males in Composition Studies research. These scholarly practices will likely increase the achievement rate among African American males in first-year writing courses.
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CHAPTER ONE: FRAMING AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ETHOS

Statement of the Problem

Many adolescent African American males thrive in college, particularly in first-year writing courses. However, their experiences have gone unnoticed because “[w]e have been conditioned to see the failure of Black men and boys as normal” (ix), argues Pedro Noguera in the Foreword to David A. Kirkland’s *A Search Past Silence: The Literacy of Young Black Men* (2013). Society’s way of knowing about African American males subscribes to the deficit theory, which manifests as cultural rhetoric in reports, popular media, and public discourse that position the majority of the African American male population in the prison system complex, as candidates for special education classes and expulsion, and as uneducable. Ultimately, this deficit perspective manifests in pedagogical practices that further impede many African American males’ efforts to succeed in writing courses the U.S. education system.¹

All human beings are entitled to an equitable, quality education, and all of them have the potential to learn and thrive in supportive and resourceful educational contexts, yet many African American students are forced to thrive in educational contexts that are harsh and unsupportive. Their struggles in the American school system today are part of a long history. Carmen Kynard, in her historical research on the history of African American enrollment and advancement at Harvard University, asserts:

If white middle-class and/or immigrant male students were considered alien to academic writing and etiquette at nineteenth-century Harvard, then black students had no chance of even being cast as human. Yet these 1920s African American students show us how education and school-based literacies have always been

¹In this context, I include basic writing in first-year writing courses.
reconfigured by the very people who have been troped as hopelessly locked on the outer margins. (14)

Again, many African American males are meeting the objectives of their writing courses. However, in *Urgency of Now*, John H. Jackson maintains that the “equitable support and resources they need to . . . fully engage and succeed . . . have come at a painstakingly slow pace or not at all” (2). I borrowed data from Jackson’s national report on Black males and public education to create a quantitative representation of the perceived effects of limited and no school support and resources for African American males. As Figure 1 below indicates, the national four-year high school graduation rate for Black males has slowly increased from 42% in 2001-02 to 52% in 2009-10 to 59% in 2012-13, but their four-year high school graduation rate still lags behind Hispanic and White males (*Urgency of Now* 7). The Schott Foundation reports that, states with relatively small Black populations achieve high graduation rates for Black male students (Maine, Utah, Vermont, and Idaho). This seems to indicate that Black males, on average, perform better in places and spaces where they are not relegated to under-resourced districts or schools. When provided similar opportunities, they are more likely to produce similar or better outcomes as their White male peers. (13)

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2Borrowing from the U.S. Department of Education, the Schott Foundation defines “Black” as “‘students having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa as reported by their school’” (6). African American males’ graduation rates are lower than “Latino, and White, non-Latino male and female students” as well as Black female students in thirty-eight of the fifty states and the District of Columbia (*The Urgency of Now* 13), and African American males’ graduation rates are lower than “Latino, and White, non-Latino male and female students” as well as Black female students in thirty-eight of the fifty states and the District of Columbia (*The Urgency of Now* 13).
Before I proceed, I must note that Michael Holzman and Jackson write that the Foundation’s 2012-13 data contain a discrepancy because schools over-reported enrollment rates for students who were not enrolled in school but had “not officially informed their school or district that they have dropped out” (21). Holzman and Jackson also state that this type of incongruous enrollment reporting occurs until students reach the legal maximum age limit for schooling (21). The school system’s method of reporting graduation rates creates a more crucial situation for African American males because they are a double absent presence in the educational system. I borrow the term “absent presence” from Catherine Prendergast’s 1998 article “Race: The Absent Presence in Composition Studies” in order to represent how the school system treats students who might have been marginalized/silenced when they were present, and yet when they are actually absent, they are still present.

Finally, the Schott Foundation’s 2012 report predicts that at Black males’ current achievement rate “it would take nearly 50 years for Black males to secure the same high school graduation rate as their white male peers” (7); hence, the urgency for more effective
instructional strategies and resources for Black male students. So what can educators do now to close the fifty-year gap that the Schott Foundation has projected?

The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was implemented to address the academic achievement of all students in secondary education, but there have been slow and minimal improvements in minority students’ academic achievement rates (Black Lives Matter 2015; U.S. Department of Education 2011; The Urgency is Now 2012). Perhaps this phenomenon occurs because NCLB focuses on improving primary and secondary school students’ reading performance and standardized test scores, as opposed to improving their writing skills, though strong reading and strong writing skills are not the only factors that contribute to students’ achievement in school. Nonetheless, in 2011, the U.S. Department of Education reported that there is a strong link between students who fail English classes and retention rates among U.S. students. Additionally, while more African American males are enrolling in universities, fewer of them are graduating in four years, and fewer of them are leaving the university with degrees (Harper 2012; Noguera 2011; Tatum 2005; U.S. Department of Education 2011; The Urgency of Now 2012). Shaun Harper reports that “[a]cross four cohorts of undergraduates, the six-year graduation rate for Black male students was 33.3%, compared to 48.1% for students overall” (Black Male Student Success 3). Finally, African American males represented a mere 4.3% of the higher education population in 2002 (Harper, Black Male Student Success 2012).³

In 2014, when I was writing this report, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) was implemented, and forty-three states had adopted the standards. The inititiave is part of an ongoing effort to increase education standards, to increase graduation rates, and to increase college enrollment and retention rates (3). The initiative comprises a set of K-12

³ Similar findings are reported by the Schott Foundation 2012; Boner 2012; Lederman 2012; and Scott, Taylor, and Palmer 2013.
standards “for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects” that are intended to prepare all students for entry into college or a career (3). Standards were framed on international models of best education practices and on research and feedback from various local, state, and national sources, as well as students, parents, college and university personnel, employers, and other constituents. This initiative is also designed to help students develop writing, reading, speaking, and listening skills (3), a pedagogical approach that might change how writing is taught in higher education and change African American male college enrollment.

Equally alarming is the fact that before the Common Core State Standards Initiative was implemented, Composition Studies scholars had published few studies on the literacy practices of adolescent African American males, specifically research on their writing practices, despite the difficulties that most African American males experienced in first-year writing courses (including basic writing). Some contributions to the small repository of scholarship that exists in Composition Studies on adolescent African American males’ literacy practices is that of David E. Kirkland (2013; 2010; 2009; 2006; 2001), Kevin Roozen (2008), and Cynthia A. Selfe (2004). Kirkland, “a transdisciplinary scholar of English and urban education,” specializes in urban youth culture. Many of Kirkland’s participants find themselves “standing outside on the inside” (Welch and Hodges 1997) of what they identify as the oppressive system of public schooling that does not respect their identities, dialects, cultures, or interests. Kirkland urges literacy specialists and compositionists to widen the lens they use so they can witness the literacies African American males practices.

Similar to Kirkland, Roozen argues “that the writer’s school tasks are profoundly shaped by an extensive network of non-school practices, artifacts, and activities” (5). Drawing on
“Elaine Richardson’s dictum,” Roozen urges basic writing teachers and literacy studies specialists to consider basic writers’ academic and nonacademic literacy practices (5). Roozen’s five-year longitudinal ethnographic case study “Journalism, Poetry, Stand-Up Comedy, and Academic Literacy” explores the synergies among five curricular and extracurricular spaces where Charles Scott Jr. practiced literacies. Charles is an African American male at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Roozen explains that the project began as an examination of Charles’ status as a basic writer; however, it “evolved into a much more complicated, messy, and yet fascinating exploration of the role that non-school literate practices played in Charles’s development as an ‘academic writer’” (8). According to Roozen, Charles excelled in extracurricular spaces while he struggled to meet the curricular requirements of two undergraduate courses. Roozen notes that Charles struggled to control lower order concerns and to integrate “multiple sources” into his writing (7). Eventually, Charles carried literacies from one site to another so he could succeed in curricular and extracurricular spaces. Based on his findings, Roozen urges writing teachers to closely examine basic writers’ full repository of literacy practices. He also argues that writing teachers must “explore more fully how we can all learn to recognize, acknowledge, and promote the productive weaving together of diverse literacy practices by inviting our students to draw from a range of literate practices and activities they engage in outside of school and to honor the values, beliefs, and interests embedded in them” (29). In 2004, Selfe made a similar call to Composition Studies scholars, which was to expand the lens they use to examine African American males’ literacy practices. In “Students Who Teach Us,” Selfe examines the advanced technological literacy skills of David John Damon, an African American male who was enrolled in a four-year university in the spring of 2000. According to Selfe, while David’s technological skills grew exponentially, he “failed two
of his more conventional communication classes,” which lowered his GPA to a point where he could no longer maintain his status as a student at the university (49). Selfe suggests that if David’s “teachers in the English Department” had valued his technological literacies, they might not have identified him as “illiterate” (57). Selfe argues that David’s writing teachers should have helped him use his technological skills to meet the demands of his writing courses. Again, Kirkland, Roozen, and Selfe urge writing teachers to consider the wide spectrum of complex literacies that African American males carry to writing classrooms.

Although limited research exists in Composition Studies on the literacy practices of African American males, the call for compositionists and literacy studies specialists to recast their definition of literacy has a long history in Composition Studies. For example, almost forty-years ago, Janet Emig urged writing studies researchers to conduct cross-cultural research if they hope to learn more about all students’ composing practices. One of the field’s first documented case study designs is Emig’s *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (1971), where she analyzes the composing practices of “eight sixteen- and seventeen-year-old secondary school students” from various schools in Chicago (29), and she describes participants’ races and ethnicities accordingly: “[s]ix are white, one, black; one, Chinese-American” (29). Emig’s findings suggest that writing teachers should intervene in several stages of students’ composing processes. Also important to my study is Emig’s call for writing studies researchers to conduct cross-cultural research.

While the objective of Emig’s research was to unearth methods that would increase writers’ chances of producing reader-based prose through a writing process, Keith Gilyard urges teachers to accept the dialects students carry from home to school rather than have them attempt to remove all evidence of a nonstandard dialect in a writing process. Similar to my call to
weave students’ voices into Composition Studies research, in his autobiography, Gilyard observes, “Oddly enough, conspicuously absent are the voices of the students themselves” (10) who can articulate narratives about the linguistic gap that exists between home and school. *Voices of the Self: A Study of Language Competence* (1991) is Gilyard’s own literacy narrative that calls for “the articulate opinions of those African American students who face the task of public school language education . . . about the clash between cultures, this problem of being Black and attempting to cope with the instruction offered in a school controlled by those of another background” (10). Gilyard’s autobiography illuminates his acquisition and development of non-academic and academic dialects and literacy practices at home and at school. He offers writing teachers the following suggestion for creating inclusive classrooms: “language educators in particular must prepare themselves to function productively in multicultural classrooms, [must] stop assuming that students are inferior and/or have nothing to contribute to the educative process other than to sit and absorb,” and must teach African American students in ways that do not attempt to deconstruct their identities and dialects (165). Gilyard’s argument for a sociocultural approach to language teaching is grounded in a scientific theory of human development that is attributed to Lev Vygotsky, a pioneer researcher in human development, particularly children’s learning development.

Most contemporary literacy studies research is grounded in Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, according to Paul Prior. In “A Sociocultural Theory of Writing,” Prior offers a brief historiography on the evolution of writing research and theory. Prior states that some scholars attribute knowledge on writing research and theory to “the emergence of sophistic rhetoric tradition among the ancient Greeks” (54). He goes on to explain that other scholars begin with modern systemic research studies that were rooted in “psychological and
anthropological methodologies” such as Janet Emig’s 1970 study of high school students’
writing processes, which introduced writing as process, and “Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod,
and Rosen’s 1975 study in the U.K. that examined secondary students’ writing processes and
shifted writing from a monolithic approach to a hierarchical one, which, according to Prior,
“pointed a new generation of researchers to question writing as a form of activity” (54).

Furthermore, Prior notes that Linda Flower and John R. Hayes’ cognitive approach to
writing had become the major writing paradigm in the United States in the 1980s. Yet the
cognitive approach was challenged by critics because of its limited attention to context thus the
beginning of the social turn—sociological theory and methods—to writing research that
originally focused on the “social, historical, and political contexts of writing” (54).

Additionally, Prior writes that there was an influx of interdisciplinary empirical research studies
“emerging from psychology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, and semiotics” (54). Again,
Prior situates the social turn in Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory that,

argues that activity is situated in concrete interactions that are simultaneously
improvised locally and mediated by prefabricated, historically provided tools and
practices, which range from machines, made objects, semiotics means (language,
genres, iconographies), and institutions to structured environments, domestic
animals and plants, and, indeed people themselves. (55)

In *Literacy in American Lives* (2001), Deborah Brandt espouses a sociocultural approach to
literacy studies research. Brandt’s study of Americans who acquired literacies in the twentieth
century appears to respond to Gilyard’s call for African American students who can speak to
how they acquired academic English in the competing cultures of school (10). Brandt argues,

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4 Other scholars who ascribe to a sociocultural approach to studying writing/literacies are Bazerman 1985; Beaufort
1999; Cole 1981; Hawisher and Selfe 1999; Heath 1983; Ivanic 1998; Lunsford 2002; Moss 1994; Scribner and
Cole 1981; Sheridan-Babideau 2001, to name a few.
[l]iteracy is so much an expectation in this country that it has become more usual to ask why and how people fail to learn to read and write than to ask why and how they succeed” (1). While Gilyard’s narrative explores the challenges he faced in a U.S. school system that promotes standard American English, Brandt examines how a technologically driven economy alters people’s literacies and casts standard American English as a commodity and literacies as a technology (Literacy in American Lives 2001). Brandt draws on Street’s ideological model of literacy to foreground the connection between the ideological model and the autonomous model in her case study research on literacy learning. Brandt writes that she “offers a conceptual approach that begins to connect literacy as an individual development to literacy as an economic development” (19). Grounding her literacy learning research in the tradition of life-story, Brandt focused primarily on how participants learned how to write, though she also inquired about their “memories of reading” (9). She interviewed eighty people who represented a diverse population who were born between 1890s and 1980 (9). She asked participants how they used and valued their literacies (9-10). Brandt also points out that the Workforce 2000 plan of the U.S. Department of Labor increased productivity and created a network among “literacy ability, corporate profitability, and national productivity” (25), and as a result, literacy (reading and writing) drove productivity and changed the way people sponsored literacy. Brandt insists that “[u]nrelenting economic change has become the key motivator for schools, students, parents, states, and communities to raise expectations for literacy achievement. It is also considered the key reason for widening gaps in income between skilled and unskilled workers”

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5 Brandt defines life-story as “a loose confederation of historical, sociological, psychological, and phenomenological inquiry” (10), and she writes that it draws on oral history. Brandt defines literacy sponsor as any agent who invests in a person’s literate development.

6 Literacy sponsor connects literacies to money or the economy. According to Brandt, literacy sponsors are “agents who support or discourage literacy learning and development as alternative motives in their own struggles for economic or political gain” (Literacy in American Lives 5).
This persistent phenomenon that is referenced in my case study chapters. Brandt goes on to assert that “a more highly literate workforce” prompts employers and potential employers to amass means of literacy learning (26), which often undermines people’s literacies, shifts their socioeconomic status, and disrupts their ability to share their literacies with others (26), phenomena that are also evident in my data. Additionally, Brandt explains how literacy practices were shared between and among African Americans so they could maintain a literacy learning tradition that had an economic underpinning. Furthermore, Brandt’s examination of the link between literacy learning and the workforce supports my case study findings that key participants’ (Rashad Alexander Melroy-Thompson and Malon Smith) fathers’ connected their sons’ literacies to economic factors (Brandt 2001). In other words, Rashad’s and Malon’s fathers’ promoted formal education because they were aware of how literacies are valued and devalued in the workplace and how traditionally reading and writing have helped African Americans access professions and social mobility (see Chapter Three and Chapter Four).

Similar to how Brandt’s data show the connection between literacies and identities, my data demonstrate how literacies shape African American’s personal, sociocultural, and professional identities. In other words, my data reveal that the economy still determines the value of literacies as well as who acquire them, how they acquire them, and why they acquire them, validating that literacies are both ideological and autonomous (Brandt 2001; Street 1998). Finally, one conclusion that Brandt draws is that literacy studies specialists have not paid enough attention to the economy’s role in how or whether people become literate (also see Beaufort 2007). Consequently, for the most part, African American males’ literacy practices and ‘race remain undertheorized, unproblematicized, and underinvestigated in Composition Studies,” contends Keith Gilyard in his 1996 presentation at the Watson Conference on Rhetoric.
and Composition (qtd. in Prendergast, *Literacy* 36). Ultimately, Composition Studies has still “underinvestigated” African American males’ complex literacy practices and the literacy practices that successful African American males enact in first-year writing classes. Thus, Composition Studies has neglected to pursue opportunities to learn about the literacy practices, strategies, and resources that successful African American males use to achieve in first-year writing courses and in society in general.

**Purpose of the Study**

One purpose of this study is to contribute to Composition Studies’ limited research on the literacy practices of African American males, specifically eighteen-year-old African American males who self-identify as successful writers. This project is also a plea to integrate African American males’ voices into intellectual conversations about Black males’ school achievement. This study examines the literacy practices of Rashad Alexander Melroy Thompson and Malon Smith, two eighteen-year-old African American males who were enrolled in two separate predominantly White four-year universities in Northwest Ohio. More specifically, it explores the literacies, strategies, and resources that Rashad and Malon used to meet the objectives of first-year writing courses. This project was designed to create a platform for Rashad and Malon to use the power of storytelling to articulate their own narrative about their own literacy practices. Primarily, it reveals what it means to be an African American male in a first-year writing course in a four-year university in the United States. This project positions Rashad and Malon in the middle of historical and contemporary discourses about African American males’ status in school and in society, as well as permit Rashad and Malon to speak back to rhetoric that posits a deficit perspective on African American males. As discussed in Chapter Two, voicing is imperative to this study on African American males who are members of a group of people
whose voices have been systematically silenced since their arrival in North America. Pedro Noguera defines voice as “the ability to express one’s hopes, dreams, fears, angst, and inner turmoil—[voice] is what allows us to tell the world, ‘I exist and I have a right to be here!’” Noguera also posits that:

[Y]et for voice to be meaningful, there must be those willing to listen. In fact, this might be what Black males need most of all: adults who are willing to open up lines of communication, to engage in dialogue, and to listen. That may sound like a simple solution, but actually it is the first step in recognizing the humanity of Black males. (Search x, ix)

To listen deeply to Rashad’s and Malon’s voices is to witness their humanity, to respect their potentiality, to open a space for critical self-reflection, to recognize the literacies they acquired, developed, and applied in non-curricular spaces and transferred to school. In order to hear my participants’ voices and respond accordingly, I viewed them through what Jacqueline Jones Royster calls a “lens of subjectivity” that accorded Rashad and Malon “the power and authority to speak and to make meaning” of their own lived experiences (“When the First Voice” 31), and I served as a vessel who carried their voices to the academy. ⁷

Similar to how Noguera casts voice as a thing, Royster defines “voicing as a phenomenon that is constructed and expressed virtually and orally and as a phenomenon that has import also in being a thing heard, perceived, and reconstructed” (30). Because African American voices are silenced in school and the wider society, Rashad’s and Malon’s stories are not “‘simple stories’ to delight and entertain, but [are] vital layers of a transformative process,” as argued by Royster

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⁷ I use the term “voice” literally (recorded voices) and metaphorically (the voice that manifests in text). Some scholars argue that voice manifests in text (see Elbow 2007 and “What Do We Mean When We Talk About Voice in Text?” http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Books/Sample/56347chap01.pdf) while other scholars complicate the way that the metaphor operates, or not, in text (see Holmes 2004).
in “When the First Voice You Hear is not Your Own” (35). Royster also asserts that dynamic stories have the power to “construct new histories and theories” (35) in Composition Studies and across the disciplines (Powell 396). Yet in the academy, “the problem of articulating new paradigms through stories becomes intractable, if those who are empowered to define impact and consequence decide that the stories are simply stories and that the record of achievement is perceived, as Audre Lorde has said, as ‘the random droppings of birds’” (Royster 35). Hence, another function of this study is to record the achievements of two African American males and to urge literacy studies specialists and compositionists to alter the way they think about and teach African American males, a paradigm shift that has far-reaching implications for academe and society.

Another purpose of this project was to study the literacy practices of only African American males, as opposed to comparing African American males to White males. Historically, African American males’ academic achievements have been compared to Caucasian males’ academic achievements. In this literature, Caucasian males outperform African American males in every aspect of student academic achievement such as on standardized test scores, reading achievement, grade point averages, and computer skills tests (Harper 2012; Ladson-Billings 2000; Noguera 2011; Tatum 2005; U.S. Department of Education Report 2011; The Urgency of Now 2012). Additionally, studies show that Caucasian males have access to academic, economic, and cultural capital that affords them the knowledge and skills to outperform other American students regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender and because the U.S. education system privileges White middle-class norms and ideology (Brandt 2009; Carter 2003; Finn 2009; Freire 1970; Heath 1983; Ladson-Billings 2000). Ivory Toldson argues against cross-racial and cross-gender research because “The path that a lot of successful
Black males take is different from the path of successful White males” (Freeman). Therefore, Toldson suggests within-culture comparisons, as opposed to cross-culture comparisons. When viewed through Toldson’s lens, race matters in research projects about African American male achievement. Similar to the way that Toldson and Jacqueline Jones Royster position African Americans in their research, “I rejected images of African American males that would position us interpretively as a mirror or a reflection of others, or as a room accessed by other people’s doors and windows, or even as a backdrop against which other stories are told, invigorated, or clarified” (Royster, Traces 255). Gloria Ladson-Billings notes that Caucasian males have a longer history in the education system than African American males (2000). In “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education,” Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate, IV argue, curriculum represents a form of ‘intellectual property.’ The quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the ‘property values’ of the school. . . The availability of ‘rich’ (or enriched) intellectual property delimits what is now called ‘opportunity to learn’—the presumption that along with providing educational ‘standards’ that detail what students should know and be able to do, they must have the material resources that support their learning. Thus, intellectual property must be undergirded by ‘real’ property, that is, science lab, computers and other state-of-the-art technologies, appropriately certified and prepared teachers. Of course, Kozol demonstrated that schools that serve poor students of color are unlikely to have access to their resources and, consequently, students will have little or no opportunity to learn despite the attempt to mandate educational standards. (54-55)
Ladson-Billings and Tate, as well as other scholars, maintain that many secondary education school systems are not preparing students from underresourced homes, students of color for higher education (also see Delpit 1995, Finn 2009, Freire 1993, Jackson 2007, Lamos 2011, Prendergast 2003, Richardson 2003, Royster and Taylor 1997, Shaughnessy 1977, among others). Because many African American males are underprepared for life after high school, my target population became African American males who identified as “successful” so we might learn how to prepare more African American males for success in post-secondary and secondary writing courses.

Thus, the last purpose of this study is to offer post-secondary and secondary educators feedback from two African American male writers with the overall goals of (1) improving the quality of instruction that African American males receive in post-secondary and secondary writing courses, (2) making school more challenging for African American males, and (3) making writing relevant to African American males’ lives and potential professions so they can link their writing courses to their goals and interests, which will make writing more practical for them.

Research Questions

One primary research question and one secondary question directed this project. My questions ask: 1) “What factors contribute to African American males’ success in first-year writing courses?” and 2) “What value do African American males place on their literacies and identities, and what is the source of that value?” These questions focus on social, cultural, personal, and academic factors that contributed to Rashad’s and Malon’s ability to achieve the requirements of first-year writing courses.
General Findings

Data show that four general factors contributed to Rashad’s and Malon’s success in first-year writing courses:

- their acquisition of critical literacies at home,
- their ability to carry literacies from home to school and across the curriculum,
- their use of school resources to further develop their literacies, and
- their dispositions regarding formal education, which, for the most part, were shaped by their African American fathers’ perspectives of their sons’ formal education.

Before I move on to a discussion on my framework, I must note that women also directly and indirectly shaped Rashad’s and Malon’s academic identities and attitudes on formal schooling.

Framework

Based on the questions and the methodologies in which this project is rooted, my examination of Rashad’s and Malon’s literacy practices necessitates a frame that draws on Brian Street’s ideological model of literacy and on Deborah Brandt’s concept of African American-literacy sponsorship. Street, an ethnographic researcher and new literacy studies specialist, defines an ideological model of literacy as an approach that perceives literacy practices as empowering, disempowering, authoritative, subjective, embedded in power structures, political, epistemological, contextual, mobile, “socially constructed,” and “materially produced” (Hull qtd. in Street 435). In other words, Street asserts that “researchers dissatisfied with the autonomous model of literacy . . . have come to view literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in society and to recognise the variety of cultural practices associated with reading and writing in different contexts” (434), while also recognizing the autonomous nature of literacy practices. Street’s social-practice paradigm narrows “literacy” to reading and writing,
which is problematic on the one hand, but advantageous on the other because the social-practice approach allows me to examine the sociocultural aspect of Rashad’s and Malon’s literacy practices while also recognizing their technical or cognitive nature, which is where Brandt’s concept connects to my study.

As stated earlier, Brandt connects literacies to the economy and pays attention to how the economy defines who, how, why, and where people acquire literacies. Because I have already discussed the context of Brandt’s work, I will not repeat it here. Instead, I expand that conversation, explaining its connection to my project. In “‘The Power of It’: Sponsors of Literacy in African American Lives,” Brandt examines the life history of sixteen African Americans “who grew up between the 1910s and the 1970s in . . . the rural and urban South, the industrial upper Midwest, and the West” (107) in order to discern how they acquired literacies, reading and writing, in a competitive and racist society that limited and devalued African American literacy practices. Brandt found that three core institutions: the church, the Black mass media, and the Black school/Black educators sponsored Black people’s literacies. Again, Brandt defines “sponsors of literacy” as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (19). For the most part, African Americans acquired, developed, and practiced literacies in a specific context. Brandt points out that, historically, literacy has been used in American society to systematically marginalize African Americans’ access to formal literacy learning and to stifle their application of the literacies they did manage to acquire, which contributes to the persistent disparities in education and income levels among Black and White Americans. However, in spite of their “wholesale exclusion from economic and education” opportunities throughout their presence in North America, many African Americans
managed to become “literate” in a society where their skills continue to be measured against “those of the white population” (Brandt 106).

Again, many of the injustices that Brandt illuminates have intensified in the twenty-first century giving rise to more segregated and unequally funded schools; a rise in standardized testing; a new voting law that requires current government-issued photo identification for voters; and increased violence against African Americans, particularly African American males. Yet many African American males still manage to become “literate” as demonstrated in this case study, which is another reason Rashad and Malon identified as successful writers. For the most part, Rashad and Malon acquired literacies so they could eventually meet the demands of the technically-driven workforce that primarily privileges the standard dialect of English, as Brandt points out. Brandt’s research also supports my findings that Rashad and Malon acquired literacies at home and carried them to school. However, as far as Rashad’s case is concerned, I place sponsorship in a local context of his home—the single-parent home of his African American father who taught his son how to read and write through his own intensive home curriculum. Although Rashad connected writing to the economy, that is, he perceived writing and reading as a means to an end, Jimmy, his father, also taught Rashad that writing and reading are literacies that he should engage as non-school-sanctioned activities. For example, Rashad’s father taught him how to critically read Black-owned mass-market magazines such as Ebony and Jet for their educational value (the racial and social issues of concern to African Americans), as opposed to focusing on their primary mission, which was to entertain and to promote consumerism (Brandt 133).

When I combine them, Brandt’s conceptual paradigm and Street’s theoretical paradigm helped me systematically analyze how Rashad’s and Malon’s literacy practices function
ideologically and autonomously and how their literacies are rendered valuable in various contexts and invaluable in others. Brandt’s and Street’s paradigms also helped me demonstrate that Malon’s (a basic writer) literacies are dynamic and widely distributed. Therefore, literacy studies specialists must not focus on a single, narrow site such as a classroom, argues Roozen, Richardson, Selfe, Moss, Lamos, and other literacy specialists in Composition Studies. Roozen also states that his case, “Charles’ story suggests that the same is true of our search to understand how basic writers develop as literate persons throughout the undergraduate years” (39). Roozen goes on to argue that “Like the man who looks separately at hydrogen and oxygen without ever coming to realize the characteristics of water, the researcher who examines non-school and school writing as separate, autonomous activities cannot see and account for how they mutually interact and inform one another” (39).8 While Roozen’s research is pivotal to my understanding of how to conduct literacy research that moves beyond the writing classroom, it does not account for the literacy learning that transpire in students’ homes. Hence, based on my findings, I urge literacy studies specialists to “look at the whole person,” as Rashad urged me to do so I might understand why he identified as a writer and a successful African American male in general.9 Rashad needed us to know that he became a writer and reader at home.

Origin of the Study

The idea for this research project developed from my personal experiences with African American male writers at a historically Black university (HBCU) in North Carolina and at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in North Carolina. I taught first-year composition and basic writing at the HBCU for six years, and I have taught advanced composition for seven years to sophomore and junior pre-medical and pre-dental students of all races and ethnicities at the

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9 Also see “Journalism, Poetry, Stand-up Comedy, and Academic Literacy.” Journal of Basic Writing, 27.1 (2008).
At both institutions, I engaged informal teacher-research in order to identify some of the diverse literacies that African American males brought into first-year writing courses, including basic writing courses. However, of the minority students who enter the summer enrichment program that prepares them for medical school, I ask how they see a future self in a profession where only 4% of the practicing physicians are Black/African American, but where 36.7% are White (“Current Status” and “American Needs”). I also observe the academic literacies they reject and how their academic and non-academic literacies converge and conflict, which spawn many of the questions that ground this literacy-based research project.

My self-directed teacher-research also initiated a systemic literacy-based service learning project in 2009 at an HBCU that called on me to listen to all my students’ narratives about their academic and non-academic literacy practices. While all the reflections were palpable, one African American male’s reflection resonates with me. He wrote, “My English teacher came up with an idea that we could write letters to [ . . . ] high school students . . . I thought this would be another dumb project. But, I think now that it was a good idea” (Faulkner-Springfield 64). The writer also postulates that his performance in school would have improved had he engaged in cross-aged teaching initiatives when he was younger. The service-learning initiative I integrated into my first-year composition course also piqued my interest in African American males’ literacy practices and the resources they use to succeed in writing courses and in the wider society.

**Participants**

When I conceptualized this research project, I imagined recruiting African American males who had maintained a 3.5-4.0 grade point average in high school, who were actively engaged in their school and academic communities, and whose digital literacies had surpassed

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10Data from 2013 and 2004 reports of the Association of the American Medical Colleges.
most African American males’ technological literacy skills. However, those African American males did not volunteer to participate in my study. I have come to appreciate, however, that literacies are widely distributed and “success” is relative—situated and contextual. Nevertheless, after Rashad and Malon volunteered to participate in my study, both of them consented to have their real names used in a project that explores their literacy practices and that reveals what I considered personal and private aspects of their lives (see figures 2 and 3 below).

Fig. 2. Image of Rashad's HSRB Consent Form

Fig. 3. Image of Malon's HSRB Consent Form

Initially, I thought two eighteen-year-old African American males had made a precarious decision; therefore, I explained some of the consequences of revealing their full names in this project. Yet Rashad’s and Malon’s position on revealing their full names in my study remained indisputable, as they insisted that they were successful African American male writers. When I compared their narratives to mainstream narratives on African American males, I accepted Rashad’s and Malon’s decision to expose their names in a space that was created for them to
articulate their own narratives about their own literacy practices, particularly their writing practices. More specifically, I deduced that I had an obligation to represent whole human beings, as David E. Kirkland did in his literacy-based authnographic research project. In *A Search Past Silence: The Literacy of Young Black Men* (2013), David Kirkland writes, “Being Black and male myself, I never thought it would be my job to convince others that Black men practice literacy. It just never dawned on me. Rather than seeing Black through the default prism of stereotypes, much of the narrative you have read has examined how and why the literate lives of six Black males merged” (135). I am an African American female who is defending two adolescent African American males, that is, proving that they practice literacies. Besides that is one of the advantages of qualitative data, as opposed to quantitative data that results in “‘voiceless’ prose and ‘faceless’ data” (Newkirk, “Narrative Root” 131).

Finally, after Rashad, Malon, and I decided that I would reveal their true identities, I informed each potential interviewees such as their parents, former writing teachers, and former school administrators, of the powerful rhetorical statement that Rashad and Malon had made by revealing their full names. Their rhetorical strategy had had ramifications for potential interviewees.

*Rashad Alexander Melroy-Thompson*

Rashad was born in 1995 to “an African American father and a Puerto Rican and White mother.” He stated that when he attempted to honor his mother’s ethnic identity by identifying as Puerto Rican, he was told that he did not “look” Puerto Rican, as he “look[ed] Black.” In addition to negotiating Black masculinity and other tensions, Rashad also negotiated the racial divide. For the first two years of his life, Rashad lived with his mother in a low-income single parent home in a middle Atlantic region of the United States. When Rashad was eight years old,
he was adopted by a single African American male named Jimmy Thompson who placed Rashad in “high performing” schools and in pre-college programs. When I met Rashad, he and Jimmy lived in a suburb of Northwest Ohio, where Rashad had attended high school (eleventh grade and twelfth grade). Rashad was enrolled in a large public four-year research university when I met him during the Fall 2013 semester.

Rashad was a confident African American male who self-identified as a writer, reader, and critical and analytical thinker. He asserted that after he moved to Ohio, he was not challenged in high school, which produced his disenchantment with school. Then, when he matriculated in college, he deduced that his first-year writing course should have been taught in his high school in Ohio, which would have made writing more challenging yet appealing. In an interview in April 2014, Rashad reported that he had maintained a “B” average in college, but strived for an “A” average. He also insisted that his first-year experience in college offered him a new perspective on writing, reading, and thinking. He pointed out that he learned why his adoptive father “forced” him to read and write critically at home. After completing one year of college, Rashad decided to become an attorney like his father, so he changed his major to psychology and criminal justice.

Malon Smith

Malon was born in 1995 into a two-parent home in a large city in Northeast Ohio to African American parents. He attended predominantly Black elementary and middle schools in Ohio and Georgia, and he attended a predominantly White high school in Ohio. Malon’s parents were separated when I met him, and he told me that both of his parents supported him and encouraged him to go to college. After Malon graduated from high school, he attended a small private predominantly White liberal arts college in Northwest Ohio, where I met him during the
Fall 2013 semester. Malon was a confident African American male, who self-identified as a writer and critical thinker. Malon noted that he had maintained a “C+” average in high school and in college (self-professed grade-point average). When I probed him about his grades, Malon replied that he is satisfied with Cs because he was progressing as well as he could in his new complex education and social environment at his university. One of Malon’s childhood dreams was to attend his mother’s alma mater, play football, and major in criminal justice. He attempted to attain those goals at the end of the spring 2014 semester when he transferred to his mother’s alma mater.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rashad’s Success Factors</th>
<th>Malon’s Success Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earn a college degree</td>
<td>Earn a college degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succeed in first-year writing courses</td>
<td>Succeed in first-year writing courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earn a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.5</td>
<td>Earn a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“elude thug life”</td>
<td>Avoid incarceration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid biological parents’ life style of abusing drugs</td>
<td>Maintain trust of parents, particularly his father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain content with his life</td>
<td>Play football in college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter a career, “not a job”/ become an attorney</td>
<td>Play NFL player, become FBI agent, or become attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earn academic scholarships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with diverse audiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through a initial close examination of Rashad’s and Malon’s literacy practices, several themes and concepts emerged: “intelligent,” “success/successful,” “fathers,” “mothers,” “grandmothers,” “friends,” “sports,” “writing,” “reading,” “technology,” “profession,” and “unchallenging curricula,” to name a few. Though I used case-study methodology in order to immerse myself in my participants’ worlds and make the familiar strange and the strange familiar, I also drew on ethnographic methods thus interviewing people who had influenced Rashad’s and Malon’s literacies, and I visited the communities where they lived, their college campuses, and their high school campus.¹¹ Rashad’s and Malon’s narratives continue in two separate chapters of this dissertation, and within those narratives are the voices of Rashad’s and Malon’s parents, former high school and college writing teachers, former principals, as well as literacy studies scholars, compositionists, and education specialists.

**Definition of Key Terms**

*African American* is used as a racial identity for Rashad and Malon who self-identified as African American. Rashad and Malon were born in America, attended public schools in America, and self-identified as African American. The term is also used as a racial identity for other participants who are Americans.

*Black* is also used as a proper noun to refer to the ethnic identity of people who are members of the African Diaspora. It is used as an ethnic identity for individuals who self-identify as Black or who have been identified as Black by scholars whose works are discussed or referenced in this dissertation. When I speak directly about Rashad’s and Malon’s racial identity, I use the term African American, but when I join conversations that use the term Black, I also use it to represent a group of people who have an African heritage such as when I discuss the educational experiences of males of color. For example, David E. Kirkland uses the term

¹¹ Later in the study, I learned that Rashad and Malon attended the same high school in Ohio.
Black because four of his participants had African American parents, and one of them had a “Mexican” mother and “Black” father (Search 77). I must note that all “Black” people are not Americans, and not all Americas of African descent identify as “Black,” which further complicates the ambiguous term “race.”

*Identity* “is a fluid, socially and linguistically mediated construct, one that takes into account the different positions that individuals enact or perform in particular settings within a given set of social, economic, and historical relations,” according to Alfred Tatum and Valerie Gue (128). In this dissertation project, “identity” denotes and connotes the qualities, beliefs, values, and characteristics that situate a human being in a specific context or within a specific group or groups.

*Literacies* is broadly defined as multiple meaning-making tasks such as reading, writing, speaking, listening, and other textual and non-textual practices that are acquired, developed, and applied in various contexts. Sometimes literacy practices merge, diverge, or conflict in each context because literacy practices are social practices that are grounded in a local context (Flower 1994 and 2008; Gee 1989; Goodman 1984; Heath 1983; Kutz 1997; Moss 1994; Short, Harste, and Burke 1996).

*Success* is a concept that Rashad and Malon helped me define. When I met Rashad and Malon, I dragged my preconceived notion of success into their individual and complex lives, as I discussed above (see Participants). However, Rashad and Malon taught me how to define success from each one of their unique perspectives, which includes their success at school and in the wider society. As far as Rashad’s and Malon’s writing courses are concerned, I define success as each participant’s ability to meet the objectives of his first-year writing courses the first time he enrolled in them. Both Rashad and Malon completed their courses with a grade of
“C” or better. Because cognitive, emotive, and ideological forces affect students’ academic performance, one of my research questions asks about the value that Rashad and Malon placed on their literacies and their identities. Rashad and Malon not only met the demands of their first-year writing courses, but they also met the demands and requirements that their father imposed on them. For example, in an interview that I conducted with Malon in fall of 2013, he emphasized that “if anyone was applying pressure,” it was his father. Malon and Rashad taught me that students’ performance in first-year writing classes is not only rooted in their cognitive skills, but also in social, cultural, and personal determinants, a finding that has far reaching implications for how we teach and conduct literacy research on any population. Nevertheless, I used one success measure to determine Rashad’s and Malon’s success in the writing courses they took in the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters, which was their ability to meet the objectives of their courses.

Conclusion

The scope of this project is limited, as Rashad and Malon do not represent the entire African American male population. Therefore, in this study, I generalize to other cases, topics, concepts, and theories (Yin 1984). For example, I generalize to Cynthia Selfe’s 2004 study and Kevin Roozen’s 2008 case study of African American males’ literacy practices. Generalizing to theories and cases such as Selfe’s and Roozen’s helps me establish Rashad’s and Malon’s credibility and create evidence that supports my proposition that African American males are indeed succeeding in first-year writing courses the first time they take them. Additionally, generalizing to Self’s and Roozen’s cases also helps me demonstrate why more writing teachers should exploit the literacies that students bring into writing classrooms in order to help them meet the requirements of those courses, which should result in a paradigm shift in writing studies.
research, theories, and practices (Royster 1996). During their first-year experiences, Rashad and Malon not only fulfilled writing requirements, but they also met the requirements that their parents and guardians had created for them. In this regard, not only did their literacy practices contribute to their academic success, but they also contributed to their ability to meet non-school obligations. This project calls on readers to listen closely to Rashad’s and Malon’s narratives and to reconceptualize the field’s metaphors and metanarratives about African American male literacy practices (Trimbur 2000).

Frances Smith Foster affirms in Written for Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892: “Quiet as it’s kept, black women have been recording and influencing American history since their earlier arrival upon these shores” (1). I have recorded Rashad’s and Malon’s stories, placed them beside other people’s stories, and “demonstrating [my] closeness to the collective spirit of the African American oral tradition,” I have taken those stories back to my academic community where I urge literacy studies specialists, teacher-researchers, and compositionists “[t]o think with a story” (Frank, “When Bodies” 23).12 Borrowing from an Indigenous female anthropologist who was “attempting to explain a narrative oral tradition to a white audience,” Arthur W. Frank puts her story beside his story and argues, ‘You have to learn to think with stories.’ Not think about stories, which would be the usual phrase, but think with them. To think about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyze that content. Thinking with stories takes the story as already complete; there is no going beyond it. To think with a story is to experience it affecting one’s own life and to find in that effect a certain truth of one’s own life. (23)

12 See Mary Helen Washington’s Foreword to Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) where she quotes Michael Awkward, a Black male feminist.
A listener’s ability “to think with a story” reduces her or his propensity to misconstrue and decontextualize that story. To “think with a story” calls on her to be patient, to wait for the story to unfold, to listen holistically, to contemplate, to self-critique, to feel and see herself in the story and transform.

**Chapter Outlines**

*Chapter One: Introduction.* Chapter One introduces the exigency for this research and its imports for Composition Studies. In this chapter, I also discuss its purpose, research questions, general results, framework, and origin. It introduces Rashad and Malon, my key participants. Contextualizing this project required me to elucidate my positionality; therefore, interwoven into Chapter One is my subjective perspective on my relationship with African American males. I also discuss my methodologies and data collection methods, which are explored more fully in Chapter Two. Finally, I conclude by defining key terminology.

*Chapter Two: Methodologies and Methods.* Chapter Two provides an explicit description of my methodologies and methods. Peter Smagorinsky (2008) and Bob Broad (2012) discuss the importance of making a method section the epicenter of a research project. However, this narrative case study research about the literacy practices of two successful African American males calls on me to place as much value on my case studies chapters as I place on my methodology and method section, as my methodologies and methods unveil Rashad’s and Malon’s narratives through the use of feminist methodologies. I also discuss the interdisciplinarity of my methodologies and methods, situating them in Composition Studies and across the disciplines. I identify my research sites, participant selection process, and methods of data collection, which includes how I analyzed, interpreted, and reduced data.
Chapter Three: Findings/Case Study One: Rashad Melroy-Thompson. I begin Chapter Three with a discussion on context. Then, I transition to a discussion on the themes and patterns that manifested in my data and their implications. Chapter Three also contains Rashad’s narrative and results from Rashad’s father’s survey and interview data and other artifacts I collected from Rashad and his father, Jimmy. Additionally, my discussion of Rashad’s literacy practices also draw on data from his first-year writing teachers and an administrator at his former middle-high school. Finally, this chapter includes Rashad’s contribution as a panelist at the 2014 Black Male Summit, which was held at the University of Akron on April 12, 2014. I conclude with a brief comparison of contemporary research on other African American males and the conclusions drawn in those studies.

Chapter Four: Findings/Case Study Two: Malon Smith. Like Chapter Three, Chapter Four begins with a discussion on context, methods of data collection, and analysis. Then, it transitions to a discussion on the themes and patterns that manifested in my data and on their implications. Chapter Four also contains Malon’s narrative and data from individuals I interviewed such as Malon’s godfather/former high school principal, and first-year writing teachers. Similar to Chapter Three, Chapter Four concludes with a brief comparison of contemporary research on other African American males and the conclusions drawn in those studies.

Chapter Five: Conclusion, Implications, and Reflection. My conclusion briefly recaps and synthesizes the results of my two case studies. This chapter reveals the implications for teaching first-year writing and contributions to Composition Studies. I also discuss the limitation of my research and why additional research is needed in Composition Studies on the literacy practices of African American males.
CHAPTER TWO: STORY AS METHODOLOGY, DATA, GENRE, AND LIVED EXPERIENCE

Rashad: Success is when you reach a level of happiness: When you wake up in the morning and you are happy with your life. That’s success because there’re people who have all the money in the world, but they hate their lives. . . . I was successful in eluding that path, and I went down the . . . scholarly path. However, you can’t say I’m successful yet because I can always get off the success path. . . . I was successful at getting here [to college]. . . . I didn’t want to be a thug. I want to make money. I want to be the person who provides for his family. I want to put my father in his own house. He wants a Brownstone. Maybe one day I can give that to him. I want to play basketball. . . . This comes before basketball right now. . . . my academics, my schooling. My most realistic goal is to get through college with at least a 3.0 so I can have a career, not a job, a career.

Malon: Just do it! Do what makes you uncomfortable. Do something you’re not so familiar with. Do something that makes you well-rounded. They say school makes you well-rounded. Well, it does. When you get an education, it helps you get a job. You want to stand out and not be a statistic. If you’re a Black man in college, you stand out. . . . Why would you not want to become a part of a movement to do something your ancestors couldn’t do because they didn’t have the choice, but you have the choice, so you need to get out there and get an education. . . . Not only you personally, but we as a race can move up to bigger and better things if more African American males attend college.

In the epigraphs that begin Chapter Two, Rashad’s and Malon’s knowledge and understanding on life and on formal schooling are primarily grounded in their fathers’ and their own experiences, but they are also grounded in their African American heritage. Therefore, Rashad and Malon tell similar stories about academic success and thus about the value of their literacies. Rashad who has lived in both urban and suburban communities walks down a narrow conceptual path on his journey to success, indirectly imparting guidance to other adolescent African American males. However, Rashad delivered his perspective on academic success to an actual audience of Black male high school and university students, as well as post-secondary faculty and administrators at the Black Male Summit during the Spring 2014 semester. At the Summit, Rashad outlined a plan for success in writing courses that included accepting writing as process, avoiding the deferment of writing assignments, conferring with writing instructors and
tutors, and allowing other people inside and outside the university to become support, resources, and mentors.\textsuperscript{13} Rashad and I co-presented at the conference that was hosted by the University of Akron in Akron, Ohio. Malon sustained an injury during football practice, so he could not present with Rashad and me at the summer. Nonetheless, in the epigraph, Malon becomes a model for an invoked audience of adolescent African American males who grew up in an urban neighborhood as he did where few African American males attend college, according to Malon and his godfather. Malon urges African American males to broaden their experiences, to “draw . . . on the educational opportunities that their ancestors struggled to provide for them” (Collins x), as he has done. Rashad’s and Malon’s perspectives on academic, professional, and personal success directly connect with my research questions about the factors that contribute to their ability to meet the requirements of first-year writing courses and the value they place on their literacies and identities.

I begin my discussion on methodology with the voices of two African American males who self-identified as successful writers, in part, because they know what they are talking about: they are using their voices to “express [their] hopes, dreams, . . . [to] tell the world, ‘I exist and I have a right to be here!’” (Noguera \textit{Search} x). In short, they exert agency and name their own realities about their own lived experiences and futures (Delgado 2000). I also begin my discussion on methodology with the voices of two African American males because successful African American males are chiefly a neglected subject in Composition Studies scholarship, creating phenomena that negatively affect African American males’ presence in writing classrooms and in society: their inability to be heard, their inability to be seen, and their inability to be deemed credible. Despite these obstacles, many African American male students achieve in first-year writing courses. The third reason I begin my discussion on methodology with the

\textsuperscript{13} I discuss Rashad’s presentation in depth in Chapter Three.
voices of two African American males is because in Chapter Two, I discuss the methodologies and methods I used to help me collect Rashad’s and Malon’s stories.

In order for me to draw a connection among my research questions, my methods, my primary methodology, the theoretical literature on African American male literacy practices, and the exigency I delineate in Chapter One, I have expanded a methodology that Jacqueline Jones Royster draws on to foreground the literacy practices of African American women (1996; 2000). This methodology is grounded in a specific epistemology (Clandinin 2007). Sandra Harding defines methodology as “a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed” (3), and Harding defines epistemology as “a theory of knowledge [that] answers questions about who can be ‘knowers’ . . . what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge . . . what kinds of things can be known . . . and so forth” (3). Additionally, Gesa E. Kirsch and Joy S. Ritchie expand Andrienne Rich’s concept “politics of location,” defining it as a theory of research that situates a feminist researcher’s material self deeply inside her or his research, “validating experience as a source of knowledge” (7).14 In much the same way that Kirsch and Ritchie, Rich, and Harding position knowledge in research, Jacqueline Jones Royster postulates in “When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own,” that “[a]dopting subjectivity as a defining value is instructive” and that “individual stories placed one against another against another build credibility and offer . . . a litany of evidence from which a call for transformation in theory and practice might rightfully begin” (30). Royster speaks to persistent contested subjects in Composition Studies research and scholarship: the role of voicing and the role of self-representation. Hence, this project makes a significant contribution to Composition Studies research and, more specifically, to feminist research since Malon’s, Rashad’s, and other people’s

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inseparable stories that constitute knowledge on two African American males’ literacy practices undergird this narrative of a dissertation that privileges voicing.

This narrative would be incomplete if it were not imbued with portrayals of the people from whom Rashad and Malon acquired literacies such as their parents, grandparents, former teachers, and former principals/administrators. And surely I must have influenced their literacy practices in one way or another. Furthermore, Anne Harrington argues, “If we are going to be interpreting others’ lives, we need to be public about how we understand we are implicated in the telling” (48). In essence, the feminist scholars discussed in this chapter call on me to place my own story beside Rashad’s and Malon’s narratives; thus, I also foreground my own positioning as an American, an African American woman from a working-class family, and an advocate for Black males. Of equal importance, I must foreground my bi-dialectical self who articulates both “African American English” and “Edited American English,” two problematic dialects that result in more code-meshing than code-switching. Finally, I am a writing specialist who has taught advanced composition, first-year composition, and basic writing for a combination of ten years at three different four-year institutions of higher education: one public predominantly White institution in the Northwestern United States, one private predominantly White institution in the Southeastern United States, and one public historically Black institution in the Southeastern United States, as discussed in Chapter One.

At the historically black university where I taught writing to primarily first-generation college students who had limited experience with the type of writing they were expected to produce at the university-level, I asked of those writers: “Who Are You?” Many writers do not expect this type of questioning on the first day of class. I did not ask student writers to identify themselves because I needed to account for the bodies that populated our writing classrooms. I
interrogated students on the first day of class because I believed my newly-minted matriculants needed to hear themselves articulate aspects of their own identities and potentials, which might have helped them understand the objectives of their writing course and our roles as both teachers and learners in first-year writing courses. Nevertheless, my question consistently generated the same response, “My name is ___,” a reaction that minimized writers’ identities to simply a name, although their names are a significant part of their identities. Then I asked, “Does your identity comprise only your name?” Students’ verbal and nonverbal gestures assured me that my constructive technique was effective, as some of their nonverbal communicative acts suggested that they were uncomfortable revealing their identities or that they did not know who they were in their new academic context. Yet other students began to expand their sense of self by articulating nouns and adjectives such as “a smart Black woman,” “a sister,” “a brother,” “a single father,” “an artist,” “a singer,” “a poet,” “a rapper,” “a musician,” “a student,” “an entrepreneur,” and the list goes on. Some students asserted: “I’m Black,” with no other depiction of themselves. However, among the richly variegated nouns and adjectives that rolled off the tongues of students who populated my writing classrooms, I seldom heard the term *writer*.

Conversely, this strategy is imperative in a classroom of basic and advanced writers of any race, ethnicity, or gender orientation because it invites students to engage in metacognition hence in thinking about how they think about themselves. This strategy is also beneficial for some first-year writers who are learning a new empowering discourse that might help them achieve the goals of their writing courses, though this new discourse often disempowers some students, relegating them to the role of insignificant other. Sometimes this strategy has import for African American males who are not as confident as Rashad and Malon and who sometimes resist the acquisition of some academic discourses. However, in order to help writers improve
their communication skills, I must understand their experiences and their purposes for enrolling in a writing course. Of equal importance, I must expand my own systematic research to determine whether non-writers must identify as writers in order for them to meet the learning outcomes of my writing courses, particularly African American males. Ultimately, I must ask: “What do I need to know about African American males, particularly about their writing practices and their ways of knowing about themselves and about the academy?” (Hurston 1991).

Can listening holistically to African American males help Composition Studies researchers collect data in ways that encourage their participants to “talk about writing” and use methods and practices that help Composition Studies researchers elucidate their participants’ “reasons for talking about writing [and] the purposes of the writing they talk about. . . .” (Mortensen 107). In Writing Studies Research in Practice: Methods and Methodologies (2012), Mary P. Sheridan and Lee Nickoson urge researchers to reconceptualize the way they research writing in twenty-first century contexts. Sheridan and Nickoson ask: “What questions about writing interest us now? . . . What do we gain, and lose, from adopting a particular methodology? . . . as we explore why, how, when, where and what writers write” (1). My project speaks back to Sheridan and Nickoson’s concerns because I asked their questions and new ones, as well as altered my methods as I progressed through the research process so my participants could talk with me about writing (Mortensen 1992). Two of those questions were: “Why did Rashad and Malon identify as academic writers?” “How are they writing outside school?” These questions motivated me to delve deeper into Rashad’s and Malon’s personal lives and re-examine their non-academic literate practices. I explore these concerns in depth in chapters three and four and later in this chapter.
In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss my own methodology and explicate its relationship with Composition Studies and other disciplines. Then, I transition to a brief overview of qualitative research and how it operated in this literacy-based research project. Next, I offer why I used the different methods I selected to piece together the stories of Rashad’s and Malon’s literate lives. Finally, this positioning helps me shift to my coding strategies and the methods I used to collect my participants’ narratives, and then I conclude with the consequences and implications of the methodologies and methods I chose to examine the literacy practices of two eighteen-year-old African American males who self-identified as successful writers.

**Story-Beside-Story: A Methodology and A Practice**

I use story-beside-story methodology in this study to place other people’s stories beside Rashad’s and Malon’s stories, which helps me:

- situate myself in my own narrative research project (African American male advocate);
• situate my participants and their “literacy sponsors” in this narrative research project thus creating a multivocal project;\textsuperscript{15}

• situate my project in what David Kirkland calls an “unknown story that is rarely told in the ‘science’ of Black males and literacy” (\textit{Search Past Silence} 1);

• situate my project in African American socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts;

• situate my project as interdisciplinary; and

• situate Rashad and Malon as credible African American males and me as a credible researcher.

This situatedness creates a space for me to demonstrate both the collective spirit of the African American community in its effort to support the literacy learning of its community members. It also helps me demonstrate the ways that African American women have \textit{always} implicated themselves in the promotion of literacies and advocacy in the African American community. For example, in 1694, Frances Driggus, a seventeen-year-old free Black woman and mother, used oral discourse to defend her rights as an “an autonomous liberal subject” (Keizer 29) in a White male-dominated colonial legal system in Northampton County, Virginia.\textsuperscript{16} Driggus advocated against enslavement and Black female exploitation when she sued John Brewer, a White male who had contracted Driggus as an indentured servant. In the presence of an all-White male jury, Driggus “argued that John Brewer was conspiring to place her in a community where her status as a free woman would not be recognized. The letter binding Frances to Brewer was ruled invalid” (n. pag.). The Virginia court granted Driggus the right to reside in a slave-free community thus ultimately granting her the right to challenge a White male in

\textsuperscript{15}From Deborah Brandt’s \textit{Literacy in American Lives} (2001).

\textsuperscript{16}In her work on the examination of contemporary slavery in literary works, Arlene Keizer defines “an autonomous literal subject” as a human being’s ability to conceptualize herself or himself as a whole person, as opposed to an objective self who belongs to another human being.
colonial America. In contrast, Driggus’ success reveals the power of rhetoric in her newly-formed society with indentured servants and slaves. Though there is no evidence of Driggus’ ability to write or read, she engaged discursive practices by using her voice as a free American of African descent to reveal her lived experience so others might document it. In this sense, Driggus “was still able to make use of the technologies of writing even though she [might not have been] able to participate in the practice of writing in the traditional sense” (Fisher 21), as we witness in the case of Sojourner Truth, an African American woman who, for the most part, defines her own fate and identity (Fisher 21).

Hence, my literacy-based case study research also evolves, in part, out of Black feminist challenges to social institutions’ including the academy’s tradition of marginalizing African Americans’ voices and of privileging objectivity, an epistemology that is grounded in a White, Western, elite male tradition. Therefore, my project explores the implications of who can speak, why they speak, and with what kind of authority. In this sense, my project offers a contrasting perspective on Deborah Brandt’s argument that she dehumanizes her participants’ words. In “The Politics of the Personal,” Brandt claims that when private narratives about research participants’ literacy practices become public, that disclosure invites unjustified scrutiny. Brandt maintains that the publicizing of private information “invites audiences to psychologize the interviewees, to see them as characters to be analyzed or wondered about” (43). Therefore, Brandt “dehumanize[s] the words people give” her (43), obliterating “their personal significance [in order to] understand their historical significance” (43). Though I respect Brandt’s imperative, I offer a contrasting approach to representing Rashad and Malon because my “passionate attachment” to them prevents me from “dehumanizing the words [they gave me].”

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besides, our personal significance directly connects to our historical significance as members of a marginalized group in the academy and in society. Diane S. Pollard places her story beside Marsha Houston’s story and writes, “Houston echoes this perspective when she challenges White feminist researchers to ‘Follow us into our world.’ Only by taking this journey, she argues, will these scholars learn to recognize and ultimately reject ethnocentric and exploitative research conducted on women and communities of color” (16). While Brandt’s work is not exploitative, it does strip her participants of the essence of their humanity—their voices and their identities—which is a concern of many feminist researchers of color.

Consequently, story-beside-story methodology is deeply rooted in Black feminist theory. It draws on Alice Walker’s “Womanist” (1983), Jacqueline Jones Royster’s “Afra-feminism” (2000), and Patricia Hill Collins’ “Black feminist thought” (2000). Displeased with the second wave of feminist epistemology, Walker coined the term “Womanist” to signify unity among people of color. Womanist, according to Walker is “A black feminist or feminist of color” who is not a separatist, as a womanist is devoted to the “survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (xi). In “The Alchemy of Disloyalty,” Robyn Wiegman, a White Women’s Studies scholar, argues that Walker’s “rearticulation of feminism . . . stages a resistance to the totality of feminism’s modern narrative of inclusion, given that narrative’s deep philosophical and political ties to Western racism” (183). Similarly, Royster’s Afra-feminism and Collins’ Black feminist thought promote inclusivity and are steeped in other personal, social, political, economic, and intellectual issues. Afrafeminism is a methodology Royster theorizes in *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women* (2000) that promotes ethical awareness and “embodies the notion that the mind, heart, body, and soul operate collectively”

19Brandt, 44.
20 The perspective that Pollard writes about is Harding’s feminist standpoint epistemology (16).
Royster’s qualitative research project uncovered the rhetorical practices of eighteenth and early twentieth century “elite” African American women, which is a neglected subject in Rhetoric and Composition, analogous to research on the literacy practice of adolescent African American males who achieve in first-year writing courses. Royster writes,

In declaring my interest in a non-mainstream academic area, I have benefited from an array of practices in rhetorical studies, literacy studies, and feminist studies. However, I have not been privileged to have a guide in identifying appropriate analytical frameworks for the use of such practices with my targeted group or in either choosing or developing a set of methodologies that were actually adequate to the task. (251-52)

Though Royster and I examine the literacy practices of marginalized groups, in my project, gender and race matter in ways that perhaps Royster did not experience. I “learned to engage in a painstaking process of recovery and reconstruction” (Royster xi) of the lives of human beings who are deemed failures in school and American society. I explored the lives of human beings who spoke back to me and agreed with my methods and representations of them as African Americans but who also spoke back to me and disagreed with my methods and representations of them.

In *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: In Search of Excellence* (2010), Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch describe critical imagination as a method that feminist researchers use to situate themselves in their research subjects’ contexts thus considering their subjects’ thoughts, their actions, and their reactions so researchers can convey meaningfully aspects of their subjects’ work and lives (20). Rashad, Malon, and I dwell in a contemporary society where we wear contrasting lenses to view the world. For example, we have contrasting perspectives on
Blackness, on masculinity, on the role of social media (especially Twitter), on reading and writing, and on a Black male’s role in a Black woman’s life. Equally important is the fact that Rashad and Malon were adolescent African American males who were interested in a project that created a space for them to demonstrate their achievements in first-year writing courses. Yet I do not believe they nor I fully understood the consequences and implications of the project. Furthermore, Rashad and Malon did not fully understand the consequences of revealing some of the information they shared with me: a middle-aged African American woman who moved in and out of her identities as a researcher, an educator, a model, an advocate, and an “othermother” to adolescent African American males who were discovering their places in the world. While I adhered to my protocol and my ethical obligations to Rashad and Malon and their desires such as using their full names on this project because they “want the world to know that [they are] successful African American males,” I also attempted to adhere to my obligation to our African American community, responsibilities that impelled me to incessantly reflect on the images of Black males that are portrayed in the media, in popular literature, and in federal and state education achievement reports, where their failures have been normalized in American society (Noguera Search x). In resonance with Royster’s theorizing, “my goal here is to share knowledge and experience . . . on my own standpoint as a researcher and scholar in the process of completing this [research project]” (251) on the literacy practice of two adolescent African American males, a still-neglected subject in Composition Studies.

Consequently, I have articulated a Black feminist standpoint that is also rooted in Collins’ conceptualization of Black women’s activism that is premised on two ideas: a struggle for group survival and a struggle for institutional transformation. Collins defines Black feminist
theory as “a critical social theory” (12), and in Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (2000), she writes,

One key role for Black women intellectuals is to ask the right questions and investigate all dimensions of a Black women’s standpoint with and for African American women. Black women intellectuals thus stand in a special relationship to the community of African American women of which we are a part, and this special relationship frames the contours of Black feminist thought. (30)

Similarly, in “Rethinking Black Women’s Activism,” Collins maintains that in order for Black feminist standpoint to become more inclusive and to understand the ways that power operates outside academe, we must consider the efforts of working-class Black women, that is, consider “Black women’s everyday interpersonal relationships” (203), particularly since there is neither an “essentialist” nor an “authentic” Black feminist activism, according to Collins. Collins elucidates four themes that outline “a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community” (39), but I have identified two themes that most closely align with my exigency:

- Historically, feminist research was conducted for the purpose of recounting women’s lived experiences and for writing as uncritically as possibly about those women’s multifaceted lives and experiences.
- Black feminist research was conducted to repurpose the role of women of color in the struggle for equality in educational, political, and social contexts not only for themselves, but also for their families and communities.

Since my work concerns itself with the social and “disciplinary domain of power” (203), I have attempted to situate myself, Rashad, and Malon at the center of the Black women’s matrix of
empowerment and disempowerment, exposing their influences on “working-class Black women,” men, and the adolescent African American males in their lives. In short, story-beside-story methodology strongly aligns with my framework: Brandt’s African American literacy sponsorship (2001) and Street’s ideological model of literacy (1994). I have also brought my methodology in line with the work of historical Black female intellectuals such as Maria Stewart and Ida B. Wells, nineteenth-century civil rights and women’s rights activists who also advocated for African American males. For instance, Wells, using mixed methods, collected published stories and first-hand investigations on lynching in the South to expose the truth about lynching and its motives. Wells also juxtaposed those stories, primarily about African American males, beside her own stories about her struggle to perform as a professional woman in a nineteenth-century racist and sexist society.

In contemporary society, African American males are still impacted by “structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power” (Collins 203), as African American women are often impacted by them. Robyn Wiegman also asserts in her historical research on the ways that race and gender have been theorized in the United States that the “foundational rhetoric of [Black] women’s common oppression” connects to nineteenth-century lynch mobs and lynching, the emasculation of some Black males, and “a denial of the black male’s newly articulated right to citizenship” (83-84). Wiegman goes on to note that “[b]ecause all men do not share equally in masculine rights and privileges—because some men are, in fact, oppressed by women of the prevailing race and class—assumptions about power as uniformly based on sexual differences (men as oppressor, women as oppressed) have been pressured to give way” (83). Scholars such as Ladson-Billings and Jacqueline Jones Royster and Rebecca Greenberg Taylor remind us that within the U.S. school system many White female teachers
oppress males of color (Ladson-Billings 2014 and Royster and Taylor 1997). In their
classrooms, particularly in basic writing classrooms, far too many Black males are
misunderstood and placed in vulnerable situations that often result in their removal from a
society of a classroom. Because of these injustices and the exigencies I elucidate in Chapter
One, this literacy-based research project addresses within-racial and gender issues since
strategies and laws for improving the quality of education for African American males in the
U.S. have slowly evolved (Schott 2013).

Again, by foregrounding the efforts of Black women rhetoricians, I reveal the way 1) the
Black family operates as a powerful collective and a social institution that has always valued
family, community, equality, civil rights, and education, 2) the similarities between lynching, the
prison system complex, and inadequate and unequal educational systems, and 3) the connection
between the ways that race, gender, class, and institutions disrupt African American males’
educational processes, that is, the type of formal and informal education they acquire.
Ultimately, my research project is grounded in an African American women’s tradition of
juxtaposing stories about social, political, personal, and educational injustices and sharing those
stories with social, political, legal, and educational communities thus sometimes positioning the
storytellers as insiders and outsiders. Royster also observes: “The objective of such bridge-
building is to maximize the interpretive power of various standpoints, by bringing all that we
know together kaleidoscopically. The assumption is that the whole of a kaleidoscopic view has
greater interpretive power than a singularly defined view would have” (277). The focus of Black
female rhetoricians’ efforts, like my own efforts, were “not only on the nature of oppression but
also on ways to ‘deconstruct the structures of oppression’” (Pollard 15) collectively so more
African American males might succeed in social institutions such as predominantly White four-year universities.

**What is Qualitative Research and What Does it Do?**

Qualitative research, defined generically, is “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (3), claim Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Denzin and Lincoln also write that qualitative research:

- consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.
- These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (3)

Qualitative research created a space for me to reproduce Rashad’s and Malon’s literate lives through their voices and other visual representations of how they practiced literacies, particularly writing. I took field notes and collected other artifacts, though limited such as Rashad’s and Malon’s writing samples. I analyzed these data and compared them to Rashad’s and Malon’s teachers’ assessments of their writing, which was a part of my triangulation process. Using surveys, semi-structured face-to-face video- and audio-recorded interviews, I deeply immersed myself in Rashad’s and Malon’s lives during the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters. In order for me to listen to them talk about writing, I listened to stories about how they became writers—stories about the people, places, institutions, and technologies that influenced their writing. In this regard, Rashad’s and Malon’s responses to my research questions sometimes appeared to
deviate from my purpose for collecting data in the first place. However, these digressions took Rashad, Malon, and me on paths that revealed their struggles and vulnerabilities, which made them even more real and credible. Thomas Newkirk insists that this type of disclosure helps researchers establish and maintain “integrity, complexity, and plausibility” (“Seduction” 12). In essence, the qualitative method created a space for me to sit, listen, and walk through Rashad’s and Malon’s lives, bearing witness to what Deborah Brandt calls “life-story” (Literacy in American Lives 2001).

- Before I heard about Rashad’s literacy practices, I listened to his autobiography, which, as Rashad asserted in our first interview in the fall of 2013, readers had to know where he came from in order for them to appreciate who he was and where he was going as a writer. I learned about Rashad’s birth and rebirth: the legal system took a toddler from his mother and gave the child to his maternal grandmother—the mother kidnapped her child from her mother—the legal system took the child from his mother and gave the child to her brother—her brother gave the child back to the system (foster system)—the system “bounced” the child from family to family until he lived with a Hispanic family—the Hispanic family gave him to Jimmy who catapulted his literacy learning. This chain of events altered Rashad’s worldview and his performance in school. Nevertheless, he preserved, went to school, and further developed his literacies. Again, Rashad believed it was necessary for us to understand the non-school factors that shaped his literacy development and his attitude on schooling so we could also understand his identities and literacy practices.

- Malon also shared an aspect of his life-story with me before I learned about his literacy practices. We dwelled in Ohio, walked to Georgia, dwelled in Georgia,

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22 Bounce is the term that Rashad used to describe how he was treated when he was a foster child.
walked back to Ohio, dwelled in Ohio, walked back to Georgia, dwelled in Georgia, and walked back to Ohio. While Malon discussed his football career, I learned where he attended school and how many times he moved in and out of two school systems. Malon moved to Georgia two times with his mother before he moved to back to Ohio to live with his father when he was in the ninth grade. Surely, his movement between Ohio and Georgia school systems affected his writing skills in some way or another.

Despite what appeared to be Rashad’s and Malon’s initial unstable lives, they went to school and developed their literacies. Equally important, they also developed them at home (in Rashad’s home-school and at Malon’s mother’s house and in his maternal great-grandmother’s kitchen). This is only a narrow depiction of Rashad’s and Malon’s literate lives.

Qualitative research also opened other spaces. I expanded Rashad’s and Malon’s narratives when I weaved other voices into Rashad’s and Malon’s own voices. After they gave me permission to contact their parents, former high school and university writing teachers, and former school administrators, I weaved their stories beside Rashad’s and Malon’s stories. These accounts on how Rashad and Malon acquired writing, reading, and technological literacies and their motivations for doing so closely align with each other. I also modified my data collection tools because they did not appeal to Rashad’s and Malon’s preferred modes of communication, which hindered me from collecting the data that demonstrated how Rashad and Malon use digital media (I continue this topic below). On the other hand, Rashad’s and Malon’s resistance and my acceptance of their decision also functioned as a form of triangulation because it forced me to reevaluate my data collection methods. Therefore, I increased our face-to-face interviews, which was their preference. The qualitative researcher must be amendable when she collaborates with other human beings. While discussing her methodologies, Deborah Brandt writes that “the
heavy hand of [her] interview script, shaped by the theoretical interests motivating my study, imposed itself on the participants, becoming at times at odds with the communication norms they preferred and knew best” (12). Brandt also states that her participants, like mine, shifted from the script, yet she “tried to listen closely for the lessons about literacy that they offered” (12). As stated above, Rashad’s and Malon’s conversations often transitioned from the script, but I carefully listened for data that I could extract from those seemingly disconnected conversations. In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2011), Denzin and Lincoln compare a qualitative researcher to a quilt maker or bricoleur. A bricoleur engages in bricolage, and Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary defines bricolage as the “construction (as of a sculpture or a structure of ideas) achieved by using whatever comes to hand” (2014). Denzin and Lincoln posit that “The qualitative-researcher-as-bricoleur or a maker of quilts uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand. If new tools or techniques have to be invented or pieced together, then the researcher will do this” (4). I placed my voice beside Denzin and Lincoln’s voice to proclaim: the qualitative feminist researcher “will do this” (4).

**Stitching a Quilt to form a Bridge: Coming to a Feminist Understanding of Qualitative Research**

Executing a methodology for my case study research project that adhered to tenets of feminist rhetorical practices proved to be a complex and nuanced task because I collaborated with complex human beings who articulated intricately nuanced stories about their literacy practices and their communicative acts. Though my Human Subjects Research Board (HSRB) application outlined five methods I would use to collect Rashad’s and Malon’s stories, my participants resisted many of those methods, forcing me to conform to my contexts and perform
as a quilt maker who “stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together” to create “the world of lived experience” (Denzin and Lincoln 5 and 2). For example, my research protocol asked that Rashad and Malon keep written journals of their thoughts on the writing they performed in academic and nonacademic contexts. I asked Rashad and Malon to demonstrate the emotions they evoked before, during, and after their writing experiences, as well as any internal dialogue or identity negotiations they experienced while completing various writing tasks (Kastner 2013). However, my participants declined my recommendation to keep a journal. Rashad and Malon stated that they did not have time to record their thoughts; besides journaling was a new genre, and it was a writing task that had no value for them since it was not connected to a grade or to other intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. Thus, I created two private blogs for each one of my participants to use for journaling, for reading transcriptions, for providing comments and suggestions, and for introducing ourselves, among other things, but they rejected this digital mode of communication as well (see Figure 5). Next, I suggested a semi-private blog that Rashad and Malon would co-author; eventually, I learned that my participants had an aversion to maintaining blogs. Also, I could not unearth a blog theme that might appeal to eighteen-year-old

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23 My HSRB application (380718-3) was approved June 13, 2013.
African American males. Finally, I urged Rashad and Malon to use their smartphones to produce video journals of their reflections on writing, but they also rejected my proposal to video themselves, though they habitually posted selfies on their Twitter accounts for their friends’ and followers’ amusement. Malon, in particular, has a “giant” footprint on the Internet, as his self-sponsored writing manifested on: Instagram, Vine/Vinebox, Vinemo, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter, among other spaces, where he demonstrates his ability to use the language of those discourse communities.

In fact, Malon had 60.5K tweets and 1,234 followers at the time I wrote this chapter. He followed 1,044 twitters, maintaining a quota that allowed him to appear as a leader, not a follower. Malon published the epigraph that begins this chapter on Twitter before he replied to my e-mail about its placement in this chapter (see Figure 6).

Rashad’s and Malon’s ability to manipulate our rhetorical situations speaks to their sense of agency and to their perspectives on the role of social media and digital devices in the academy. After several failed attempts to collect participants’ journals, Rashad suggested that I video- and audio-record his reflections as I had recorded his responses to my interview questions, queries that, for the most part, my participants controlled. This type of flexibility, on my part, was imperative on a research project that explored the complexity of human behavior, specifically participants’ language abilities, and
the factors that determine who writes and speaks and how and why they engage in written and verbal discourses.

Although Rashad and Malon regularly used digital media in non-school contexts, it became evident that their preferred data sharing method was through face-to-face interviews. Although face-to-face interviews were their preferred modality, I used other methods including video clips “to capture the digital writing life of [my] research participants” (Selfe and Hawisher 43). In “Exceeding the Bounds of the Interview,” Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher point out that, face-to-face interviews, although they did supplement our understanding of participants’ literacy practices and histories, further corroborated our sense that no one method of collecting interview information, no single session, regardless of how long it lasted, and no one interpretation of participants’ stories was sufficient to the task of exploring participants’ literacy practices, values, and histories. (43)

I share Selfe and Hawisher’s concern on the limitation of face-to-face interviews since my participants and I opined for more time to engage in rich conversations about their literate lives. As a result, we further extended the length of our interviews. While I considered quantitative methods that would have yielded more expedient results, that data would not have created the images of Rashad’s and Malon’s literate lives that my project commanded. Of equal importance, we would not have engaged in the intimate act of subjective, reciprocal knowledge-making. Finally, quantitative methods would not have allowed me to discuss my “personal preference for and personal attachment to qualitative inquiry” (Broad 202), a methodology that opens spaces for me to pieced together my participants’ life-stories with the data collecting tools that became readily available to me.
In addition to the modification discussed above, I “stitched and edited” my project in other ways (Denzin and Lincoln 5). For instance, my research protocol indicates that my primary focus would be on my participants’ out-of-school literacy practices, specifically text productions and reading practices. As the project progressed, however, I gathered more data on participants’ academic literacy practices than I did on their non-academic writing, reading, and technological practices primarily because Rashad and Malon located writing and reading in an academic context, that is, as school-specific literacies. Further, Rashad and Malon did not believe the “writing” they composed on social media sites was writing. Hence, Rashad and Malon identified as academic writers who perceived the utility of writing for enhancing their academic and potential professional practices (more on Rashad’s and Malon’s definitions of writing in chapters three and four). Moreover, my HSRB application identified a student who placed in a first-year writing course (who had not taken a basic writing course) as an “achiever” and a student who placed into a basic writing course as a “low performer.” However, Malon, a “basic writer,” helped me use a different lens through which to view his achievements, regardless of his standardized assessment results. Though enrolled in a “basic writing” course, Malon self-identified as a “writer” and a “successful” African American male. In theory, Malon’s placement in a pre-academic writing course and a skills course affirmed his “poor” writing and cognitive skills. Yet Malon’s cognitive functioning skills were not deficient, though his writing skills were not as strong as Rashad’s writing skills, nor had Malon received the type of writing practice that Rashad had received. Malon’s writing contained more grammatical and punctuation errors and contained general statements that were not supported by specific details and examples. Sometimes Malon did not integrate quotations and citations into discourse that obviously was not his. However, Malon was a critical thinker with a rich vocabulary that
perhaps help him write his way out of his first-year writing courses. As noted in Chapter One and by Kevin Roozen in his 2008 article, basic writing scholarship and other Composition and Rhetoric scholarship, in general, focus on minority students’ oral literacies. This research “mark[s] the field’s long history of both recognizing and valuing the considerable experiences with spoken language that basic writers bring to the classroom and how those experiences shape their participation in academic discourse,” according to Roozen (6).

In order for me to produce research that might help fill the gap I witnessed in Composition Studies research about successful African American males, I had to change the lens I used to view Rashad and Malon. They impelled me to take on their individual worldviews, that is, to understand their individual stances on writing, on language, on education, on society, on life, and on themselves. To understand my participants’ literate lives, I, a qualitative feminist teacher-researcher, had “to learn to be able to see things in the same terms as [Rashad and Malon] and thereby to recognise and document the internal rationality or logic of their perspectives” (Hammersley 23). Consequently, though Rashad, Malon, and I share a racial identity and a cultural background, I had to deconstruct much of the knowledge I dragged into our context of a research project on what success looks like (that “baggage” is discussed earlier in this chapter), which speaks to the complexity of executing feminist rhetorical practices.

My evolving epistemological and ontological stances resulted in the new language I used to identify and talk about Rashad and Malon as successful African American males, whether I agreed with their perspectives or not. These ways of knowing and being also connect to Denzin and Lincoln’s assertion that an interpretative qualitative researcher “understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one’s personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting” (5). In short, I had conceptualized how success
would manifest in my research project. As stated earlier, I anticipated participants who had maintained between a 3.5 and a 4.0 grade point average in high school and who were actively involved in their academic and social communities, not exclusively as athletes. Rashad’s and Malon’s definition of “success” included their academic, social, cultural, and personal lives, which also accounted for various obstacles that many African American males experience. Rashad and Malon forced me to use language in ways that helped me understand how and why they identified as “successful” African American male academic writers. In essence, Rashad’s and Malon’s ability to advocate for themselves, their sense of agency, and their sense of reason and truth forced me to use alternative data collection methods to capture their own realities on their terms.

Of equal importance, my willingness to relinquish my way of knowing about academic success and about conducting traditional academic research opened a space for me to conform to some of the tenets of feminist rhetorical practices such as an ethos of care. Further, my personal attachment to Rashad and Malon, as well as my ethical obligation as a teacher-researcher to protect my participants’ integrity, to fairly represent them, and to comply with their representations of themselves, impelled me to relinquish some of my power and respect my participants’ ways of knowing about themselves, about schooling, and about society, which closed the bridge that was gradually separating the researcher from the researched. Finally, as stated earlier, I am an African American woman who advocates for African American males; therefore, my new epistemological and ontological stances necessitated a methodology that elucidated my vested interest in Rashad’s and Malon’s achievements and thus their stories that might change the lens through which Composition Studies and the wider society view African American males.
Jacqueline Jones Royster, borrowing from Hans-Georg Gadamer, uses a bridge metaphor to help her explicate the ways that African American women advocates used language to transform society by “questioning the world and constructing spaces from which to assert their viewpoints” (Traces 54), which Royster calls “building bridges or fusing horizons” (53-54). This qualitative research project also aligns with Royster’s representation of the ways African American women used language to challenge social norms. Throughout the research process, Rashad, Malon, and I negotiated meaning so we could accomplish the major goal of this project, which was to elucidate my participants’ narratives about writing and succeeding in first-year writing courses. Gadamer’s use of hermeneutics could be applied to his literacy-based project. For instance, Rashad’s, Malon’s, and my ability to discern that which is inconclusive and act upon it, is what Royster calls “hermeneutical consciousness” (53). Royster continues to write that the import of this element intensifies when a gap needs to be closed or “when a communicative act needs to be negotiated” (53). As mentioned earlier, some of my methods created obstacles, as opposed to bridges, that hindered Rashad’s and Malon’s ability to “talk about writing” (Mortensen 107); however, qualitative research created a space for me to accommodate their needs, collect their stories, and share those stories with the “commonsense world” (Frank, Letting Stories Breathe 17) of an academic community.

The Research Protocol

The Recruitment Process and the Setting

I indicated on my HSRB application that I would recruit African American males from four-year universities in Ohio. Three of the four institutions had writing programs that were housed in their English departments, and at the other institution, the writing program was an independent program housed in an English department. Eventually, I recruited one participant,
Rashad, from a public predominantly White institution that was chartered in 1910 as a normal school and opened its doors to three-hundred and four students and twenty-one faculty in 1914. Today, the institution offers over two-hundred undergraduate programs, and through eight academic programs, it offers master’s and doctoral degrees. The African American male population on the main campus is low. Matriculation and retention rates for seventeen-to nineteen-year-old African American males have declined from the Fall 2010 semester to the Fall 2013 semester at the institution (Office of Institutional Research).24

Table 2. Retention and Attrition Rates for Fall 2010-Fall 2013

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retention Rates:</td>
<td>39.32%</td>
<td>49.48%</td>
<td>47.27%</td>
<td>93.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrition:</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventeen to nineteen-year-old African American Male Retention and Attrition Rates of Four Cohorts. *The data for the Fall 2013-14 academic year was received from the Office of Institutional Research on March 20, 2014, six weeks before the semester ended.

The four graphs below represent the enrollment and retention rates of four cohorts of undergraduate African American males. One obvious pattern in this quantitative data is the low retention rate across the academic year in each cohort and the increased retention rates among consecutive cohorts.

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24 These students identify as only African American (one race/ethnicity).
Fig. 7. Fall 2010 Cohort—African American Male Enrollment and Retention Rates

Fig. 8. Fall 2011 Cohort—African American Male Enrollment and Retention Rates

Fig. 9. Fall 2012 Cohort—African American Male Enrollment and Retention Rates

Fig. 10. Fall 2013 Cohort—African American Male Enrollment and Retention Rates
As far as African American males’ yearly matriculation is concerned, their enrollment significantly decreased each year, from 206 in Fall 2010 to 129 in Fall 2013, a 37% decrease or 77 students:

- Fall 2010 to Fall 2011 enrollment decreased by 12 students (206 to 194)
- Fall 2011 to Fall 2012 enrollment decreased by 29 students (194 to 165)
- Fall 2012 to Fall 2013 enrollment decreased by 36 students (165 to 129)

Unfortunately, I did not collect the same type of aggregate data on African American male enrollment and retention rates at the four-year university where Malon was enrolled.

Malon was enrolled in a small, private liberal arts college that was founded in 1899. It offers a bachelor’s degree in forty majors and master’s degrees in four areas. Its writing program is housed in its English department, which offers four majors and teaching licensure. Its English department comprises six faculty, and its African American male population is low. The majority of its Black male population makes up the school’s football team, according to Malon’s academic skills teacher.

I also indicated on my HSRB application that I would recruit African American males, ages eighteen-to-twenty who were enrolled in basic writing courses and first-year writing courses at four public four-year universities in Ohio during the Fall 2013 semester for my two-semester study. I stated that I would recruit two students from basic writing courses and two students from first-year writing courses who had not placed in a basic writing course. Other criteria were that participants would be United States-born citizens who were educated in U.S. public school systems and who identified as “African American” rather than “Black.” I did not assure anonymity because I asked participants to place their names on surveys and to identify themselves during the interviews. However, I did ensure confidentiality of all data that I locked
in a file cabined in my home office, where the majority of my writing, transcribing, and analyzing occurred.

Participants were recruited through a recruitment letter that was emailed to writing program administrators at the four university in Ohio. I used two different methods to introduce my project to African American males after I arrived on their campuses because some writing teachers did not honor my approach that included speaking privately outside the classroom with African American males about my project. I scheduled twenty recruitment appointments with writing program administrators and writing teachers at four universities in Ohio. Before I met with writing teachers, I consulted writing program administrators at each four-year institution so I could discuss my study with them and explain how they might help me meet the goals of my project and how my project might benefit their institutions. I had struggled to recruit eighteen-to-twenty-year-old African American males for my one-semester pilot study during the Spring 2012 semester, but Rashad and Malon enthusiastically shared their narratives with me.

On October 9, 2013, a White female writing instructor ushered a male into the hallway where I sat on a slatted, brown metal backless bench waiting for a potential participant. She introduced us, turned, and faded into her computer-mediated classroom where she taught first-year writing. He introduced himself as Rashad Alexander Melroy-Thompson, and I reintroduced myself as a graduate student and writing teacher who was interested in learning about the strategies and resources African American males used to achieve in first-year writing courses and in society.

“I have a story to tell,” Rashad passionately affirmed.

Then, he began to narrate. Cognizant that my potential participant needed to return to class, I reluctantly disrupted his story to suggest that we determine a more appropriate time to
meet. On an October afternoon in the student union, we discussed my project, my consent form, my interview questions, and Rashad’s and my contributions to the project. Rashad agreed to become a participant, signed the four-page consent form, and identified a date for our first official interview, which was a week later. We met in the union again, but we later moved to a study room in Rashad’s dormitory, where he claimed there would be fewer distractions. During our first interview, I listened to Rashad’s narrative, a story that apparently needed to be told. It was with passion that I listened to Rashad’s voice. Though it was with passion that Rashad narrated about his father’s investment in his education, particularly in the development of his writing, reading, and analytical skills, it was not the narrative that weighed heavily on his heart like a song about a man who pays a debt he don’t own (more on Rashad’s literacy narrative in Chapter Three).

Eager to collect more literacy narratives, also in mid-October, I drove forty-five minutes to another recruitment site to introduce my project to six African American males who were enrolled in a basic writing course. I entered a space that was marked with black PCs that sat on top of square and pentagon computer stations where racially diverse students sat in black swivel chairs. A smart board was mounted on the wall in front of the classroom that displayed writers’ PowerPoint presentations. In the back of the cramped space, a White female writing instructor listened to her students’ presentations, interrupting them when she fell into gaps they created in their discourse on MLA writing style. Before class convened, the teacher strained to penetrate her students’ voices. When her voice finally broke through the thick cacophony of diverse vocalization, my ears witnessed: “I need . . . to stay and talk with Shirley Faulkner-Springfield about her research project.” While whispering among themselves, five males brought their
bodies close to mine.25 I began to speak, articulating my name and other aspects of my identity, while simultaneously placing a recruitment letter in each one of my potential participants’ hands. They listened tentatively to my call for African American males to tell stories about their literacy practices and help me compose a counter-narrative on African American males’ writing practices.

“How do you identify racially?” I asked.

Four of the students identified as African American or Black, and one of them stated that he was “African American and White,” yet all of them remained in the small circle we had unconsciously formed and listened to my questions about their eligibility for the project. Four of the males expressed interest in the project; the “African American and White” student requested more time to think about a project that called on him to expose himself to an outsider, to an African American woman researcher. The other four students and I agreed to meet in their student union the following week to discuss the project and the consent form. Two of the four students kept our appointment. Eager to share their literacy narratives or to become the recipient of the project’s incentive, a video camera or a gift card of equal value, both of them vied for their signatures on one consent form. My protocol was approved for one participant who was enrolled in a basic writing course at this particular university. Malon was not the writer who signed my consent form that day, but he officially volunteered to participate on the study a few days later after I arrived on his campus and learned that his classmate was ill and could not keep our interview appointment.

One aspect of collecting stories from two adolescent African American males that made my task less complex was the ease with which Rashad and Malon shared their stories with me. According to Malon, the combination of four markers of my identity: race, gender, age, and

25 One of the six males did not stay for my discussion.
profession entitled me to collect data that “a White person” could not have collected from him. Malon went on to argue that he does not believe a White researcher would have been genuinely interested in his success. On the other hand, Rashad claimed that those same identity markers did not play a role in his decision to share his story with me. The only factor that Rashad took into account, he stated, was the fact that I was a researcher who was interested in his literacy practices and his success as an African American male. This conversation was grounded in a discussion I had on literacy-based research with Professor Nickoson, my advisor. Much of that literature was written by males, and the interdisciplinary scholarship was written by African American male researchers. I imagined how I, an African American woman, might engage African American males in conversations about their writing practices, particularly in light of my pilot study that yielded only two survey respondents.

**Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Data**

**The Case Study**

A case study allows researchers to study a particular case, a particular individual, or a particular group, and based on observations and the close analysis of research data, produce limited findings. Through this method, writing researchers conclude that writers are not a homogenous group and that literacy, including writing, is a contextual, social, cognitive, historical, ideological, rhetorical, and embodied phenomenon. Case study researchers, using qualitative methods, attempt to elucidate the complexity of writing behavior through rich, thick description by expounding on their methodologies and contexts (Lauer and Asher 1988; Kirsch and Royster 2010; Newkirk 1992; Smagorinsky 2008). However, in order for case studies to be effective, to demonstrate their authority, to manifest as epistemic (Newkirk 1992), they should embody whole selves, that is, consider myriad phenomena that affect participants and
researchers. The case study design creates a space for researchers to represent their participants by raced, ethnicity, social status, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and by other descriptors including demographic information. The execution of a case study design helped me answer the “Why” to my “What” and “How” questions about the literacy practices, specifically writing practices, of two African American males who were enrolled in first-year writing courses at two separate four-year universities. Using the five data collection methods discussed below, for six months, I immersed myself in my participants’ lives and learned some of the cognitive, personal, sociocultural factors that impacted Rashad’s and Malon’s achievement in a two-course series of first-year writing courses (Rashad) and in a basic writing course and first-year writing course (Malon). Though my case study design was the ideal method for collecting data, it also had limitations (more on this topic later).

Additionally, my inquiry into the literacy practices of two eighteen-year-old African American males is informed by a case study design because this methodology has helped composition researchers generate much of what we know about students’ writing processes. One of the field’s first documented case study designs is Janet Emig’s *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (1971). Emig introduced Composition Studies to a new way of observing and collecting data when she explored what composing is, how it is accomplished, and how it affects the writer, according to Janice M. Lauer and J. William Asher (1988). Stephen North adds that Emig’s groundbreaking work initiated the produce-to-process turn in Composition Studies, that is, from focusing on writing as strictly a product to studying writing as a process (19). In her seminal work, Emig examines the composing processes of “eight sixteen and seventeen-year-old secondary school students” (29) from four different schools. Emig theorizes that writing is a recursive process, not a linear one and that students engaged in
reflective (focusing on their thoughts and feelings) and extensive writing (focusing on conveying a message). Based on her finding, Emig urges writing teachers to intervene in students’ writing processes (prewriting and draft stages), and provide thorough formative assessments. She also calls for cross-cultural studies of writing if writing teachers hope to learn about the ways writing works in all students’ lives (96). Since Emig’s 1971 case study, Rhetoric and Composition researchers have published results from case studies that have helped writing teachers understand students’ writing processes. Three of those studies on African American males’ composing practices as identified in Chapter One are Roozen’s (2008) and Selfe’s (2004) case studies, and Kirkland’s ethnographic research study explores the non-school literacy practices of six Black males (2013).

Data Collection Instruments

The Human Subject Review Board at the four-year university where I was enrolled as a graduate student approved my project for five data collection methods: interviews, observations, surveys, journaling, and textual analysis. These methods helped me “capture holistic contextualized pictures of the social, political, economic, and educational factors that affect the everyday experience of” Rashad’s and Malon’s writing processes (Tillman 6). Peter Smagorinsky’s “The Method Section as Conceptual Epicenter in Constructing Social Science Research Reports” proved most helpful in that I followed his charge that I include “thick descriptions” and a rich, extensive set of details about data collection and data analysis in my methods section. Furthermore, Smagorinsky insists that “A research method requires a theoretical perspective, and so the content of the opening framework for an article suggested at least in part by the tenets behind the investigative method” (407-408). Smagorinsky urges qualitative researchers to assure that their research is replicable and reliable; I performed
accordingly by attempting to construct an epicenter in this method section of my dissertation.

Hence, I have attempted to promote transparency in the project write up that I encourage my colleagues to duplicate.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the methods I used to collect data that might have helped me expose the factors that affected Rashad’s and Malon’s literacy practices, particularly their academic composing practices, as well as the value they placed on their literacies and academic and nonacademic identities. (I discussed journaling earlier in this chapter). However, first I will provide an overview of my data analysis process. All data for this study were initially analyzed based on one primary research question: “What sociocultural factors contributed to Rashad’s and Malon’s achievement in post-secondary writing courses and what obstacles impeded their success in non-academic and academic contexts, specifically writing courses?” It also was driven by three secondary questions. However, as I progressed through the data collection and analysis processes my questions changed to: “What factors contribute to African American males’ success in first-year writing courses?” and “What value do African American males place on their identities and literacies, and what is the source of that value?”

I listened to audio-recorded interviews and watched video-recorded interviews several times so I could understand the data I had collected. I created a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for organizing and sorting my coded data. Then, I categorized the information I collected by identifying themes, patterns, and concepts that connected my participants’ literacy practices, specifically writing. I borrowed this method of coding from other qualitative researchers such as Shaun Harper (research on successful Black males in higher education) and Marilyn J. Ross (success factors of African American males at HBCUs). Some of those initial recurring themes
are outlines in Chapter One, but the list of codes increased as I reread transcribed data and continued to listen to my participants’ actual voices. I also categorized data from emergent categories that I discerned while re-reading and re-listening to data. In this sense, I used a hybrid categorization method. However, it was during my process of literally re-listening to my participants’ voices that I changed my coding process from abbreviations to full words because I had created too many categories that could have had the same abbreviations as the new codes I needed to create (see Table 3 below).

Table 3. Data Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Coding</th>
<th>Factors that Contributed to Success</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cultural</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat=Father</td>
<td>BB=Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mot=Mother</td>
<td>FB=Football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GM=Grandmother</td>
<td>Re=Read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sis=Sister</td>
<td>Go=Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bro=Brother</td>
<td>Sch=School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fri=Friend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go=Goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Coding</th>
<th>Factors that Impeded Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>LS=Legal System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Med=Medication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These and similar codes were placed along the margins of my transcriptions. I also integrated more extensive notes into my transcriptions, speaking to myself and talking back to my participants; however, before I sent transcriptions to my participants, I deleted my “soliloquy.” One exception was when I left a note on the bottom of a writing instructor’s transcription, which was a response to her belief that she did not teach Rashad how to read because he already knew how to read. I asked her if we might discuss my comment when we met to discuss my
interpretation of our interview. My primary concern was that although Rashad entered his first-year writing course with an ability to decode text, during one of our early interviews, he told me that sometimes he struggled to fully understand the language his first-semester writing instructor used on assignment sheets, rubrics, and assessments. Rashad argued that he did not understand the language his instructor used on assessments because he believed that she talked with her colleagues in the field, not with a first-year student who was unfamiliar with the field’s language. Therefore, he struggled to decode those texts (more on this discussion in Chapter Three).

Nevertheless, because my Excel database had grown exponentially (52 columns), I created a Microsoft Word table, reduced my categories, and created subcategories within my main categories to make my data more manageable. The new table contained the codes RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 that represent my four research questions, and I integrated these codes into the margins of my transcriptions and in my fieldnotes. The columns also contained (for text), the date of the interview, the title of the interview, the page number of the transcription, the paragraph number, and (for audio and video) the date of the interview, the title of the interview, and the timecode.

Finally, in reinterpreting the data for my new database and for my results section, I continued to revisit my research questions to remind myself of my purpose for writing. Additionally, I returned to my research questions so I could explain what new and major lessons I had learned about two African American males’ literacy practices and discern what data would close the gap I discovered in the field’s scholarship on African American males’ writing practices and literate lives. I asked myself how my data might be used in other disciplines.
Interview

The primary tool I used to collect data was the interview. I composed twenty-one open-ended questions (see Appendix A) for HSRB approval with the understanding that I would amend questions as I progressed through the interviews. Rashad’s and Malon’s deep investment in the project resulted in deep conversations on their literacy practices they used in academic and social settings and the factors that hindered their success in those contexts. Later, I focused exclusively on the literacy practices, strategies, and resources they used to meet the requirements of their first-year writing courses.

My protocol asked Rashad and Malon to sit for six informal, thirty-five to forty-five minute semi-structured recorded interviews during each participant’s 2013-14 academic year. However, after our first interview, I met with each one of them once a month for semi-structured recorded interviews that lasted between one-to-one and one-half hours. I met with Rashad more frequently than I met with Malon because after our second meeting, Rashad invited me to become his unpaid writing tutor, and I agreed with several stipulations. I accepted Rashad’s offer to become his tutor because the act helped me form a reciprocal relationship with him as well as become one of his literacy sponsors. Though I attempted to separate my dual roles of tutor and researcher, it was inevitable that they merge since Rashad discussed his writing process and features of his writing during tutoring sessions (more on this conversation in Chapter Three).

In addition, I used two tools to record interviews: Audacity and a video recorder. Audacity is a multi-track recorder and audio editor that I used to record interviews and transcript data. I used a Canon FS-300 flash memory digital camcorder to video interviews. Although I

\[26\text{Four of those conditions were: 1) schedule appointments at least one-week in advance, or set up a standing appointment, 2) keep all appointments, except during extenuating circumstances, 3) be prepared for every meeting, 4) accept writing as process, and 5) use the course’s handbook as a resource.}\]
used audio and video recorders to capture interviews, I also took field notes that helped me immediately identify themes that I coded. I took field notes that included additional questions and topics that I needed Rashad and Malon to expound on. After spending four-to-five hours producing word-for-word transcriptions, I sent the transcriptions to Rashad’s and Malon’s Yahoo e-mail accounts then texted them to let them know that I welcomed their comments, corrections, clarifications, and suggestions. I posted transcriptions on the blogs I created for Rashad and Malon, but by November, I realized that they were not going to record their thoughts on the blogs, so I restricted my communication about the transcriptions to text, e-mail, and telephone, but primarily text messages. Cognizant that interviews are limiting and create gaps in discourse, as noted by Selfe and Hawisher, I needed my participants to review my interpretations of our conversations so they could reflect and elaborate on my interpretation of the data, which afforded opportunities for each participant and me to co-construct narratives about his literacy practices. During our face-to-face interviews, I learned that Rashad and Malon did not read our transcriptions, so I attempted to close the gaps we created by returning to previous discussions and writing my concerns into survey questions. Despite this limitation, our face-to-face interviews (informal conversations) created a space for Rashad and Malon to talk
freely about their writing experiences and other academic and wider social experiences. In fact, the semi-structured interview became my most effective data collection tool because it opened a space for close, rhetorical listening, resulting in a dialogic relationship that was more profound than the other four methods used to collect data. During interview sessions, I listened patiently and sensitively to Rashad and Malon as they talked candidly about their experiences (see Figure 11 above). As mentioned in Chapter One, I relinquished most of my power and authority as a researcher so I could place myself into the roles of co-collaborator and student, allowing Rashad and Malon to teach me how to talk with them so they could talk about writing. Hence, I gradually learned how to frame my follow-up questions and survey questions, which I used as triangulation methods. As a result of my deep listening, I also learned how to: refine my methodologies, take on an anti-deficit stance, redefine success, and compose a narrative about two eighteen-year-old African American males who were determined to succeed in their writing courses, in college, and in society, more broadly. However, implementing these strategies were not seamless.

Survey

Again, the survey functioned as a triangulation tool. Martyn Hammersley claims that survey research questionnaires produce “highly structured forms of data” that do not portray the complexity of qualitative or naturalistic research (41), which was my motive for using it as a triangulation method. The fifteen-minute online survey contained twelve open-ended questions that were altered as I progressed through the interview process because my survey questions were contingent upon my respondents’ discussions. I used an online survey software program called Qualtrics to collect data. Although the surveys contained paragraph-text boxes, and its instructions asked respondents not to provide one-word responses or single-sentence responses
that were unclear or did not address the questions or instructions, many of Rashad’s and Malon’s responses were vague or warranted follow-up questions. After I transcribed, analyzed, and coded interview data, I composed survey questions and sent the survey to participants during the week of the interview. After I received the survey responses, I coded and analyzed the responses. Then I formulated new interview questions based on the current data, when necessary. Like the interview transcriptions, Rashad and Malon received invitations to read my survey transcriptions that were mailed to their Yahoo email addresses because they seldom read their university e-mail.

Observation

My protocol also asked participants to allow me to observe their writing practices for one hour in October and December of 2013 and January of 2014. Though we created an observation schedule, as opposed to my execution of spontaneous observations that might have been more intrusive than a scheduled one, Malon, Rashad, and I did not follow the approved schedule. I met Malon twice in a resource center on his campus to observe his writing process. While Malon typed a six-to-nine-hundred word paper on becoming a scholar, I video-recorded his process and typed field notes. After my second observation, I concluded that my active participation in Malon’s writing process was disruptive, though he told me that it was not intrusive. Additionally, this compose ecology was inappropriate for our task.

I did not introduce Malon to talk-aloud protocol because, as mentioned earlier, I believe it creates a fictive composing space, that is, a space that contrasts the traditional classroom space where most students compose quietly or where we compose outside the classroom but do not “talk-aloud” through each step of the writing process. Borrowing from the behavioral sciences and linguistics, Linda Flower and John R. Hayes conducted cognitive-based research that asked
participants to think out loud during the writing process, a method called protocol analysis. Flower and Hayes gave writers a problem and asked them to compose out loud so their thinking or verbal responses to their own writing process would be recorded on a tape recorder. The researchers write, “They were asked to verbalize everything that goes through their minds as they write, including stray notions, false starts, and incomplete or fragmentary thought. The writers are not asked to engage in any kind of introspection or self-analysis while writing, but simply to think out loud while working like a person talking to herself” (368). Flower and Hayes contend that “The act of writing involves three major elements which are reflected in the three units of the model: the task environment, the writer’s long-term memory, and the writing process” (369). As stated earlier, Flower reconceptualized the writing process by introducing a social cognitive theory of writing. I attempted to account for the major elements that Flower outline in her research, but they were problematic.

First, Malon claimed that he did not “talk-aloud” when he composed because he listened to “relaxing music, not like Mozart, but it’s like calm, fast tempo” while he composed, which could have affected his ability to retrieve data from long-term memory. Thus, as outlined in my protocol, I immersed myself in Malon’s writing process by asking him to explain why he paused or made other gestures that caused him to stop typing. My frequent questions disrupted Malon’s writing process. Additionally, after reviewing my first video-recorded observation, I noticed that after I left the room with the video recording, Malon texted, searched for music, and engaged in other activities during his composing process, a phenomenon that researchers call “the observer’s paradox.”
Third, Malon’s ecology was unhealthy, which could have negatively impacted his writing process. For example, our first observation was in a space that required Malon to place his laptop computer on his lap because the large conference table that served as a desk was not close to an electrical outlet that Malon needed to charge his computer (see Figure 12). Besides the chairs were not ergonomic; instead, they were high back, double-plush leather chairs designed for a conference table. This particular physical environment created an impractical composing space. Though I called the center eight hours in advance and requested a quiet space for an observation, that space was unavailable when Malon and I arrived for the observation. The second space where the observation occurred was more practical, but my camera and my presence altered Malon’s “normal” composing process. I terminated Malon’s observations since I could not find practical locations at a time that was convenient for Malon, which was between 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., after his daily football practices. Nevertheless, during the two sessions, I observed the ways Malon produced and interacted with texts.

The times that Rashad completed his writing assignments were inconvenient for me, yet “deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand,” I “pieced together” a method for observing Rashad’s composing process (Denzin and Lincoln 4). Rashad and I could not coordinate our schedules for observation appointments because soon after Rashad enrolled in the study, he started working on campus. Though we scheduled two appointments, I
did not observe Rashad’s composing process because he usually composed essays for his writing course between five- and six o’clock in the morning while he worked at the information desk in his dormitory. Therefore, for one month, I did not collect observation data. Eventually, Rashad told me that my observation of his writing process would be problematic, and he described his writing process as disruptive because he could not sit for a long time, and because he played with a basketball or other objects while he composed (more on Rashad’s composing process in Chapter Three). As discussed earlier, Rashad urged me to video-record his discussions on his writing process, and I complied. To reiterate, I gained access to his writing process through another method. I became Rashad’s unpaid writing tutor shortly after we met; therefore, my observation of Rashad’s writing was more authentic thus more valid than my observation of Malon’s writing process. Rashad and I discussed each stage of his writing process, and I walked through those stages with him, offering verbal and written formative assessments on his writing. In this sense, Rashad’s embodied composing process also became my embodied experience, as he shared the content of his compositions and the non-school and school factors that affected his composing process. It was during these sessions that I heard Rashad move in and out of his identity as a writer.

Textual Analysis

Rashad and Malon did not easily surrender their textual representations of themselves to me. In fact, I did not receive copies of Malon’s compositions until the end of the project, April 30, 2014. My protocol asked Rashad and Malon to give me originals or copies of their electronic and/or alphabetic compositions, during the three interviews that included their teachers’ assessments of their writing. My purpose for analyzing their compositions was to discern the ways they interacted with their own texts and their teachers’ assessments of their writing.
Consequently, I analyzed Rashad’s and Malon’s writing for higher order and lower order concerns, attempting to discover patterns. Some of the rhetorical features I sought to identify were:

- a clear sense of audience, as “audience” was defined in writing prompts and as their writing teachers performed as audiences/readers/assessors,
- an "effective" use of academic English (language patterns),
- an understanding of their verbal or written responses to their teachers’ and their peers’ feedback.

Some recurring questions I asked Rashad and Malon were: Why do you think you earned this grade? How did/will you respond to this/these comments? Although I did not receive Malon’s work until the end of the study, he and I discussed his teachers’ evaluation of his writing.

**Conclusion**

This two-semester case study project helped me understand the strong relationship between methodologies, methods, and research questions. At the beginning of the research process, I identified six working methodologies that I believed might help me explain what feminist researchers Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch (2012) and Mary P. Sheridan and Lee Nickoson (2012) deem imperative for qualitative researcher who examine subjects’ literacy practices. In order to assist me in identifying an appropriate methodology, I answered questions that feminist Mary P. Sheridan and Lee Nickoson (2012) pose, which are:

- What am I researching?
- Why am I researching it?
- How am I researching it?
- Who am I as a researcher?
• What is my research stance?
• What is my relationship to my participants?
• How am I representing my participants?

These questions forced me to reconsider the knowledge and identities I brought to this research project on the literacy practices of two African American males. They also helped me investigate my methodologies, methods, and research questions and analyze data in ways that might help my audience understand “why, how, when, where, and what writers write” (Sheridan and Nickoson 1). Additionally, answering these questions also helped me reconstruct my framework. I learned that my framework, ideological model of literacy (Street 2000, 2001, and 2003) and African American literacy sponsorship (Brandt 2009) created a space for me critically examine the ideological dimensions of Rashad’s and Malon’s literacy practices. Finally, my current primary methodology is narrative inquiry, a method that helped me collect stories. However, since I collected stories on a population that has been marginalized in society and in Rhetoric and Composition scholarship, my way of inquiring about their literacy practices necessitated a specific positioning of Rashad’s and Malon’s narratives. Thus, I borrowed Jacqueline Jones Royster method of placing stories beside stories to create credibility, but at the center of this collection of stories are Rashad’s and Malon’s stories. Royster’s method also called on me to ground my methodology in three theories: Afra-feminism (Royster 2000), Black Feminist Thought (Collins (2000), and Womanist (Walker 1983). Further, to highlight Rashad’s and Malon’s human actions and my interpretations of their actions, I relied primarily on semi-structured recorded interviews that helped my participants describe a series of events about their literacy practices, specifically their writing practices. The subsequent chapters unveil Rashad’s and Malon’s narratives on the literacy practices, strategies, and resources they used to meet the
requirement of their first-year writing courses. I compose these case studies to other cases and to literacy theories.
CHAPTER THREE: “I’M A GOOD WRITER BECAUSE I’M A GOOD READER”: A DIALOGIC EXCHANGE WITH RASHAD ALEXANDER MELROY-THOMPSON

In this chapter, I report the literacy-learning experiences of Rashad Alexander Melroy-Thompson, an eighteen-year-old African American male who self-identifies as a writer and a reader. When I met Rashad during the Fall 2013 semester, he was enrolled in a first-year writing course at a four-year university in Northwest Ohio. Rashad explained that his critical literacy development began at home under the tutelage of his adoptive African American male father, Jimmy Thompson. When Rashad was eight years old, Jimmy designed a traditional literacy-learning curriculum. At home, Rashad read children’s literature such as Daniel Handler’s *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1996-2006). With Jimmy’s help, Rashad also critically analyzed adult literature about prominent people of the African diaspora who were featured in preeminent publications such as *Black Enterprise Magazine, Jet Magazine, Ebony Magazine*, and *O, The Oprah Magazine* so Rashad could learn about his African American literacy and literary legacies. Also with Jimmy’s guidance, Rashad analyzed African American literature so he could discern the strategies that successful African Americans used and the resources they accessed in order to achieve in school and in the greater society. In this sense, Rashad read rhetorically and learned “how [to] make meaning through reading and writing and how to “make meaning of reading and writing” (Brandt, *Literacy* 92), which prepared him for the argumentative writing he would produce in his first-year writing courses at his university. Alfred Tatum, a secondary education reading specialist, believes this type of critical literacy instruction not only nurtures African American males’ personal development but also increases their proficiency in reading and writing (*Fearless Voices* 2013; *Teaching Reading* 2005). In order to contextualize Rashad’s critical literacy development, I borrow from Paulo Freire (1993) and Ira Shor (1999) to define
critical literacy as Rashad’s ability to interrogate the identities that others have constructed of him, to question inequalities, and to unveil the subjective positions from which he acquired and practiced literacies. As mentioned in Chapter One, this study offers a new lens through which to view African American males and their literacy practices and the adult males who invest in their literacy learning. Ultimately, this case study has import for Composition Studies because it explores the literacy practices of an eighteen-year-old African American male, an examination that includes attention to his father’s voice and the pivotal role he played in the development of Rashad’s literacy practices.

**Chapter Outline**

This chapter provides demographic information on Rashad and his family, information including Rashad’s perspectives on identity and literacy learning. When I met Rashad, he generously tendered a story that opened a window into his short yet complex life, and his dialogue about writing, reading, thinking, using technology, and resisting is briefly highlighted in his background information. In addition, the chapter includes Jimmy’s view on formal education so readers might see how and why he promoted a traditional notion of academic success. This is followed by an account of four key reasons Rashad succeeded in first-year writing courses. In order to contextualize those factors, I stitched a web of cultures that embody Rashad’s literate life and the social and cultural forces that impacted his literate life. This network is based on Clifford Geertz’s semiotic model of culture, on feminist rhetorical practices, specifically on Krista Ratcliffe’s concept of rhetorical listening, and on Brian Street’s ideological model of literacy. I also delineate key concepts, terms, and people who link to Rashad’s literate development, literacy practices, and worldview.
Rashad’s narrative demonstrates how he became “a good writer” and how that identity influenced his placement in a first-year writing course and his subsequent successful completion of his first-year writing requirements. Drawing on research from Education, Rhetoric and Composition, New Literacy Studies, and African American Studies, I then situate Jimmy’s traditional home curriculum in three contexts, providing an in-depth explanation on how it helped Rashad come to understand himself as a writer and reader. After discussions on how Jimmy’s home curriculum helped Rashad became an academic writer and reader, this narrative progresses in reverse chronological order through Rashad’s literate life: from college, to high school, to middle school, to elementary school. I decided to structure Rashad’s narrative so that the events that directly relate to my primary research question and proposition about first-year writing courses would be presented first. Then, I integrate what I deemed personal and private aspects of Rashad’s life story into his elementary and secondary education experiences. Rashad insisted that I reveal what Gesa E. Kirsch calls “deeply personal and emotionally charged information” (2164) so readers might understand the connection between his intellectual and personal developments as well as why he urged me to use his full name on a project that exposes his fears and vulnerabilities. I conclude the chapter by revisiting my research questions and reflecting on the findings of my examination of Rashad’s literacy-learning.

**Demographic Information**

Rashad’s story begins in 1995 when he was born to a White and Puerto Rican mother and an African American father. Rashad lived with his mother in a low-income, single-family home in a large metropolitan city in the Middle Atlantic regions of the United States. I did not interview his mother because Rashad had severed his relationship with her. Jimmy wrote on a survey in 2013 that Rashad’s “birth mother was a very smart person but because of drugs, she
never got to complete high school. His father drank a lot so he too never completed high school” (“Parents and Grandparents”). Nevertheless, when Rashad was eight years old, he moved into a middle-class, single-parent home in an urban section of a large Northeastern metropolitan city with an African American male named Jimmy Thompson who one year later adopted Rashad and changed his surname to Melroy-Thompson. Melroy is Rashad’s mother’s surname. When I met Rashad during the Fall 2013 semester, he accentuated his last name. As though I had inquired about his hyphenated name, Rashad proffered: “I’ll tell you why I got a hyphenated name.” Later, I learned that the symbol that linked two parts of Rashad identity not only represented integration, it also symbolized separation. In other words, Rashad gained a father because he lost a mother, a mother who surely contributed to her son’s literate development in some way since learning begins at birth. After Jimmy adopted Rashad, he adopted another African American male who was sixteen year old and enrolled in online classes at this high school when I concluded this study. Rashad attended two large public elementary schools and a premier preparatory middle/high school, where he initially struggled to fit in and possibly disrupted his literacy-learning process, although Rashad and Jimmy did not identify a gap in his literacy-learning process. Then, Rashad attended a large high school in a suburb of Northwest Ohio before he enrolled in the university where I met him and learned that he was a writer.

After I met Rashad, he suggested that I meet his adoptive father, Jimmy, who completed a survey and had several semi-structured and follow-up telephone interviews with me. Jimmy was born in 1963 in Northwest Ohio, where he attended primary and secondary school. His earliest memories of writing and reading are in elementary school, where he read Doctor Seuss’ *Cat in the Hat* (1957) and *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960), and he identified as a reader, but not as a writer. Jimmy earned a bachelor’s degree in communications, a master’s of law, and a Juris

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27 Rashad discusses his relationship with his mother later in the chapter.
Doctor. He is a licensed attorney and an alumnus of four universities: Kent State University, Cleveland State University, Boston University, and Ohio State University. Until his job was outsourced, Jimmy was employed by “one of the world’s most admired companies,” according to a *Fortune Magazine* report. Later, he accepted a position in Northwest Ohio and relocated during Rashad’s junior year of high school. Rashad identified Jimmy as a leader and a model who walked several miles to school through a “tough neighborhood” in order to accomplish his academic and professional goals. Rashad also postulated: “[a]fter being in college for a few weeks now, I was finally able to realize that accomplishing what he did was not easy. That is why he inspires me to finish school and obtain the highest level of education that I can receive.”

**Rashad’s Success Factors**

My data revealed four key factors that contributed to Rashad’s success in first-year writing courses. However, data show that Jimmy’s sponsorship was the pivotal single factor that contributed to Rashad’s success in his first-year writing courses. Nevertheless, the four factors initially derived from recurring themes and concepts such as Rashad’s:

- Home support system (college-educated African American male model and literacy sponsor)
- Academic support system (secondary and postsecondary education administrators and teachers, writing center, and tutors (I became one of Rashad’s tutors)).
- Dispositions (self-efficacy, perseverance, sense of self, etc.)
- Ability to carry literacies across contexts

These data directly correlate with my overarching research question that was intended to help me discover factors that impacted Rashad’s success in first-year writing courses. In additional, these four factors appeared to have grounded Rashad’s perspective on his roles as an academic writer,
a college student, and a potential professional. For instance, Rashad learned from Jimmy that school with all its complexities provides access to a profession and to social mobility. However, Jimmy also argued that formal schooling does not offer equal opportunities for people of color, which is one of the reasons his son had to “work harder” than other students and had to use the resources that schools offered him. The historically persistent inequalities that exist in the U.S. education system also motivated Jimmy to enroll Rashad in pre-collegiate programs.

**Visualizing and Contextualizing Rashad’s Literate Life**

Immediately after I began listening to Rashad’s story and conceptualizing his articulations, I realized the complexity of his literacies, identities, and the symbolic representation of people in his life and the cultures they embraced. Rashad’s life was inundated with symbols that shaped his worldview such as “mother/mom,” “father/dad,” “grandmother/grandma,” “uncle,” “law enforcement/judicial system,” “therapist,” “school,” to name a few. While these symbols are common in most people’s lives, they were more palpable and took on a different meaning in Rashad’s life. In my attempt to interpret these data, similar to Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch, I recognized “that feminist research is characterized by distinctive methodologies that although they draw on work being done in other fields come together in [my research] in synergistic ways” (*Feminist Rhetorical Practices* xi). Thus, I borrowed from the field of anthropology, and while I find symbolic representations of human beings problematic, I created what anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls a “semiotic model of culture” in an attempt to ascertain a wider view of the cultures in which Rashad’s identities, literacies, and experiences were embedded. Arguing for a semiotic model of culture, Geertz, who borrows from Max Weber, believes that human beings immerse themselves in webs that he calls culture, and an anthropologist’s task is to interpret those cultures. He goes on to write that
culture “denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [human beings] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their attitudes toward life” (89). Because isolated interpretations can be problematic, I invited Rashad to guide me through his life history (Brandt 2001), and I attempted to remain as objective as I could in my subjective self. Again, my subjectivity is rooted in Black feminist theory/feminist theory, so I also turned to Krista Ratcliffe to help me understand what I was understanding (Geertz 1990). In Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness (2005), Ratcliffe writes that “understanding means listening to discourses not for intent but with intent—with the intent to understand not just the claims but the rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well,” and she goes on to assert that,

rhetorical listeners might best invert the term understanding and define it as standing under, that is, consciously standing under discourses that surround us and others while consciously acknowledging all our particular—and very fluid—standpoints. Standing under discourses means letting discourses wash over, through, and around us and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics. (28)

Ratcliffe posits that researchers acquire knowledge when they engage in cross-cultural listening.

However, I applied “understanding” to a project that invited intra-cultural dialogue between Rashad and me, African Americans who shared racial and cultural identities but who did not share the same gender and, for the most part, the same life experiences. Geertz’s and Ratcliffe’s concepts align with my theoretical and conceptual frameworks, particularly since Brian Street examines literacy ethnographically in order to understand the myriad literacy practices that are rooted in cultures and power structures (434), and since Deborah Brandt
defines African American literacy sponsors as social institutions such as schools, churches, and mass media, that hosted African Americans’ literacies. While Brandt’s study focuses on the correlation between literacy development and social institutions in a twentieth century context, in this chapter, I focus primarily on how a single African American male literacy sponsor (Jimmy) who adhered to his traditional African American literate heritage contributed to his son’s (Rashad) literate development by using his home to supplement his son’s education and thus bridge the home and school gap. Performing the same roles in his home as the core social institutions that Brandt describes, Jimmy also addressed a literacy crisis among African Americans, particularly among African American males. In this sense, one institution has been overlooked in the scholarship on African American male literacy practices: the single-parent homes of successful African American males.

In Figure 13 below, I have attempted to illuminate some of the symbols and cultures such as family, religious institutions, legal institutions, and educational institutions that influenced Rashad’s literacy learning. It is my hope that this web will be used as a site for listening (Ratcliffe 24). In response to Jacqueline Jones Royster’s call to convert listening to language and action, Ratcliffe reasons “if listening is to be revived and revalued within our field, it must occupy its own niche. Rather than be subsumed by reading, it should rank as an equal yet intertwining process of interpretive invention, for sometimes the ear can help us see just as the eye can help us hear” (23), listen and see; see and hear Rashad’s literate development.
Fig. 13. A Social Web of Rashad’s Literate Development and Literate Practices (Geertz’s semiotic concept of culture and thick description (1973) and Ratcliffe’s concept of “standing under” (2005))
The Formation of an Academic Writer Identity

Home Curriculum: Analyzing, Synthesizing, and Developing

Rashad’s narrative begins with what I call the fourth phase of his life story when he was adopted by Jimmy, a father-teacher who helped his son initiate the healing process because perhaps he knew as bell hooks knows: “Healing takes place within us as we speak the truth of our lives” (Sisters of the Yam 19), Rashad’s truth resides in his developing intellect. From our initial interview, I learned that Rashad’s most vivid memories of writing were of writing at home, where he composed for Jimmy and formed a writer identity. When I asked Rashad if he were a writer, he explained:

_Rashad_: Yes. I’m a good writer because I’m a good reader.

_Shirley_: Who taught you how to write? (pause) When I asked you who taught you how to read, you said that your father taught you how to read. Would you identify your father as the person who taught you how to write?

_Rashad_: Definitely. He is a very good writer too. He complains about [other people’s writing skills] . . . how they are not able to write at all. . . . He told me you don’t want to be one of those people. So actually I’m very good with my writing.

_Shirley_: Will you talk about the writing you [produced] for your father and his critique of your writing?

_Rashad_: My summaries.

_Shirley_: Earlier you said, well, I think you told me that your father concluded, “This is not good.”

_Rashad_: Oh, yea. You know, I tried to get sneaky with it and maybe write two sentences. He said, ‘No, I want a summary, a whole paragraph. Explain who, what,
when, why, and where.’ I remember he always used to do that. I want a: who, what, why, where, when. No listing them. I’m writing in this paragraph (pause). Now I remember articles, newspaper articles, and maybe like magazine articles [that] he would be reading something in *Black Enterprise, Jet, Ebony, Oprah Magazine*, and he made me read the articles. Then, he would say, ‘I want you to tell me what this is about. Son, you know you have to write, so make sure you understand what you are reading.’ Then, I would read it, and he would give me a pen and paper and ask me to tell him what they were talking about. Little things like that.

Rashad’s home curriculum was intended to develop his literacies and better prepare him for school. Some of his literacy practices began with his “self-sponsored” (Emig 1991) reading of children’s books such as Daniel Handler’s *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1996-2006), a collection of thirteen books about the complex lives of three orphaned children, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire, and their quest for the cause of their parents’ untimely death. Violet, Klaus, and Sunny, like Rashad, lived in foster homes. Rashad stated that he read the books on his own and would “go straight through them.” He also analyzed children’s books and revealed the “the plot, the character, and the theme.” Rashad told me that Jimmy instructed him to revise his analyses of adult literature until they resembled reader-based prose. Rashad went on to assert:

> I remember things like that. I remember having a little notebook. Every Sunday we would go to the Laundromat and sit down, and while the clothes were washing, I’d read this book. By the time I was in it, I heard, “I want summary, plot, theme, character analysis.” I’m like eight, nine, ten [years old], so I’m like, “What are you talking about?”
One aspect of Rashad’s dialogue that resonated with me was his discussion on his preparedness for school, particularly his preparedness for the type of persuasive writing he produced in his first-year writing courses. Of equal importance, Rashad articulately assessed his writing skills, identifying rhetorical concerns such as development, organization, and audience and lower order concerns such as syntax and grammar. Further, he also practiced writing as process. For example, after Jimmy read Rashad’s “summaries,” Rashad revised them if they did not meet Jimmy’s requirements for composing reader-based prose.

While listening to Rashad delineate his literacy learning at home, I concluded that Jimmy’s intensive home curriculum resembled a formal school curriculum. Jimmy did not mention a school curriculum during his telephone interviews, but one of his follow-up survey responses confirmed my interpretation of his pedagogical practices. Jimmy stated: “I tried to make Alex [Rashad] read daily when he was in elementary school and middle school. I had him recite what he read back to me. I also had a blackboard placed in his room, and I would go over sentence structure with him.” I carefully researched the curriculum that Jimmy espoused; then, I deduced that Jimmy’s curriculum closely aligned with the “2003 English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes Curriculum Framework” for the state in which he and Rashad lived. I selected the 2003 Academic Content Standards because Rashad was in the third grade when his school-based literacy learning began at home. The K-4 Benchmarks and Outcomes expected third-graders to:

- “Demonstrate awareness of and readiness for reading for meaning.
- Read and understand high-frequency and familiar words and phrases.
- Apply knowledge of word context to gain meaning from text.

28 In the next section, I discuss the writing Rashad produced for his first-year writing instructor.
Not only did Jimmy integrate reading outcomes into his curriculum, he also taught Rashad how to analyze texts in ways that both directly linked with and exceeded the state standards for reading informational and expository texts that are outlined in section R.5 of his state’s Reading Curriculum Framework, particularly section R.5.5 subtitled “Text Analysis.” Furthermore, in Rashad’s school system, third-graders were expected to:

- “Distinguish cause from effect in text. a. Identify examples in a text that show causes. b. Identify examples in a text that show effects or results” (“Curriculum Framework”).

Additionally, the Writing Strand of the curriculum indicates that third-graders should be able to:

- “Write an account based on personal experience that has a focus and supporting detail.
- Write a brief response to a literary text or an explanation of an informational text, using evidence from a text as support” (“Curriculum Framework”).

Rashad’s home curriculum taught him that writing is an act of learning, and that, as Janet Emig notes,30 “the higher cognitive functions such as analysis and synthesis, seem to develop most fully only with the support system of verbal language — particularly, it seems, of written

\[\text{\footnotesize 29 I did not cite this source because it would have revealed the state where Rashad went to school before he moved to Ohio.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 30 Also see Lev Vygotsky’s  Mind in Society (1978).}\]
language” (“Writing” 7), and that writing draws a connection among “three major tenses of our experience to make meaning”(13).31 Also important is the fact that Rashad learned the link between reading and writing and the roles those literacies played in his life. Again, Rashad pointed out that he critically analyzed articles that appeared in Black Enterprise, Jet, Ebony, and O to make meaning of them. More specifically, Rashad asserted that Jimmy challenged him to explain the strategies and resources African Americans used to excel in school, in their professions, and in the wider society, then apply them to his own life and use successful African Americans as models.

Since the literacies Rashad developed taught him how to systematically analyze literature, I also surmised that Jimmy borrowed from Kenneth Burke’s concept of pentad, where he theorizes about motives. In “The Five Key Terms of Dramatism,” Burke, who borrows from Aristotle, outlines five terms for explicating meaning that he calls pentad: act (what), scene (when or where), agent (who), agency (how), and purpose (why) (xv). Furthermore, in “Questions and Answers about the Pentad,” Burke explains that his theory expands Aristotle’s topics, where [i]n the Rhetoric, for instance, Aristotle's list is telling the writer what to say, but the pentad in effect is telling the writer what to ask”(332) in order to acquire the meaning of texts or phenomena. In addition, Burke’s pentad perceives language mainly as an approach to action, as opposed to a method for generating knowledge, “though the two emphases are by no means mutually exclusive” (330), maintains Burke. While the formal school requirements are more expansive, Burke’s method would have helped Rashad meet one of Jimmy’s requirements for analyzing literature because Rashad used language as action and as a meaning-making tool.

(Burke 330). Even so, Rashad entered school with literacies he would develop. In his first writing course, which is where I begin my discussion on the literacies Rashad carried to school, he encountered the same kind of problems that many African American males experience, but Rashad was prepared and willing to correct them. Therefore, Rashad met the requirements of his first-year writing course the first time he took it.

*Writing in College: The Extracurricular Meets the Curricular*

Again, Rashad was enrolled in a first-year writing course, *Introduction to Academic Writing*, during the Fall 2013 semester. The course was part of an independent writing program called General Studies Writing (GSW). GSW required students to compose an online placement essay that placed them in either *Intensive Introduction to Academic Writing* (basic writing), *Introduction to Academic Writing* (English Composition I), or *Academic Writing* (English Composition II). Students could also test out of the first-year writing courses. Rashad placed in *Introduction to Academic Writing*, which focused on the principles of academic argumentation, and it was one course in a series of two courses that Rashad completed sequentially during the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters. In *Introduction to Academic Writing*, students’ writing was assessed with a six-category rubric, and they earned grades of “Pass/P,” “Almost Pass/AP,” and “No Pass/NP.” While the rubric appears to evenly distribute the value of higher and lower order categories, any one of the six major categories could result in a failing grade.32

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32 The major categories are: audience, organization, development, syntax, word choice, and usage/mechanics. Each category contains subcategories.
Fig. 14. General Studies Writing Program Rubric
As Figure 14 demonstrates, the specially designed rubric also contains page notations in parentheses to chapters and sections in the seventh edition of Laurie G. Kirszner and Stephen R. Mandell’s *The Brief Wadsworth Handbook* (2013) to help students easily connect their writing concerns to the book.

*Introduction to Academic Writing* was taught by a second-year graduate student who assigned herself the name Claudia. At the beginning of the semester, Rashad composed a diagnostic assessment, an assignment that asked him to argue a position. Rashad described the essay accordingly:

> Grammatical mistakes are almost nonexistent in my writing. My content is very good. You can clearly understand what I am saying. What I struggle with is like starting it and getting certain details, going in depth, mainly. Like I can get to the point quickly, but I usually leave out a lot of details and stuff. I am definitely able to write correctly, basic structure is very good. My grammar is very good. Even my first essay for [Claudia], we had a pre-essay, a pre-introduction essay, and I got a plus-minus on it, which was an almost passing grade. She said my context was perfect, and my grammar was perfect. No mistakes.

**Shirley:** What were your writing concerns?

**Rashad:** Her concern was my counterargument. It was lacking in detail. My supporting evidence was lacking a little bit of detail. But everything else was fine. I can show you the essay I just turned in to [Claudia]. I still have it on my computer.

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33 Claudia explained that on the first day of class, she gives students the options of identifying her by her first name or by her married name. She prefers the less formal title, which is why a fictive name is used in this study.
While we discussed the content of his essay, Rashad explained that it failed to meet the criteria for the assignment because it lacked a strong counterargument. Rashad had chosen the pre-defined topic “What is the most important trait of a leader?” After I read Rashad’s essay, I concluded that he composed a strong thesis, and, generally, his text progressed logically. However, his counterargument was underdeveloped and his supporting paragraphs lacked concrete examples and supporting details, as Claudia had indicated in her summative feedback. Regarding lower order concerns, the essay revealed sound control of grammar, syntax, and standard dialect.

In order to support his claim that the ability to motivate people is the most important trait a leader must possess, Rashad drew from the knowledge he had acquired at home. He selected Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jimmy as examples of effective leaders. Rashad composed a six-sentence paragraph that argued that Dr. King’s ethos as a charismatic speaker and religious leader inspired a diverse population to “support the rights of the black citizens.”34 He also argued in a nine-sentence paragraph that Jimmy inspired him to accomplish his educational goals. To further demonstrate his critical thinking skills, Rashad identified a leader that most first-year writers might have found too controversial. In a six-sentence paragraph, Rashad denounced Adolph Hitler’s treatment of Jews and highlighted some of Hitler’s leadership skills, but he did not provide sufficient details that might have helped a reader understand how Hitler’s skills qualified him as a successful leader. Again, because his paragraphs were “underdeveloped,” Rashad’s essay earned a grade of “Almost Pass,” which is considered “good” by GSW standards on the first diagnostic assessment, according to Claudia in an interview in the Spring 2014 semester.

34 Rashad had learned about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at home, not at school.
Approximately one month after he received feedback on his first assignment, Rashad completed a writing assignment that asked him to argue a position with sources. He titled the essay “The Effects of Boom/Bust Industries.” Jimmy had also taught Rashad to capitalize on his resources, so in order to produce a strong essay that might meet the requirements of his assignment, Rashad worked with a Learning Commons writing tutor twice on his draft, similar to how he would have worked with Jimmy.\(^\text{35}\) In fact, Rashad stated that he had continued to contact Jimmy about his writing. Even so, the first time Rashad visited the Learning Commons, he received assistance with selecting a topic, developing a thesis, supporting his points, and finding sources that might help him substantiate his claims. The second visit entailed developing his draft, strengthening his thesis and conclusion, and learning MLA writing convention, according to his Learning Commons Session Report form.

However, when Rashad received his first graded assignment, it revealed the antithesis of the writer identity Jimmy had shaped. Earning a grade of “No Pass,” Rashad resisted the new identity Claudia had conferred on him, which was a non-writer. During our tutoring session, I witnessed his rage, as he complained incessantly about his new academic identity. Rashad shared his initial response to Claudia’s assessment of his writing, a visceral response that evoked emotive language:

“This is bullshit!” he grieved as he peered down at his illiterate self that lay exposed on a goldenrod rubric.

\(^{35}\) At Rashad’s university, the Learning Commons is equivalent to a writing center where student writers work with a tutor to help them identify and/or correct writing concerns. The terms “teacher” and “students” are italicized to demonstrate the emphases Rashad placed on the nouns when he asked the rhetorical question.
“I walked out, went to math lab, and I pulled the paper out my backpack and looked at it again, and I became angrier. I couldn’t focus on math because I failed my paper. My whole day was ruined,” lamented Rashad.

Rashad’s response to Claudia’s assessment of his writing had also “ruined” our tutoring session. Before I proceed, I will unpack my assertion. Shortly after he enrolled in the study, Rashad invited me to become his writing tutor, an invitation that opened a door to his writing process, a component of my protocol that had been delayed. As I discuss in Chapter Two, Rashad became a desk clerk shortly after he enrolled in the study and completed his homework assignments between five and six o’clock in the morning while he worked at the information desk. Later, Rashad told me that his writing process involved regular disruptions such as constant movement and fidgeting with objects. His inattentiveness, impulsivity, and hyperactivity were symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, a treatable medical condition, but Rashad had taken himself off Adderall the summer before he enrolled in college (his father and his physician complied with his decision). While Adderall and Ritalin are popular among many college students who believe the stimulants increase their cognitive functioning skills, Rashad remarked that Adderall reduced his cerebral functioning skills and resulted in inactivity. In other words, Rashad asserted that the medication made him lethargic, zombie-like, so he told Jimmy that he preferred to stop taking the medication. Equally important, Rashad realized that the medication affected his ability to learn. Thus, Rashad had to learn how to function without the stimulant. Therefore, sometimes he played with his small toy basketball during our tutoring sessions, but Rashad gradually conditioned himself to focus on tasks because we worked for a pre-determined period of time then took short breaks before we resumed the sessions.
Furthermore, as a practice of reciprocity, I accepted his offer to become his unpaid tutor and help him further develop his writing skills. By accepting Rashad’s invitation, I, too, became a part of this African American literacy sponsorship (Brandt 2011) and engaged in what Patricia Hill Collins calls “Black women’s motherwork” (259). However, on that fateful date, I did not offer Rashad direct instructions that might have improved his writing skills. Yet becoming his tutor also served another purpose—it allowed me to perform as an ethnographer who was deeply immersed in Rashad’s literate life. In this sense, his performance became evidence for my assessment of the value he placed on his writing and the way he responded to Claudia’s feedback, two phenomena that connect to my research questions. However, when I composed the original questions in 2012, I did not anticipate the emotion-laden responses that Rashad might have unveiled during our interviews. To reiterate, Rashad’s response demonstrates the value he placed on his identity as a writer.

As his anger intensified, Rashad’s reflections deepened:

I thought I was gonna pass. It was a well-written essay. I enjoyed writing about my topic, boom/bust economies. I talked about the way boom/bust companies destroy people’s lives and local economies when they move into a town, employ people, then leave abruptly, leaving people unemployed and the towns bankrupt. . . . I absolutely hate writing. Too many revisions. It takes forever for me to figure out what I want to write about. I spent ten hours or more sitting and writing just to not pass it. I went to the Learning Commons and got help on my introduction, thesis statement, and topic sentences. . . . How can a teacher demoralize and demotivate a student?
I could not answer Rashad’s questions. However, this disruptive yet pivotal moment revealed that Rashad valued his identity as an academic writer because he put forth a concerted effort to improve his writing skills and because he had endured rigorous writing, reading, and thinking activities at home, activities that had shaped his academic identity and prepared him to further develop his literacies in his writing course. Rashad’s response to Claudia’s assessment also speaks to the messiness of writing and of assessing writing. Rashad lamented, “I couldn’t begin. Then, I sat there writing, writing, writing.” During a telephone interview with Jimmy, which was unrelated to Rashad’s essay, Jimmy emphasized that he always pointed out to Rashad that: “Writing is crucial. You must write. It’s gonna hurt. Writing is not easy, but the end product is what he wants to show people.” Could Jimmy have imagined the pain that “the end product” would have caused his son?

In “Writing Before Writing,” Donald M. Murray discusses how writing teachers and textbook publishers neglect prewriting, a crucial stage in the writing process. Murray argues “that few teachers have ever allowed adequate time for prewriting, that essential state in the writing process that precedes a completed first draft” (375) and that “curricula plans and textbooks which attempt to deal with prewriting usually pass over it rather quickly” (375). Murray urges writing teachers to study what he believes are two critical points: the moment the writer receives an idea or an assignment and the moment the first completed draft is begun” (375). This type of “on the field” observation of students’ writing process could transpire in the classroom and during out-of-class conferences (375). In actuality, Rashad’s prewriting process was as painful as learning the value of his “end product,” a product that Claudia had inaccurately assessed.
Again, I insisted that Rashad confer with Claudia so she could help him understand why his writing did not conform to the requirements of the assignment. While querying me about the symbols (“P,” “AP,” and “NP”) Claudia had etched onto his rubric, Rashad offered his paper and rubric to me for assessment. This time Rashad had fully developed his paragraphs and substantiated his claims with specific details. I suggested that he contact Claudia and request a conference so he could ask her the questions he had asked me such as: “Why did she check the line beside “subject/verb agreement?” (Rashad had insisted that his grammar was perfect.) “How did I get a “NP” when I got “Ps” and “APs” in the six categories?” I asked Rashad if he had read Claudia’s summative comments. Rashad pointed out that he had not read them, and he insisted that he would not read her comments nor meet with her, although Claudia had encouraged Rashad to schedule an appointment to meet with her to discuss his writing concerns. I had not answered Rashad’s questions, but he engaged in critical discourse when he asked them in an attempt to make meaning of what he interpreted as an unreasonable assessment of his writerly self. In this regard, Rashad was acting as an agent of knowledge on his own writing ability. However, he failed to fully execute a rhetorical situation that called on him to consult Claudia, the authority figure who assigned his grade, and compare his knowledge on writing with her knowledge on writing so he could learn why he was unsuccessful on his first graded assignment.

Later in the month, after much coercion, I persuaded Rashad to compose an email with me to Claudia that requested a conference so he could talk with her about his concerns. Rashad had never met with a formal educator about his writing. As a first-semester college student he did not know how to respond to a teacher whose perspective on his writing was antithetical to his view on his writing and on his identity as a writer, particularly one who had invited him to talk
with her about his writing. Although Rashad discussed his writerly identity, his discourses had a wider implication that related to his identity as an African American male and a human being. Rashad demonstrated how self-efficacy contributed to his success in first-year writing courses. In his 2014 articles in *Composition Forum*, “Speaking From Different Positions: Framing African American College Male Literacies as Institutional Critique,” Collin Craig writes:

> For many Black college males, the composition course is a space where texts and writing practices make visible the ideological values embedded in language that have social and political implications for their subject formation. It is also a window into how Black males use language to transition into higher education. Participating in academic discourses often involves imagining possible selves in the wake of prevailing stereotypes about Black nihilism and academic underachievement.

Craig goes on to note that “[f]raming the literate lives of Black males in college as a viable representation of how they negotiate a sense of self while navigating value systems can reveal how literacy learning invokes moments of tension, identity negotiation and transformation for African American male writers.” In addition to guiding Rashad through some academic writing conventions, I also attempted to familiarize him with his role and responsibilities as a college student and with other academic protocols such as meeting with his professors and advocating for himself.

In “Changing Places,” Edward Fergus and Pedro Noguera assert that many students are oblivious to college protocols and do not know what to expect when they get to college. Fergus and Noguera also stress:

> Many students graduate from high school with no idea that in college they will be expected to read eight to ten books simultaneously and write five to six research
papers per term; but they also have no idea that they might go to a professor’s office hours for assistance. Low-performance and segregated high schools with racial/ethnic minority students rarely adopt curricular practices that explicitly provides such preparation. (102)

Rashad had attended a predominantly White high school in a suburban community in Ohio, yet he needed to understand that conferencing was also a significant part of his academic identity. The basis of Rashad’s resistance was the antagonistic relationship he had formed with Claudia after he received a failing grade. Rashad believed he was “a good writer” because his father, a voice of authority and model, had taught him how to write. After I explained the consequences and implications of his resistance, Rashad agreed to meet with Claudia.

During Rashad’s meeting with Claudia, she discovered an oversight on the rubric. Rashad’s paper did not contain subject/verb agreement errors, and a paper that does not earn a “NP” in any of its categories cannot earn a final grade of “NP.” Thus, Rashad’s grade changed from “NP” to “P,” and Rashad’s identity as a “good writer” had been restored. What had Claudia seen and heard and why? Had Claudia aligned her reading with “information already available on the brain” about Rashad’s or about African American male writers as opposed to “information available to the eye from the print on the page” (Murray 114)? Nonetheless, I coded Claudia’s inaccuracy and Rashad’s reaction to his grade as factors that had the potential to hinder his success in his first-year writing course.36 Interestingly, I believe that if I had not intervened and urged Rashad to schedule a conference with his instructor, he would not have met with her about his concerns. Would he have regained his self-esteem as a writer and his trust in her? Would he have dropped the course as he had threatened to do? Would he have failed the

36 Coding Scheme—RQ1: teacher. RQ 2: high value/father.
course? Would he and Claudia have formed the type of relationship that Malon and Tracy, his basic writing instructor, eventually formed after Malon was penalized for following his peer’s instruction, according to Malon in the fall of 2013 (see Chapter Four)?

Again, Rashad recouped his writer identity, and we continued our tutoring/observation session. Next, I introduced Rashad to read-aloud protocol. Later, he admitted that he initially resisted the strategy and that Jimmy had already urged him to read his papers aloud. While he listened to his own voice, he made immediate changes on his computer, or he annotated drafts and revised them later. Additionally, sometimes his drafts were unorganized, so we used his computer to dissect their contents, combining similar ideas or color-coding them so he could organize them later. Also, the sessions were primarily question-based with Rashad and I asking questions about the rhetorical moves he made or did not make in his drafts.

Furthermore, in my HSRB protocol, I indicated that I would inquire about the way participants responded to their writing teachers’ feedback. Rashad told me that he read his instructors’ comments before he revised his papers. In an interview at the end of the Fall 2013 semester, I asked Rashad what kind of feedback he prefers from writing teachers. He specified:

Face-to-face conferences are definitely better than exchanging comments over media because you know like in face-to-face [conferences] you get to exchange your ideas and thoughts on the paper. It’s a lot faster. But like when you exchange comments on media, it takes a whole day. . . . When there are written comments, some things can be misinterpreted. Also . . . having an open dialogue about a piece of writing is more effective and helpful because ideas and thoughts can be exchanged.
Rashad also responded that when he met with Claudia in her office, she invited him to ask all the questions he had about his essays, and he asked for clarification when he did not understand her responses. At the beginning of the semester, he did not understand them because it appeared to Rashad that she was writing to her peers, as opposed to speaking back to him, a first-year student who was unfamiliar with academic language. In this sense, interpreting academic discourse was another literacy that Rashad had to develop. In *Between Talk and Teaching: Reconsidering the Writing Conference* (1998), Laurel Johnson Black insists that teachers use discipline-specific terminology, language that suggests that students are members of our discourses community (76). In contrast, Claudia reasoned that students should have used their rubrics to acquire the field’s language. I must also note that Rashad did not use his handbook until I insisted that he bring it to our sessions and that he did not value his handbook nor teacher conferences until he received a failing grade that he later discovered was erroneous.

Nonetheless, Rashad regained his self-confidence, and after he met with Claudia, he became a full participant in the teaching and learning process. The third essay he wrote for Claudia was an argument that related to African Americans’ lived experiences. He discussed the factors that cause low enrollment rates among African American students in U.S. universities. His three-point thesis statement read accordingly: “Several factors contribute to African Americans’ low attendance in college, but the major factors are cost of college, parental background and guidance, and economic status” (1). When Rashad composed paragraphs two and three, he synthesized his and his friends’ personal experiences and integrated them into his essay, writing from the third-person point of view. The essay earned a final grade of “Pass.” Finally, essay four asked Rashad to analyze a visual argument. Selecting an Intel advertisement, he argued that the computer company perpetuated racial stereotypes by placing African
American males in subservient positions in the workplace. The advertisement reads: “Multiply Computing Performance and Maximize the Power of your Employees.” In the advertisement six Black topless, muscular males dressed in spandex are crouched in a sprinter’s position while a White male dressed in casual office attire with his arms folded stands between and over the Black males. Again, Rashad chose to analyze a digital image about how African American males are stereotyped and subjugated in American society. This essay that Rashad could not revise also earned a grade of “Pass.” Rashad had further developed his writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills and met the requirement of his first-year writing course. The literacies Rashad acquired at home and developed in school suggest a practice that other parents of African American males might adopt to help their sons succeed in first-year writing courses that privilege traditional academic discourse.

During the Spring 2014 semester, Rashad’s second writing course, Academic Writing, required him to conduct scholarly research. He and I met less frequently to discuss his writing because he believed the course presented fewer difficulties than his first writing course had. When I asked Rashad if he carried knowledge from Introduction to Academic Writing to Academic Writing, he stated that he had not acquired much new knowledge in his second writing course. Overall, Rashad reported that although he could already synthesize texts and contextualize information, his college writing courses taught him “how to write better” because he explained,

I never knew how to write in MLA format, like parenthetical citations. I hated citing everything. Now I know how to cite those and incorporate quotations a lot smoother. [Claudia] made me understand (pause) like just don’t throw it in there. . . . don’t even introduce a quote just throw it in there. Now I understand [how] to provide
background information, [how] to enter the quote in there and make sure it flows. I remember she read [one sentence,] and she said, ‘Oh, I didn’t know that was a quote there.’

Over the course of the study, I also noticed an improvement in Rashad’s writing skills, specifically his ability to fully develop his ideas and smoothly integrate other people’s voices into his own voice.

It is evident that Rashad’s home literacy practices and other school literacy practices contributed to his success in two first-year writing courses. As referenced in Chapter One, in his 2008 article “Journalism, Poetry, Stand-up Comedy, and Academic Writing: Mapping the Interplay of Curricular and Extracurricular Literate Activities,” Roozen discusses the results of a five-year longitudinal case study that examines the relationship between his participant’s extracurricular and curricular literacy practices. Roozen’s participant is an African American male named Charles Scott, Jr, an undergraduate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Charles’s extracurricular activities included journalism, poetry, and stand-up comedy, and the curricular activities that Roozen studied were those Charles developed and applied in two introductory courses he took during his first semester at the University of Illinois: Rhetoric 101 and Speech 101. Roozen found that Charles seemed to have carried the literacies he acquired in his journalism course, conducting research and producing news stories, to his Rhetoric 101 course that included analytical writing, and Charles drew upon his public speaking skills while reading poetry and performing standup comedy to help him meet the demands of Speech 101. According to Roozen, while Charles’s “extracurricular literate efforts” were successful, he “was struggling with the demands of the undergraduate curriculum” (7).

Consistent with Roozen’s study, this study found that Rashad carried literacies from one context
to another. However, unlike Roozen’s study, Rashad’s data show that his extracurricular activities (at home) helped him succeed in two first-year writing courses because he acquired school-based literacies that he carried to school, particularly writing and reading skills. In this regard, Rashad had met his teachers’ and his father’s expectations.

Brandt writes that “reading with children and encouraging them to read was regarded as part of normal parental responsibilities in many working-class and middle-class families” (Literacy 113). However, “teaching or encouraging writing (beyond showing very young children how to form letters or checking the spelling on homework assignments) was nearly unheard of and sometimes actively avoided by many of these same families” (94-95). To reiterate, Brandt found that African American literacy sponsors were primarily social institutions such as churches, mass media, and schools/educators (105-145). In “‘They Rose and Fell Together’: African American Educator and Community Leadership, 1795-1954,” V.P. Franklin points out that educators and other professionals taught in their home and in African American communities. He also emphasizes that:

Education was valuable not merely as means for social or economic advancement, but as an end in itself. Most African Americans came to believe that, although they might acquire (and eventually lose) money, property, civil rights, and social status, once they acquire an education it could not be taken away. At the same time, African Americans who acquire literacy or advanced training often recognized an obligation to pass that knowledge on to others within their family, community, and cultural groups. This was part of an ‘ethos of service’ that developed many middle- and upper-status African Americans who recognized that their future was inextricably tied to that of the entire group. (40)
While Franklin does not delineate the particular pedagogy that educators and community leaders espoused, one can assume that literacy learning comprised more than decoding texts. Jimmy himself earned advanced degrees and promoted an African American rhetoric of change and the idea that literacy was a commodity to be shared. Moreover, in *Black Literate Lives: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (2009), Maisha T. Fisher reasons that “the purpose of IBIs [Independent Black Institutions] that focused on teaching and learning was ‘to educate and socialize African American children to assume their future roles as political, intellectual, spiritual and economic leader in their community.’ In sum, churches, schools, newspapers, bookstores are institutions that have afforded Black people opportunities to preserve literate traditions while cultivating future leaders” (14-15). In the same way that IBIs sponsored African American children’s literacies, preserved their literate history, evoked in them a critical consciousness, and prepared them to become professions, Jimmy performed the same roles in his home, adhering to a long literate tradition that dates back to colonial America, as I explicate in Chapter Two.

Consequently, Jimmy’s home curriculum also reflected what Gloria Ladson-Billings termed culturally relevant pedagogy, a curriculum one that links school culture to home culture.37 A culturally relevant pedagogy introduces students to aspects of their home culture that allows them to see themselves positively in that culture. Additionally, it takes all students’ cultures into consideration, and it strives to recognize and appreciate the languages, dialects, and literacies all students bring into their classrooms. Ladson-Billings (1992), Geneva Gay (2002), and Alfred Tatum (2005 and 2013) maintain that culturally responsive teaching can help African

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37 According to Ladson-Billings anthropologists have examined the link between school and culture, using labels such as “‘culturally appropriate’ (Au & Jordan, 1981), ‘culturally congruent’ (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), ‘culturally responsive’ (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), and ‘culturally compatible’ (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987).” More recently, scholars in Rhetoric and Composition and Education such as Delpit 1999; Gay 2000; Purcell-Gates 2007; Richardson 2003; Smitherman 1972; Tatum 2005, 2013, to name a few, have explored ways that teachers can connect students’ home cultures to their school culture.
American males learn about the positive roles Black males have played in American society, roles that include their engagement with texts. Jimmy, who was teaching Rashad how to perform the traditional role of an African American male intellectual, explained his own curriculum best when he responded to questions about the theories and objectives that grounded his curriculum. I quote Jimmy extensively so readers might witness the ideological underpinning of his discourse:

I wanted Alex (Rashad) to be proud of his heritage and learn about African American people who were making a positive difference in the community. I wanted him to read stories about African Americans who were successful and not always receive the negative information about African Americans that tends to come from mainstream media. . . . But more importantly, I just wanted him to read. . . . I knew that by reading he would develop his vocabulary and his grammar. . . . Alex should take more writing courses so he can become a stronger writer. Our society values what is in print, which is why we have so many books and libraries. Once you write down your thoughts, they become real. Some of our best Black leaders were excellent writers. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm, just to name a few, wrote their speeches and ideas down on paper. People are not going to take Alex serious if he cannot write his ideas down. I believe Alex has a lot to say about his life, but people will not listen to him if he can’t write it down. He has four years to learn how to develop his writing style, and he should not miss this opportunity.

Rashad was taught to value print text, to understand the power of a communicative act, and to exploit language as his male African American textual mentors had done in order to write
themselves into a discourse community that had refused to recognized their humanity and contributions to American society.

Hence, not only were Rashad’s literacy learning experiences situated in an academic context, they were also situated in a wider social context among African Americans who promoted “literacy as power.”38 In other words, Rashad’s home schooling taught him that writing is a school-sanctioned practice (Emig 1971) that prepared him for college, for his potential profession, for social mobility, for social, political, and economic activism, and for his responsibilities as an African American male. Of equal importance, Rashad was also exposed to the idea that the acquisition of critical literacies could offer him not only material success, but a sense of freedom (Kynard 2014), which Rashad articulated in his definition of success that begins Chapter Two of this project.

Rashad’s sense of freedom was also connected to his acquisition of the standard variety of English. Rashad learned from Jimmy that acquiring standard American English (SAE) would not diminish his sense of self, as SAE was “his grammar” too, according to Jimmy. In a 2009 interview and in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993), Paulo Freire asserts that in order to empower oppressed people who have been objectified by their oppressors, those people must acquire critical knowledge and the dominant dialect. These literacies lead to the development of “critical consciousness that will transform the world” (52-67), contends Freire. Similarly, Lisa Delpit believes the standard/nonstandard binary should exist in profound ways in the lives of students of color. Delpit emphasizes that educators must teach African American students the dominant discourse that belongs to the “culture of power” (“The Silenced Dialogue” 24) while

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encouraging them to retain “the language of their homes and communities” (“The Politics” 545). Delpit states that to deny these speakers and writers access to the dominant discourse “would be to oppress them further” (547), and “if schooling prepares people for jobs, and the kind of job a person has determines her or his economic status and, therefore, power, then schooling is intimately related to that power” (“The Silenced Dialogue” 25). Further, Delpit insists that,

> success in institutions—schools, workplaces, and so on—is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power. Children from middle-class homes tend to do better in school than those from non-middle-class homes because the culture of the school is based on the culture of the upper and middle classes—of those in power. (25)

However, in contrast to Delpit’s understanding of the acquisition of standard American English as preparing students for the U.S. workforce, Geneva Smitherman argues in “Black Power Is Black Language” that “[t]o conceptualize the educational process in terms of preparing students for the ‘world of work’ is to make our institutions of higher learning training mills in which the daily output is one student-Robot capable of fitting into the vast machinery of technological times” (qtd. in Kynard 99). She also stresses that “[i]f the patriarchally-constituted social and economic structure would not accept non-mainstream speech varieties, then the argument for difference would simply become deficiency all over again” (21). While Pedro Noguera urges educators to respect students’ home languages, he also cogently argues that [i]n the labor market, [African American males] are the least likely to be hired and, in many cities, the most likely to

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39 Carmen Kynard notes that the majority of Delpit’s work focuses on Native American students, particularly her discussion on “culture of power” (96).
be unemployed” (*Trouble with Black Boys* 17), and later he asserts that Black males are underrepresented in communities, schools, universities, and professions (*A Search Past Silence*) x). Has their presence diminished in those contexts because they are not taught standard American English, because they do not articulate the standard dialect, or because other factors determine who is granted membership into the American labor market? When educators do not teach all students the “standard” dialect, which, for the most part, is privileged in the professions, do they perpetuate a form of illiteracy? According to Rashad, his acquisition of standard American English “paid off because [he] always scored . . . high on the SAT, the critical reading sections.” He goes on to acknowledge: “I am able to read things clearly, and it is probably because of that.” Rashad postulated that he learned the standard variety of English, which he used primarily in his written discourse, but he also emphasized that he spoke the nonstandard variety in informal contexts. The next section illuminates how Rashad practiced his public speaking skills and advocated for other school-aged African American males, which further enhanced his literacies.

*Putting Theory to Practice: Speaking and Teaching Writing*

During the Spring 2014 semester, Rashad carried some of the knowledge and skills he developed at home and in school to the 2014 Black Male Summit at the University of Akron. Rashad and I facilitated a panel discussion titled “Listening to a Successful African American Male: Strengthening the High School-to-College Pipeline,” which directly related to my research and teaching interests and to Rashad’s experiences as a college student who had passed through the high school-to-college pipeline. Rashad demonstrated his oral presentation skills when he shared his perspective on best practices for writing and strategies and resources he used or should have used to succeed in first-year writing courses:
• Accepting writing as process,
• Attending class regularly,
• Comparing drafts to writing assignment or instructions,
• Listening attentively in classes,
• Participating in class (did not always participate in class),
• Reading papers aloud, slowly and critically,
• Reading regularly,
• Taking effective notes,
• Using a dictionary because “Spel chek don’t be fixin’ er’thang,”
• Using an online dictionary that pronounces,
• Using campus and community resources such as writing centers and tutors, and
• Writing regularly and taking writing seriously.

Rashad also advised African American males that the most effective strategy is one that alleviates stress. He did not contextualize this particular strategy, so I imagined that he was referring to stress that was related to school demands, to peer pressure and the lure of street life, and to other social norms that complicate some adolescent college students’ lives. Rashad also discussed the assistance he received from his father, whom Rashad continued to consult for advice on developing his writing skills, as stated earlier. Finally, Rashad concluded his presentation by stating that “Writing is a necessary evil” and that writing is one evil to which Black males should succumb.

Again, the Summit created a space for Rashad to demonstrate some of his critical literacies, mainly his delivery skills, the fifth canon of rhetoric. A mastery of public speaking almost certainly impacts an audience’s sense of logic and emotions, which was the mission of the
presentation—to engage other Black males and urge them to act—and Rashad did so with eloquence and authenticity, and thus showcasing his ability as an orator. Also of importance was Rashad’s identity as an African American male college student that positioned him “as the wise expert with all the advice and knowledge to share with inexperienced” high school students (Faulkner-Springfield 76) who, for the most part, were unfamiliar with academic writing and the college experience. Ultimately, Rashad’s rhetoric crossed the boundaries of our research project and his first-year writing course into a public context where he performed as a change agent, speaking his truth to Black male high school and university students as well as post-secondary faculty and administrators. However, presenting formal presentations to an academic audience was not an uncommon practice for Rashad.

*Writing in Middle-High School*

The following two sections shed light on Rashad’s whole self and offer a few personal factors that contribute to his success in first-year writing courses. Rashad and I held contrasting perspectives on his insistence that I expose what I interpreted as private aspects of his life. I had ethnical concerns about the details Rashad revealed to me about his biological parents; thus, I reminded him that he elected to use his real identity on the study. Yet he insisted that readers would not appreciate his achievements and identity as a writer if they were not privy to his life-story. In other words, without his whole story readers would not have access to a whole self, argued Rashad.

Rashad attended a premier preparatory academy when he was thirteen years old and in the seventh grade. He remembered: “in the seventh grade, I took Latin, pre-algebra, and science...
courses. In my English classes, I read books and wrote essays. It was a pretty tough school, and I was there until the eleventh grade.” Rashad could not recall the genres he produced in his English classes, but he acknowledged that initially he struggled to adjust to the educational context that was designed to prepare him for college and a career. In fact, Rashad placed more emphasis on the difficulties he experienced in school than he did on the literacies he acquired and developed in school. For example, when Rashad arrived at the academy, he exhibited disruptive behavior. His English teacher did not attempt to treat his behavior; instead, she proceeded to treat the perpetrator of the behavior, according to a school administrator at Rashad’s former middle/high school, whom I assigned the pseudonym “Linda.”

Before continuing with Rashad’s literacy narrative though, I want to return to the day I met him in the Fall of 2013, when he explained what I identified as phase one of his life (see Figure 1) in order to illustrate the origin of Rashad’s literate development and the complexity of his literate life. Again, when I met Rashad, he asserted, “I have a story to tell. I could have been in prison.” This part of Rashad’s narrative connects to the web I constructed of his literate life. I initiated my investigation into Rashad’s literacy practices by inviting him to tell me something about him. Like the shrewd griot who knows how to capture his audience’s attention, Rashad began his captivating narrative with a hook that ensnared me, pressing me to listen to his voice:

I guess it’s best to start with (pause) I’m adopted. When I was born, both of my parents were on drugs. They were both alcoholic, and my mom did crystal meth. My dad (pause) he was a drunk and still is, so they were both on drugs. I was born a crack baby. Usually crack babies are born with ADHD, and I have ADHD. I lived with, with my mom for like two years, and when I lived with her, she was living with her, (pause) she had a boyfriend who is my sister’s dad. . . . They [his
mother and her boyfriend] were both on drugs, and they were never around. Her boyfriend, he beat me several times. I was left home. I remember this. I was left home alone one time when I was two years old, and I think they left to get drugs. I remember seeing some prescription pills lying around, so I got scared and went to my neighbor’s house. When they came home her boyfriend was infuriated. I got beat that day. After that day they had to give me up to my grandmother, and I stayed with her for about two weeks. . . . I guess you could say that they kidnapped me because they came into my grandma’s house, and they took me while I was with her.

Rashad also recalled:

They took me to a Laundromat, and . . . they got arrested, . . . right in front of me. They took me to the Police Station. I was immediately given custody to my uncle. He was married, so I was with them for a couple of years. I remember he told me one day that I had to (pause) he is the one who put me into a like, into Child Services because he said (pause) . . . that I was too much to handle.

I was like really, a really bad kid. I entered the adoption process in Child Care (pause) at the age of five, and I spent a couple (pause) a year bouncing from house to house. . . . they told me that I had to go to another house. I started swearing. I was five years old. I was saying (pause) I was angry all the time. . . . I went to a Hispanic family, and they kept me for three years. I was with them from five to eight. And when I was with them, I got into a lot of trouble. I got kicked out of school, not kicked out. I got suspended several times. I remember getting kicked out of school thirteen times when I was in the first grade. I was
just swearing all the time. I did not have respect for anyone. They were a
Christian family; I remember going to church with them. You know that’s when I
started (pause) I started that religion. Uh, you know I, I did get a little better, but I
was still getting into trouble at school, fights, but it did get better.

Again, the story about Rashad’s parents connects to his literacy learning process and the way he
acquired literacies or whether he improved his writing skills at all. Four traumatic events
transpired during the first three phases of Rashad’s life that shaped his worldview and caused his
inattentiveness in school.

Rashad was: 1) taken from his mother because he was abused and abandoned, 2)
kidnapped from his grandmother by his mother, 3) told by his uncle that he did not want him in
his home, and 4) taken away from his Hispanic family, the only “family” he knew. From my
analysis of the data, these events disrupted Rashad’s ability to fully engage in the literacy
learning process, though Rashad and Jimmy pointed out that Rashad maintained good grades
despite thirteen suspensions and poor behavior. According to Rashad, his cognitive skills
developed while his ability to control his emotions declined. Two additional factors fueled his
destructive behaviors: Rashad’s biological mother became dependent on drugs and birthed a
child who had emotional and neurological problems, and his biological father abandoned him.
From this blend of unfortunate events arose a child who felt unloved and struggled to cope with
abandonment, according to Jimmy.

Pedro Noguera also observes that “children who suffer from abuse or neglect . . . are
sometimes more likely to act out and get into trouble” (113), and he also argues that “[t]oo often,
schools react to the behavior of such children while failing to respond to their unmet needs or the
factors responsible for their problematic behavior” such as familial, environmental, cultural,
socioeconomic, among others (113). Finally, Rashad’s narrative proves that his separation from his mother and his placement in foster care negatively affected many aspects of his life. African American males’ placement into foster care and its effect on their success in school is also a neglected topic in education research. In 2012, the U.S. foster care system housed 399,546 children. Twenty-six percent of those children were Black or African American, and fifty-two percent of those children were male (“Child Welfare” 1, 9, and 12). These data do not group children by race and gender, but more research on this topic might shed light on the reason some African American males struggle in school.

Rashad’s oppositional behavior marked him as violent, disrespectful, and anti-intellectual, markers that often result in suspensions and expulsions for African American males, rather than a treatment of the behavior, as Gloria Ladson-Billings discusses in a 2014 interview with The Huffington Post. Similar to Noguera, Ladson-Billings argues that school teachers and administrators “treat” African American males by telling them that they do not belong in society when they suspend and excel them, which too often results in their migration through the school-to-prison pipeline (2006; 2014). In the interview, Ladson-Billings asserts that the majority of school suspensions are linked to “noncontact behavior . . . such as wearing a hat . . . rolling their eyes . . . [being] disrespectful.” Ladson-Billings, who delivered a commencement speech at a correctional facility, learned that one-hundred present of her audience had been suspended from school. She offers a word of caution: “I want teachers to understand the consequences of starting down this particular road. It’s not merely about exclusion from school. It is about starting to determine life courses because now you have decided that this is someone who cannot be included in the population.” Her argument speaks to the lived experiences of many Black males, a reality that Rashad articulated when he blatantly professed: “I could have been in
prison.” Later, he asserted that if he had remained in the care of his uncle, he would have gone to prison because he “definitely would have been on the streets . . . that is all I would have been exposed to,” emphasized Rashad. Here, Rashad suggests that he would have become a product of his environment and his uncle could not have protected him, an uncle who also abandoned him. Rashad also told me that he would not have attended college if he had remained with his Hispanic family. Although they showed him love and taught him the meaning of family, they could not afford to send him to college because “they had their own biological children and other adopted children” to support. Finally, Rashad asserted that although he attended school when he was with his Hispanic family, he did not complete homework assignments at home. Instead, his foster family focused on other concerns such as completing household chores, preparing meals, and addressing other economic issues. According to Rashad’s assessment of his family (mom, dad, grandmother, uncle, foster parents), they could not protect and nurture him the way Jimmy did.

In “Early Schooling and Academic Achievement of African American Males,” James Earl Davis examines the experiences and achievement outcomes of African American males who were enrolled in kindergarten through the third grade. Davis asks: “What are the mechanisms at work that are responsible for African American males’ achievement lags and apparent disengagement in early years of schooling?” (516). He goes on to argue that “[i]n the midst of trying to get a handle on the education crisis of Black boys, we have unfortunately learned too little about how boys construct personal meaning for their social and academic lives” (520). Rashad’s narrative offers a small window through which to view his personal and academic identities and the primary factors that contributed to his success in school. In retrospect, Rashad self-identified as a “bad kid” who “earned stellar grades.” Not only did Rashad identify as a
“bad kid,” he qualified the adjective “bad” with adverbs such as “real” and “really,” accentuating the degree of his behavior. Rashad suppressed his emotions, but they revealed themselves in violent ways.

On the other hand, one of the recurring themes that manifested in his data was “success.” Rashad anticipated academic success, professional success, and personal success, which is delineated in the epigraph that begins Chapter Two. Some researchers report that many minority students profess that they want to succeed in school, but their academic performance and their attitudes on schooling differ from their verbal confessions (Carter 2005; hooks 2004; Polite and Davis 1999). Perhaps some of these students lack the motivation, knowledge, and encouragement they need to succeed in school, qualities that Rashad possessed and support he received from Jimmy and some of his teachers. Perhaps many students of color do not receive equal treatment and equal opportunities to learn when they are taught in what bell hooks calls “a culture of domination by those who dominate” (150). Similar to the advice that hooks’ mother gave her on how to acquire literacies in educational contexts, Jimmy taught Rashad to enter “a culture of domination” (150) and acquire the literacies he needed to compete and survive in school, in his potential profession, and in society. If Rashad met these requirements that Jimmy established he would have accomplished what Jimmy had done for himself as an academe and then as a professional, which speaks to the importance of insider knowledge as ethos building and as modeling.

James Earl Davis also postulates that the majority of research “about student attitudes focuses on [middle and high school students’] resistance and cultural opposition to schooling and achievement” (524). He merges the results of a U.S. Department of Education survey with a ten-year-old ethnographic study to conclude “that . . . Black boys [are] achievement oriented and
very engaged in learning in elementary school. Only boys who were struggling academically expressed negative attitudes toward school” (524). The aspect of Davis’ research that is most germane to my project is his finding that few studies exists on “how boys construct personal meaning for their social and academic lives” (520). Similar to Ladson-Billings’ findings, [Davis and Jordan] also found that “remediation, grade retention, and suspensions induce academic failure among Black boys” (522) and that parental involvement is crucial during children’s early schooling experiences. Finally, Davis insists that education researchers have neglected to examine Black boys’ “early childhood schooling and home experiences such as school readiness” (522). This study addresses school readiness on a small scale. For example, Rashad asserted that after he met Jimmy, he concluded that he did not want to be like his biological parent who became dependent on drugs, dropped out of school, and relinquished their parental responsibilities to him. Jimmy not only attempted to prepare Rashad for school, his personal and conjectural perspectives on schooling led him into his son’s classrooms and into other aspects of Rashad’s academic life such as contacting Rashad’s school, responding to Rashad’s teachers’ queries, and attending report card night and back to school night, reported Linda, an administrator at Rashad former middle/high school.

During the telephone interview with Linda, she illuminated some of the challenges Rashad faced after he transferred to the academy, and the way Jimmy intervened and offered a solution to Rashad’s and his teachers’ difficulties. Linda met with Rashad after one of his English language arts teachers reported his behavior to her. She identified three institutional factors that impeded Rashad’s success in his English class: “I think the thing that negatively affected his performance was being in a class with thirty other students and having some behavior issues and the teachers were not necessarily addressing him but addressing the
behaviors issues.” Then, Linda asserted: “That’s how we handle behavior problems. That’s something that not only happens at our school, but it happens in general when a lot of times, the consequence are the behavior, but the root of the problem is not addressed.” Linda also posited that “His father brought in a very good firm perspective for the teachers to consider, and I think that was really very eye-opening for the teachers. . . . When one teacher was struggling, it really made her think about how she could assist Rashad in different and positive ways so that he could be successful.” Although Linda could not remember whether Rashad’s “grades actually changed,” she recalled that “his behavior started to improve, and Rashad seemed a little bit happier in his classes as well” after his teachers applied strategies that Jimmy introduced to them, strategies that Linda did not reveal.

The most striking data on Rashad’s literate development that I collected from Linda was her assessment of Jimmy’s investment in Rashad’s formal education and well-being:

I give a lot of credit to Rashad’s father in all this. When Rashad came into the end of the meeting, his father was, at that point, almost leading the meeting. He gave Rashad his expectations, and he pointed to the expectations of the teachers. He also said that at the end of the day, Rashad will be fine and that he loved him, and he needs to know that, in front of all the teachers. He said, “You are my son, and I love you. We’re gonna get you through this.” So it was a very (pause). I think it brought tears to most of the teachers’ eyes. So as I said, I give his father a lot of credit for being there, and his father really showed the teachers that Rashad’s behavior was really a huge improvement from what it was before, and they needed to see that. They also needed to know that they were not failing
Rashad. He was becoming better. I give his father so much credit. Rashad has so much potential, and his father knows how to reach that.

Perhaps Rashad’s English language arts teacher did not know how to re-channel his emotions, a student with diagnosed ADHD, because she saw an emotionally and physically immature Black male whom she chose not to teach nor reach. However, not only did Jimmy know how to appeal to his son’s potential, he taught his teachers how to do the same by sharing his methods with them thus becoming a teacher to teachers. As already demonstrated by his narrative, Rashad was “teachable” and willing to engage in the teaching and learning process. For example, as a middle school student, he submitted a project to the Science Fair at Harvard University, and he reported that he won a prize for his project about volcanoes (see Figure 15).

When he was in the tenth grade, Rashad co-presented a research project titled “Innovation for Development: Exploring Solutions to Africa’s Challenges” at the Harvard African Development Conference at Harvard University. Additionally, Linda’s responses are striking because they speak back to the larger discourse on African American male fathers’ involvement in their sons’ lives and on African American males’ literacy practices. Consequently, Jimmy’s involvement in Rashad’s academic life proves that some African American males play a crucial role in assuring their sons’ academic success.

Writing in Elementary School

Rashad recalled having homework assignments when he was in the fourth grade, and his homework increased when he was in the sixth grade. However, he could not recall the types of
writing he produced in elementary school nor did he preserve copies of his writing. He noted that he read above grade level, which is one of the vital factors that education researchers contribute to success in school.⁴³ In addition to the strategies discussed earlier, Rashad stated:

Before I could play, before I could go outside and play basketball, I had to complete my homework. He would make me go over math, but mainly it was reading and writing because he knew how important that was. But he would, like, literally grade my writing, and he would say that is not good enough. Write another one. I hated it, but it made me smarter.

Jimmy also insisted that he recognized his son’s potential when Rashad was in elementary school, and so he began to nurture his budding intellectual. Jimmy introduced Rashad to educational technologies such as Leap Frog and Nintendo DS with Super Mario 64 DS so Rashad could develop his problem-solving, critical thinking, and synthesis skills.

Jimmy pointed out:

When Alex was in elementary school, I read an article to him from the Wall Street Journal. The article was about gifted kids and the steps they took to answer a math problem. There were four steps to the math problem, and each child was given a pencil and paper. Alex was in the rear seat of the car playing a hand-held video game when I read the problem to him, and within seconds, he gave me the answer without using paper or pencil. The kids were much older than [Alex].⁴⁴ Rashad asserted that when he was in elementary school, algebra was “an easy subject.” Because of Rashad’s mathematical skills, he became interested in the field of engineering. To help

⁴⁴ Jimmy used Alex, short for Alexander, instead of Rashad.
Rashad became proficient in mathematics, Jimmy enrolled him in “science programs at MIT [and] Harvard on the weekends, [and he] studied at the Russian School on Mathematics, which was an after school math program that focused on problem solving skills and critical thinking,” according to Jimmy.

Of his third grade experience, Rashad remembered getting into trouble:

I was just, I was really bad. Third grade fights! I had like explosions, not temper tantrums, these were explosions. I destroyed the whole classroom one time. . . . I was a really bad kid. My dad he realized (pause), so he (pause) I had a therapist. I had to go to therapy sessions, and finally, I was prescribed, I think first I was prescribed Prozac. . . . Prozac was more of an antidepressant. I guess I was clinically depressed for a period of time. I was on that for a time. Then, they put me on Adderall, which was supposed to control my impulses and my anger issues, and it is supposed to help me focus more. So I was on that for a long time. And, uh, you know but I kept getting worse. . . . So my dad eventually, he upped the medication. Uh, you know, at that time, I was a bad kid, but I was getting stellar grades. I would make sure to make straight “As.” I remember my reading tests were (pause) I was in the fourth grade reading at an eighth-grade level. My writing was always above average. . . . In the fifth grade, I ended up going to a different school. It was a better school, a charter school, so I received a better education. . . . But, uh, I got moved from there back to the old elementary school.

Jimmy transferred Rashad to what he called a high performing elementary school because he believed Rashad’s intellectual and emotional needs were not being met at his current school (see Appendix B). On his survey response, Jimmy wrote that he enrolled Rashad in the best
performing school in their city because he “knew Alex had potential and that he needed to be challenged.” He placed Rashad on the two-year waiting list of a high performing school in a suburban community, and he stressed that he “had to fight to get him into this school because he was assigned to another school that was underperforming.” In this sense, the more Rashad struggled to come to terms with his new identity as a young male without a mother, the more support he received from his adoptive father. In other words, despite Rashad’s anxieties and obstacles, he demonstrated his potential to learn, and Jimmy recognized that potential and nurtured it by helping Rashad gain access to top performing schools.

Conclusion

Rashad’s act of telling his story—a literacy event itself—assisted me in “asses[ing] how the knowledge produced by analyzing talk about writing fits into the mosaic of knowing we call composition studies” (Mortensen 105). Mortensen urges researchers who study talk about writing to expose their “knowledge of the participants and their reasons for talking about writing, the purposes of the writing they are talking about, and so on. Such disclosure [helps] us as readers . . . judge the validity of researchers’ expansions of conversational meaning, [and] they remind us of researchers’ ideological interests in their work” (108). I created an extensive context of Rashad’s early childhood experiences so readers might understand why Rashad identified as a successful African American male writer and why he consented to the use of his full name on a project that reveals his vulnerabilities and weaknesses. In “The Trouble with Black Boys: The Impact of Social and Cultural Forces on the Academic Achievement of African American Males,” Pedro Noguera writes that “[s]cholars and researchers commonly understand that environmental and cultural factors have a profound influence on human behavior, including academic performance” (18). However, asserts Noguera “[w]hat is less understood is how
environmental and cultural forces influence the way in which Black males come to perceive schooling and how those perceptions influence their behavior and performance in school” (18).

Rashad’s backstory offers a nuanced view of the structural and cultural determinants of his destructive behavior and their impact on his academic performance and his perspective of self. In essence, Rashad’s backstory also demonstrates the interconnectedness of literacies, identities, and definitions of success. Equally important, it shows how students practice literacies inside and outside school. Rashad’s backstory calls on literacy scholars and writing teachers to “look at the whole person” (Roozen, *Journalism* 30), as Rashad called on me to do.

Therefore, one limitation of this case study is that it does not include the voice of Rashad’s biological mother, a person who might have fostered Rashad’s literacies. In *A Search Past Silence: The Literacy of Young Black Men* (2013), David E. Kirkland, argues that we weaken the validity of our data when we ignore the roles that Black women play in Black males’ literate lives. Kirkland writes,

> We researchers of Black males and literacy have always been mistaken in thinking that we could isolate gender in our efforts to understand gender literacy. In doing so, we often ignore the sets of deep relationships, including fluid genderings of flesh and performance, that influence how one reads and writes, thinks and comprehends, invents meaning and understands meanings already invented. (12)

I agree with Kirkland’s critique, which is grounded in the local context in which he conducted ethnographic research. However, my context necessitated the integration of the voices of a group of males whom society has deemed irresponsible and unreliable. More important to this study is the fact that mainstream society has accused African American fathers of not being
involved in parenting and in their children’s education. For this reason alone, it was imperative that I deconstruct the stereotypes that perpetuate a deficit perspective on African American fathers by integrating Jimmy’s voice into this narrative about his son’s literacy practices. Besides Rashad had severed his connection to his mother because he believed she was a negative model.

This study of Rashad’s literacy practices demonstrates how Jimmy’s traditional perspective on African American sponsorship reconstituted Rashad’s literate life. Rashad professed: “I know that if my adoptive dad had not tried to educate me as much as he could and keep me away from all the negative things, I would have been one of those negative kids, one of those negative kids on the street doing whatever.” Rashad concluded that his adoptive father put him on the “scholarly path” to success or through the high school to college pipeline, a trajectory that does not materialize for many African American males, according to the Schott Foundation and other education researchers (see Introduction). The primary finding from my examination of Rashad’s literate life reveals that the main cause of Rashad’s success in first-year writing courses was the traditional literacy learning he acquired at home and carried to school. Finally, Rashad performed at school for some of his teachers as he performed for his father at home, completing his assignments and accepting writing as process. Based on these findings, it appeared that Rashad performed best when he was challenged by his teachers, teachers who appealed to his literacy needs and reinforced learning.

Rashad’s narrative is proof that African American males define themselves and academic success differently. When Rashad compared himself to his biological parents, he concluded that he was successful and did not want to share their perspectives on life. When he compared himself to his adoptive father, he concluded that he had a lot of work to do in order to achieve
what Jimmy had achieved academically, professionally, and socially. The diverse literacies that Rashad acquired at home helped him bridge the gap between home and school, resulting in his placement and success in a first-year writing course. Similarly, Malon also acquired literacies at home such as reading and critical thinking skills. However, it appears as though because Malon’s family did not privilege traditional writing, he placed in a basic writing course. The next chapter demonstrates the way that Malon transferred literacies from home to school to help him meet the requirements of a basic writing, a first-year writing course, and an academic skills course.
CHAPTER FOUR: “OH, WOW! I CAN WRITE”: A DIALOGIC EXCHANGE WITH MALON SMITH

In Chapter Three, I showed how Rashad developed a writer identity and critical literacies at home under the instruction of his father, Jimmy, and applied them in his first-year writing courses in order to meet the requirements of those courses. Similarly, this chapter is about how an eighteen-year-old African American male named Malon Smith developed literacies at home and in secondary school and applied them in college to meet the requirements of his basic writing and first-year writing courses. Malon’s narrative also sheds light on how his identity as an academic writer was shaped by writing teachers and how their perceptions on his writing forced him to shift among three writer identities: “a writer,” someone who “can write,” and someone who is “skilled in writing.” Malon’s story focuses closely on two college writing courses that he took during the Fall 2013 semester: Academic Writing (basic writing) and Applied College Skills. Using Amy Burgess and Roz Ivanič’s definition of writer identity, I linked Malon’s writer identity to Brian Street’s model of ideological literacy. Additionally, since voicing is a key concept in this project, my interpretation of Malon’s literacy practices is not only mediated through the lens of interview transcriptions of Malon’s and my interviews, but also transcriptions of two of his former postsecondary writing teachers’ and his godfather’s (a high school principal) interviews as well as data from surveys and writing samples. Malon’s story is also placed beside the stories of literacy and writing specialists across the disciplines. Finally, Malon’s experiences suggest that basic writing courses are still too narrowly conceived because they limit students’ learning to primarily worksheets and drills when those students can actually benefit from more complex materials and from knowing the history of basic writing courses and of academic writing in general.
Chapter Outline

In the remainder of this chapter, I provide demographic information on Malon and his parents. I also discuss the roles that formal education played in his parents’ lives. Then, I identify major factors that Malon described as contributing to his success in school, at home, and in his community. Using the data I collected from face-to-face semi-structured interviews and surveys, I outline five success factors that manifested in the data. After I discuss Malon’s definition of writing and the writing he performed at home, I shift to dialogues that illuminate the ways his literacy acquisition was mediated culturally and technologically, grounding my analysis in Brian Street’s theories of ideological and autonomous models of literacy and in Burgess and Ivanič’s definition of writer. These discussions are categorized thematically: 1) writing in middle school, 2) writing in high school, 3) writing in college, 4) writing process in college, and 5) digital writing in extracurricular spaces. Finally, I conclude this chapter by revisiting my research questions.

Demographic Information

Malon’s story begins in 1995 when he was born to African American parents in Northwest Ohio. Malon was enrolled in a basic writing course at a small private liberal arts college in Northwest Ohio, where he was pursuing a degree in criminal justice with a minor in psychology. Malon established his professional- and college-career goals early. He prepared for his potential profession by playing football throughout his life, though inconsistently. Malon noted, “I’ve been playing on and off since about second grade,” and he insisted that if he does not became a professional football player, he will seek a profession as an FBI agent or an attorney. He also recalled: “[a]round five or six years old, I was saying I wanted to go to . . .
and play football.” When Malon was seven years old, his parents divorced, resulting in him moving in and out of two school districts, one in Ohio and one in Georgia:

→ kindergarten-first grade in Ohio (did not play football),

→ second-third grades in Ohio (played football),

← fourth grade in Georgia (did not play football),

→ fifth-sixth grades in Ohio (played football),

← seventh-ninth grades in Georgia (did not play football),

→ tenth-twelfth grades in Ohio (played football).

When I asked Malon if his transfer between the two different school systems impacted his education, he said that it did not because he did not repeat a grade.

When I met Malon, he lived in a single-parent home with his father and some of his siblings in an urban neighborhood of a large metropolitan area in Northwest Ohio. Malon described his family’s socio-economic status as middle-class, a status that was maintained by his father, a warehouse manager, according to Malon. Malon also told me that his father played football in high school, and after he graduated from high school, he attended Virginia Military Institute (VMI) on a football scholarship. However, Malon’s father withdrew from VMI before he earned a degree, so he verbalized to his son: “I couldn't do it, so you have to do it,” stressed Malon, who also insisted that “if anyone was applying pressure, it was my dad. . . . But that was his role.” He and his father created a strong bond of trust, which Malon also attributed to his success in school and in the wider society.

As we progressed through the interview process, I learned about some of the pivotal roles that Malon’s mother played in his life. She was also an athlete who ran track when she was in high school. Thus, she urged her son to join the track team, which he did as a high school
sophomore, but because it was not a contact sport, he “did not like it one bit,” asserted Malon. Additionally, Malon’s mother is an alumna of a large predominantly White private four-year university in Northwest Ohio. He described his mother as a strong, dedicated, self-confident Black woman and community leader who accomplished her goals. Malon explained that his mother influenced his decision to improve his handwriting and increase his vocabulary by reading the dictionary, a literacy practice he began when he was in the second grade. When I asked him why a second grader would be intrigued by a dictionary, Malon declared, “I think it was because I saw Malcolm X reading the dictionary, so I started reading the dictionary . . If I knew a new word, my mom would be impressed by it. I would say, ‘Oh, she is impressed . . . so I’m gonna keep doing it.’” He also stated that his mother’s ambition motivated him to transfer to her alma mater and play football, which he did after completing one year of college at the institution where I met him.

Malon and I maintained our relationship that was mediated primarily through text messages. Although Malon valued face-to-face interaction, texting was his most common method of communication, and he received numerous text messages from his mother during our interviews. Perhaps their electronic communication also kept him grounded since he would “get in trouble” if he did not respond to her, according to Malon. Malon attributed his success in school and in the wider society to family, particularly his mother and father, but he believed that his father’s mandate and perspective on formal education contributed to his success in college and in his writing courses. My preliminary data revealed six factors that Malon contributed to his success in his basic writing and first-year writing, and academic skills course. However, as I continued to collect and code data, I discovered five broad factors that contributed to Malon’s success in his first-year writing courses. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the data that
were collected from a case study of Malon’s literacy practices at school, at home, and in other extracurricular spaces.

**Malon’s Success Factors**

My data revealed four key factors that contributed to Malon’s success in first-year writing courses. However, data show that Malon’s father’s mandate was a pivotal single factor that contributed to his success in his first-year writing courses. The four factors initially derived from recurring themes and concepts such as Malon’s:

- Home support system (father, mother, maternal great-grandmother, and godfather)
- Academic support system (eighth-grade English language arts teacher, first-year writing teacher, writing center, and tutors).
- Dispositions (self-efficacy, perseverance, sense of self, etc.)
- Ability to carry literacies across contexts

These data directly connect with my research questions. In addition, these four factors appeared to have grounded Malon’s perspective on his roles as an academic writer, a college student, and a potential professional.

**Writing in School: Defining Writing and Establishing a Writer Identity**

Malon defined writing during our second semi-structured interview in the fall of 2013. He reasoned that writing entails “[c]omposing in depth thoughts into extended words on paper or typing.” Malon situated writing as a school-sanctioned practice (Emig 1971), as opposed to a “self-sponsored” practice (Emig 1971) since he perceived writing as his ability to engage in an extensive, complex conversation using alphabetic text that was written to a teacher. Malon posited that the short one-hundred-and-forty character messages he composed on Twitter did not
Although Malon engaged the literate act of writing at home, he did not construct an identity as a writer at home where he wrote the alphabets for his maternal great-grandmother, improved his handwriting for his mother, typed school assignments, and scribbled notes on greeting cards to family members. As we continued to talk, Malon articulated the complicity of espousing what Amy Burgess and Roz Ivanić theorize as a “writer identity” (2010); hence, I invited Malon to expound on the impact of writing on his identity.

Writing and Reading in Middle School: The Construction of a Writer Identity

Malon’s middle school curriculum linked writing to reading; thus, our talk about writing validates the symbiotic relationship between coding and decoding texts. Malon’s story also supports Burgess and Ivanić’s claim that people form identities through writing and reading (2010). Malon’s first memory of writing in school was in the second grade. Perhaps this memory resonated with him because his “teacher-reader” was receptive to his story and acknowledged his identity as a writer, he recalled. Yet his teacher’s written and verbal discourses did not initiate his formation of a writer identity; instead, his eighth-grade teacher shaped his identity as an academic writer. After receiving assessments from his eighth-grade teacher on a writing assignment inspired by a story his father told him, Malon constructed an identity as someone who could write, which was not equivalent to a writer. Malon’s teacher’s encouragement made him feel talented as his parents and great-grandmother had made him feel.

Malon: In the second grade, I wrote a Christmas story about a snowman, and I remember that I got really good feedback on it. But when I was in the eighth grade, I was like Oh, wow! I can write. . . . One semester I wondered if I could write a good paper, so I wrote a paper about a kid who was born in the hood. He was a part of a gang and

45More on his digital literacies later.
got shot over a jacket. It had a pretty good twist to it. I wrote that he stole the jacket from somebody and was shot in that same jacket. Because my dad had told me a story a week before about how he saw (pause). He was driving by this neighborhood in . . . terrible neighborhood, and he saw some dude get shot in a phone booth. Then, [the male] started running down the street away from gun fire. So when my dad told me this story, I said okay I can incorporate this story into my own version of a story. These suburban White teachers don’t know anything about people getting shot in a [stolen] jacket, so I was like (pause). I read it in front of the class, and she was stunned. She kept telling me how good it was, and she wanted to enter it into a writing contest. I don’t know if she ever did, but she wanted too. After that, I was like okay, I guess I really can write a story if I really try.

Shirley: Are you stating that you identified as a writer when you were in the eighth grade?

Malon: Right! I’m a writer. I still don’t fully consider myself a writer. I can write, but am I a writer? There is more than just writing a good story that makes a person a writer. You got to have some type of passion for writing to be a writer. I can write. I can write really good. I’m a skilled (pause), I won’t say writer, I am skilled in writing, but that doesn’t make me a skilled writer, as weird as that sounds.

A skilled writer, Malon posited, was Walter Dean Myers, an African American male writer and author of Slam! (1996), a book Malon read when he was in the fifth grade. The novel is a coming of age story about a seventeen-year-old African American male named Greg “Slam” Harris, who attends a predominantly White prestigious school that has a poor performing basketball team, but Slam leads his team to victory. In addition to identifying Myers as a skilled writer, Malon stated
that he was captivated by Myers’ ability to maintain his attention. Here, Malon was performing as a “perceived writer” (Burgess and Ivanić 241), which Burgess and Ivanić define as “the impression of the writer that the reader creates in the act of reading a text” (241). Malon did not remember whether he consciously imitated Myers’ writing style. Furthermore, when Malon’s father storied the tragedy he witnessed, his son appropriated the discourse and rearticulated the narrative for his audience: a “suburban White teacher.” In this sense, Malon was imitating a speaker, iterating what he witnessed through a discoursal act (Bakhtin 1981; Burgess and Ivanić 2010).

According to Burgess and Ivanić, a discoursal self brings a sense of reality to his writing process and integrates it into his writing. In “Writing and Being Written: Issues of Identity Across Timescales,” Burgess and Ivanić define identity as “something that is not unitary or fixed but has multiple facets; is subject to tensions and contradictions; and is in a constant state of flux, varying from one time and one space to another” (232). They go on to note that “[t]his multifaceted identity is constructed in the interaction between a person, others, and their sociocultural context. It includes the ‘self’ that a person brings to the act of writing, the ‘self’ she constructs through the act of writing, and the way in which the writer is perceived by the reader(s) of the writing” (232). Burgess and Ivanić also explain that a discoursal self might also form when a person engages in a verbal conversation (233). By carefully analyzing his rhetorical situation, specifically his audience, Malon enacted what Burgess and Ivanić might regard as a “discoursal self,” which is a performance that included the writer himself, his worldview, his “values, and beliefs” (Burgess and Ivanić 249). Burgess and Ivanić also contend “that the writer constructs [beliefs] through [his] writing practices; [his] choices of wording; and other semiotic means of communication” (240). In this sense, Malon’s text seemingly
represented what Kara Poe Alexander explains as a “‘little’ cultural narrative” (2011), although
his narrative does not neatly fit into Alexander’s schema for cultural narratives of literacy that
are outlined in “Success, Victims, and Prodigies.” Alexander, who borrows from Jean-Francois
Lyotard and Beth Daniell, writes that “little narratives are unsanctioned, artistic, and
imaginative; they are less generalizable and more individualized and situated”; they “assume that
“literacy is multiple, contextual, and ideological,” and that they “critique and challenge the
dominant master narratives” (611). Malon’s narrative critiques and challenges the dominant
master narrative, yet it is not its content that should be analyzed, rather its author’s skillfulness in
performing for an actual audience or a “teacher-reader.” Malon became a writer whose purpose
was “to make sense of a lived experience in a particular domain” (Alexander 611) that Malon
called “the hood” and in the “hood” of a writing classroom where African American males’
voices are often marginalized and silenced. More important, Malon’s audience is a member of a
cultural group that has its own master narratives about African American males’ intellect and
ability to produce literature that has value for that group.

Malon’s “suburban White teacher,” as he called her, also validated her students’
“authorial self” when she deemed his work worthy of competition, which aligned with Malon’s
sense of self as a student and an athlete. Burgess and Ivanič define an authorial self as “the
presence the writer constructs for [himself] as author of the text” (240). While Burgess and
Ivanič’s data reveal a connection between an “authorial self” and a “discoursal self,” they also
believe the “authorial self” should be observed as a separate self “as it is concerned with the
interpersonal aspects of identity: how authoritative the writer feels, how strongly [he] asserts
[his] position(s), the extent to which [he] stamps [his] authorship on the text, and the
authoritativeness [he] conveys to [his] reader(s)” (240), as well as the way the writer uses
language to position himself in “social relationships of power in a more general way” (240). To reiterate, Malon understood the power relationship that existed in his writing classroom and in the greater society: Malon was an eighteen-year-old African American male student in a predominantly White school who wrote to a “suburban White teacher” who did not “know anything about people getting shot in a [stolen] jacket,” according to Malon’s perception of his writing teacher’s way of knowing about people who live in urban communities, specifically African American males. Nevertheless, his story came from a place of being and knowing. Though Malon positioned his writing teacher in a deficit position, she met him where he was and created a space for him to further develop his literacies through writing. Moreover, in Malon’s story, the villain does not elude punishment for the crime he commits—a rhetorical move that portrays Malon as a moral character—as an outsider and an insider. Malon’s performance in his eighth-grade English language arts classroom suggests that when afforded an opportunity to synthesize curricular and extracurricular literacies, African American males can deconstruct the cultural rhetoric that portrays all African American males as anti-intellectuals, particularly as non-writers and non-readers, since Malon “construct[ed] himself as a literate individual” (612).46

Although Malon explicitly articulated the writer identity he formed while and after composing the essay, his description of himself as a writer spawned two questions about the correlation among his receptive skills and his productive skills (Emig 2003):

- Did Malon imitate Myers’ or any other author’s writing style?

46 It is worth noting that Malon discussed one “successful” writing assignment that I did not review. Nor did I learn how his English language arts teacher assessed his writing.
• Did Malon’s placement in a basic writing course and the feedback he received on his writing affect the way he defined himself as a writer?

Again, Malon identified as “a writer,” as someone “skilled in writer,” yet not “a skilled writer.” In order to help me make meaning of the formation and reformation of his writer identity, I needed to understand when, where, and why these identities were constructed (see Table 3 below for a timescale of Malon’s nonwriter/writer identities). Besides, Burgess and Ivanić write that identifies change over time; however, I did not learn whether Malon’s experience in his basic writing course resulted in his conceptualization of himself as a writer yet not a skilled writer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timescale of Malon’s Nonwriter/Writer Identities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third-Grade Teacher 2002-2003</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White female teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>no writer identity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>composed an alphabetic text about a snowman that received “good feedback,” from his teacher, but Malon did not form a writer identity based on her feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Malon</strong>: “You can write the best paper you have ever written in your life, but if you do not know how to use grammar and commas, you will get a grade of 40 on it.”</td>
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<td></td>
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Again, I did not receive a copy of the papers Malon produced for his eighth-grade teacher, but based on his account of the rhetorical situation that unfolded in his classroom, he demonstrated his ability to perform as a rhetorician who appeals to his audience’s needs, as Myers had done for him. Malon believed his teacher’s response to his story qualified him as a writer or as what he described as someone who “can write.” In this case, from his eighth-grade teacher, Malon believed he acquired the skills he needed to succeed in a writing course where the power to appeal to an audience’s sense of logic established him as a credible and competent writer.

Malon’s story demonstrates what one African American male can accomplish when his writing teacher creates assignments that ask him to write essays that relate to his interest and life, which made writing more meaningful for Malon. In addition, Malon valued his teacher’s assessment of his story because he reversed his and his teacher’s roles, positioning the student as a teacher and the teacher as a student, which is not the way many postsecondary education teachers teach writing, according to Lil Brannon and C. H. Knoblauch in “On Students’ Rights to Their own Text: A Model of Teacher Response.” Malon assumed that his “suburban White teacher” (his audience) was unacquainted with aspects of urban life, so he, the authority on the subject, educated his teacher on life in the city, more specifically on the life that many African American males live or witness every day. I must note that I did not ask Malon if he knew where his teacher lived. Nonetheless, Brannon and Knoblauch argue that “[t]he teacher-reader assumes, often correctly, that student writers have not yet earned the authority that ordinarily compels readers to listen seriously to what writers have to say. Indeed, teachers view themselves as the authorities, intellectually mature, rhetorically more experienced, technically more expert than their apprentice writers” (158). Again, I did not learn the criteria Malon’s teacher used to assess his writing. Brannon and Knoblauch also observe that many writing teachers do not create
spaces for students to perform as authority figures, although secondary school students tend to identify their teachers as a primary audience, as reported by Janet Emig in 1971. Emig studied the roles teachers played in students’ writing process and learned that student writers primarily composed for their teachers.

In Emig’s groundbreaking study *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (1971), one of her findings was that “For the twelfth graders in [the study,] extensive writing occurs chiefly as a school-sponsored activity” (91). Emig concludes that the primary audience or “significant others” for “school-sponsored writing” is a teacher, and the primary audience or “significant others” for “self-sponsored writing” is a peer (91). However, Emig also reports that when elementary school students engage in “school-sponsored” writing, they place equal value on the roles of their teachers and their parents, but the role of the teacher as “significant other” in school-sponsored writing remained consistent for secondary school students, “with parents occupying a very minor role except, occasionally, when they themselves are teachers” (92), as demonstrated in Rashad’s case. Nonetheless, Malon carried his identity as a writer to high school, where, according to Malon, it was ignored because his English teachers used worksheets to teach writing, particularly grammar, as a decontextualized tool.

*Writing in High School: An Autonomous Approach to Literacy Learning*

I asked Malon about his writing experiences in high school so I might understand whether the writer identity he formed in middle school was further developed in high school.

Malon: I knew in the third grade that I would go to college, [but] I thought I would just go to college only to play football because I thought college would be like middle school and high school . . . all that busy work . . . worksheet, test, worksheet, test. High school was more like what you can remember, but college tests what you know,
so I have to understand the material, not memorize it. High school was boring because I wasn’t challenged. Most of the reading and writing in high school was senseless. The readings would have no real . . . I don’t want to say no real meaning, but it was just . . . the teachers would have to choose a book so they would choose a book that they would enjoy and say, ‘Ha, maybe my students would enjoy this book.’ And the book [was] god awful, but I didn’t have a choice [of whether] to read it or not. I had to write a book report about it and act like I liked the book. . . . I always knew I was going to college, but I thought I was going to the University of . . . my mother’s alma mater. . . . I kinda used football as motivation to go [to college] because I didn’t want football to end [after I graduated from high school], but I’m not here on a football scholarship. Now that I’m [in college], I put my education before sports.

According to Malon’s version of his reading and writing experiences in middle school and high school, worksheets and standardized tests were the primary tools his teachers used to assess his writing skills. In this sense, his teachers promoted decontextualized skills instruction, an approach to teaching that initially shaped Malon’s perspective on how he would write in college. Malon conceptualized college as a microcosm of high school, where literacies were practiced “as either an individual cognitive tool or as a neutral function of institutions” (Street 437).

Nevertheless, Malon’s narrative suggests that he possessed the “dogged strength” (disposition) to thrive in a first-year writing course. However, according to Malon, his high school writing courses did not help him develop literacies such as critical thinking, critical reading, and

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synthesis skills, though, during our semi-structured interviews, Malon validated his ability to synthesize and think critically and analytically.

Malon also added that he acquired critical literacies at home and on social media sites. In this sense, Malon came to college with evidence of developing those literacies. He went on to argue that the books he read in high school were void of content that related to his personal life, interests, or goals, yet he read them and produced reports on them. Boring, senseless, and painful are the adjectives Malon used to describe his literacy learning experiences at school. The adjectives he used to describe his experiences often foster discontentment and eventually disengagement for many African American males. When they consciously or unconsciously resist disempowering pedagogies, many African American males are often labeled “anti-intellectual,” “remedial,” and “antagonistic,” identities that reinforce the deficit perspective that is perpetuated in disempowering pedagogies (Finn 2009; Freire 1993; Noguera 2008; Tatum 2005). In turn, when African American males’ behaviors are misconstrued, they are disproportionally placed in special education or remedial classes (Noguera 2003, 2011). In essence, they are assessed on their behavior, as opposed to their intellect (Kunjufu 141), as demonstrated in this chapter and in Chapter Three. Finally, when they are accessed on their behavior that is produced by disempowering pedagogies, they become contributors to the “problems” outlined in Chapter One. Ultimately, Malon’s narrative suggests that teaching grammar and writing as decontextualized practices disrupted his learning process because they did not appeal to his learning style.

In keeping with Malon’s perspective on the literacies he acquired in his secondary English courses, his teachers did not teach him how to write in ways that promoted best practices for writing. For example, to a notable extent, Sandra Vavra and Sharon Spencer, English
Education specialists, might agree with Malon’s assessment of his literacy learning experiences. Critical of the English Education candidates and the programs they enter, Vavra and Spencer frame their argument accordingly:

How can they teach writing, and teach it well, when they have not themselves practiced a variety of ways to do so? . . . Is it any wonder, then, that English Education candidates find it easier to develop literature-based plans than writing-based plans in our methods courses? Or that they ‘teach’ literature in their practicums far more often than they work with high school students on their writing—often increasing the three-to-one ratio they encountered at the university to the point where practicing writing is nearly eliminated from the curriculum. (5)

Of course, there are countless exceptional writing teachers in English Education programs and in the United States public school system; the results of their pedagogical practices are evident in the writing skills that some first-year writers transfer to college. Yet standardized assessment requirements force many teachers to form the persistent belief that they must teach the literature that manifests itself in those assessments and that they must teach grammar, mechanics, and usage as discrete instructions. How can more secondary education teachers help students become college ready? More specifically, how can more secondary education writing teachers, administrators, and parents better prepare African American males to meet the requirement of first-year writing courses, though those requirements are varied, flux, and contextualized? Perhaps the answer lies in the new Common Core State Standards Initiative, achievement standards that promise to make students career- and college-ready. It also urges teachers to use diverse genres to foster students’ critical writing and critical reading skills. One of the aims of Malon’s basic writing course was to make him “college-ready,” a goal he resisted because his
teacher’s teaching style did not align with his learning style, yet he met the requirements of his basic writing course the first time he took it (more on this topic later).

*Writing in College: Teaching a Basic Writer How to Write*

For the most part, Malon learned in middle school that writing is a mode of learning that permitted him to synthesize literacy practices he had acquired in various contexts. In high school, Malon learned that writing is a decontextualized literacy that was grounded in a literature-based curriculum and where surface errors were taught as decontextualized instructions, and they were more important than higher order concerns. Shortly after placing in a basic writing course at his university, he learned that his writing course was similar to many of the English language arts courses he had taken in middle school and high school. Because Malon had internalized the identities his parents, maternal great-grandmother, and his eighth-grade English language arts teachers had helped him form, he could not understand why his university devalued his literacies.

According to his ACT results, Malon was considered “illiterate,” that is, as an African American male who would not have had access to higher education without his entry into his university’s remedial program (Lamos 2012). In essence, university administrators, state and national legislators, and accrediting agencies created a reciprocal relationship between Malon and his university: Malon, who admitted that his ACT score was “slightly lower” than his university’s admission requirements, would enroll in two fundamental courses during his first semester: *Academic Writing* (basic writing) and *Applied College Skills*, and his university would maintain “this country’s promise” to give all its citizens access to higher education (Mutnick 183). However, according to Malon’s own assessment of his literacies, he should not have placed in a remedial course. As I analyzed the data I collected, I noticed that, with an exception
to Twitter, Malon did not foster his writing skills as he had fostered his reading skills. I must also note that Malon entered a new discourse community that called on him to write in ways in which he had never written before. Malon offered a detailed critical assessment of how his basic writing course taught him what it meant to be an ineffective writer:

*Academic Writing* was handholding, walking you down the path of commas. It was second grade writing. She was a grammar Nazi when it came to grammar. You can write the best paper you have ever written in your life, but if you don’t know how to use a comma, you will get a forty on it. When you put an educated person in a remedial class, you don’t learn anything. You wouldn’t put someone who knows AP calculus in Math 123. It’s like putting a college [football] player back in high school. He won’t adopt any new skills because he knows them. They put me back—they put me in that class, [but] there was nothing for me to learn. It was that busy work I did in high school. It was all that busy work . . . I was asked to go to my book and highlight a certain section. I had a rented book, so I could not write in my book. She took off points. Later, she told me that I could have used a pencil to underline words and texts. I said I am going to lose $125 bucks because you want me to write in my book. I didn’t get anything out of that class.

Malon’s harsh criticism of his basic writing course also stems from his basic writing instructor’s use of worksheets to teach grammar, which induced memories of his high school writing experiences. I refer to Malon’s basic writing teacher as Tracy.

In other words, Tracy did not teach to his learning style, according to Malon. In “Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing,” Constance Weaver, contends that students learn
best when grammar is taught in the context of students’ own writing, as opposed to taught systematically using worksheets (15). Weaver also notes that Hillocks and Smith (1991), Findlay McQuade (1980), Martha Kolln (1981), and Harris and Rowan (1989) for example, have proven through empirical research that a contextualized approach (constructivist/transactional theory) to teaching grammar is more effective than a decontextualized approach (behavioralist approach to learning), although neither method totally eliminates grammatical errors from students’ writing (15-17, 23). Malon also resisted the worksheets Tracy assigned from Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein’s *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (2005). Tracy noted that the templates were controversial, yet she found them beneficial in a basic writing class.

After Malon voiced discontentment with his basic writing course, I asked him if he read the syllabus.

“I read it, but it didn’t tell me what kind of writing we would do,” Malon countered. Although I attempted to secure a copy of the syllabus from Malon and Tracy neither one of them furnished a copy of it. Therefore, I could not compare Malon’s interpretation of the syllabus to my or his teacher’s interpretation of it. I asked Malon if he truly believed that his basic writing course was valueless.

“Well, I guess I got better at using commas,” Malon replied.

At the beginning of the Spring 2014 semester, I interviewed Malon’s *Academic Writing* basic writing teacher. Tracy described her course accordingly:

*Academic Writing* is a development writing class students are placed in based on ACT scores actually, and it becomes a pre-requisite before they are allowed to take college English, which is a mandatory first-year comp. class . . . The course
was created originally because there were complaints from faculty across the university that students did not have mastery of what they considered basic writing skills, and the single-semester college writing course was somehow seen as inadequate to help [incoming] students who . . . were perceived to be less prepared in terms of academic writing skills. . . . So one of the main things that the university wants me to do I’m gonna say quite frankly that it’s to fix their grammar. Right. They are perceived as using nonstandard dialects in written forms, things that might work better in oral communication and that this is problematic.

Tracy also shared her perspective on the knowledge and skills Malon brought to his basic writing course. Her assessment began with his strengths and transitioned to his weaknesses. Malon was a writer who “was stronger than some but not out of the range of his peers,” and “he had big ideas, but the language itself had a lot of dialectic markers that I know were going to be a problem for the outside academic community,” asserted Tracy.

Tracy pointed out that her course was designed to prepare Malon for the writing he would do in writing courses across the curriculum, in the disciplines, and outside the university. Therefore, the goals and objectives of the basic writing course, she insisted, were to introduce Malon and his classmates to a basic understanding of written standard American English. Written “Standard” English is defined by linguists Anne Curzan and Michael Adams in How English Works: A Linguistic Introduction (2012) as a contested concept that was “elevated to the status of ‘standard’ for social and political reasons, as well as for utilitarian ones” (37) to standardize written and spoken communication. Therefore, the dialect, which is also called the “prestige social dialect” (36) is a social construct that standardizes English in order “to suppress
language variation . . . making it more homogeneous in public social settings where ‘correctness’ is valued” (37). Again, according to Tracy, a basic writing curriculum was created in the English department at her university because “[a] lot of the faculty [there] have more traditional expectations of student writing in an academic setting and so tend to be distracted by academic inaccuracy in writing and less able to notice content and ideas because they are so distracted by these perceived problems,” problems with grammar, style, and mechanics.

Composition Studies scholars such as Bob Broad urges writing teachers to reassess the value they place on lower order concerns, specifically on grammar and mechanics. In What We Really Value: Beyond Rubrics in Teaching and Assessing Writing (2003), Broad reminds us that the value we place on dialect hinders many students of color from succeeding in first-year writing courses and from entering first-year writing courses. Broad asserts that when writing teachers privilege standard American English, they marginalize and silence students who do not write in that dialect of English and thus significantly decreasing the possibility of their successful completion of writing courses. Similar to the way that Broad urges writing teachers to examine their assessment methods and the value they place on them, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Rebecca Greenberg Taylor also urge basic writing teachers to explore the biases they bring to basic writing classrooms that affect how students’ writing is assessed. Royster and Taylor ask can basic writing teachers “simultaneously: encourage critical questioning; hold students accountable for accuracy, clarity, and precision when they lead discussion; and require respect for others in the basic writing classroom?” (50). Perhaps we should turn to Zandra L. Jordan’s “Students’ Right, African American English, and Writing Assessment: Considering the HBCU” for an answer to Royster and Taylor’s question. Jordan explores African American female literacies at an all-women historically Black university in Atlanta, Georgia, and she asks many of
the same questions I ask of the _Students’ Right_ resolution and of writing assessment that consider race (103). Jordan asks, “What is ‘their language’”? “What does ‘uphold[ing] the right of students to their own language’ mean for classroom writing assessment and pedagogy?” (98). Jordan goes on to ask of “Vershawn Young’s and Suressh Canagarajah’s compelling arguments for code meshing [that] underscore the need to consider writing assessment: How do we assess multiple degrees of EAE and AAE integration that often call for fluency in EAE?” (100). In order to help African American female students at Spelman College improve their writing skills, Jordan does not promote code meshing; instead, she engages them in scholarly conversations on language diversity, language stereotypes, and literacies. Jordan’s students read and complete exercises in Martha J. Kolln and Loretta S. Gray’s _Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects_ (2007) for two hours a week in “English 150, Grammar and Style” (103). Then after Jordan introduce students to Elaine Richardson’s “To Protect and Service’: African American Female Literacies” and Deborah Brandt’s “Accumulating Literacy: Writing and Learning to Write in the Twentieth Century,” she asks students to write a reader response to Richardson’s article and participate in a large-group peer review, where they discuss their writing in a safe and respectful space, contends Jordan. Jordan argues, “I wanted students to learn the ways of writing that would garner academic success, but I did not want them to become so beleaguered in the process that they lost all pleasure in writing, confidence in themselves, and pride in their own language” (103). She went on to maintain that “[r]equirement elements included a clear thesis, supporting evidence, specific reference to concepts in Richardson’s article, citations as appropriate, and editing across drafts.

Jordan also noted that while she paid less attention to lower order concerns in students’ writing, the hierarchy she created,
does not mean that we should hold AAE speakers to a different standard . . . we can help students by understanding their attitudes toward AAE and our own; engaging them in dialogue about language diversity through reading and writing; helping them identify unfamiliar EAE conventions and then modeling those conventions, while also honoring the language of their heritage; and bringing these new approaches into the way we assess student writing in the classroom.

(108)

Finally, one of Jordan’s students and study participants Shanika tells us how to teach students who write in African American Vernacular:

Don’t just knock ‘em down. Give ‘em something that they can change. They can develop greatly over a semester but the opportunity of just changing completely over a semester is just slim. So, just understand, maybe, where that person is coming from. (108)

I gave Malon an opportunity to discuss his own language competence and where he was “coming from” (108). When I asked Malon to define the dialect he thought he used when he wrote papers for his basic writing teacher, he did not draw a clear distinction between written standard American English and spoken standard American English, which could have contributed to some of his writing concerns. Perhaps Malon refused to implicate himself in the politics of labeling (Mutnick 194). In no way am I critical of Malon’s linguistic skills. Nevertheless, he perceived the mastery of spoken standard American English as his ability to pronounce words “properly.” However, I am critical of the assessment that was used to determine his placement in a basic writing course and the way he was taught how to write in that course.
According to Malon, his peers confirmed his perception of his verbally articulate self by stating, “Oh you’re White” because he could engage in “intelligent dialogue,” could “speak clearly,” and could speak without using “a lot of slang.” Malon also said that his peers’ expectations of his literacies were perplexing because he believed he was “normal,” not an African American male who acted White when he articulated what he perceived to be the standard dialect of American English and when he engaged in critical discourse. Although Malon clearly voiced his and other’s perceptions on his verbal skills, he refused to discuss one aspect of his writer identity that might have situated him in what some readers of this project might consider a deficit position, particularly since he placed in a basic writing course. Malon minimized our conversations on his writing concerns to punctuation, assuring me that grammar was not one of his writing concerns. Additionally, Malon did not give me a portfolio of the essays he produced in his basic writing course, as our protocol stipulated. Could Tracy’s pungent criticism of his writing have revealed flaws that he chose to conceal from me.48

Because of his prominent cognitive skills, because he had not accepted his membership into his new discourse community, and because Malon did not self-identify as an “economically and academically ‘at risk’” student (Lamos 6), his basic writing course became a “contact zone” (Pratt 1991). Malon and Tracy had an encounter and disagreed about his grammatical skills, as opposed to establishing a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978), where he and Tracy could have collaborated to help Malon develop his writing skills such as grammar, usage, and mechanics, as Jordan shows us. In addition, when I critically imagine (Royster and Kirsch 2012) how Malon could have further developed his writing skills, I think of an assignment I designed

48 In an interview that I conducted during the spring of 2013, Tracy stressed the dialect markers that manifested in Malon’s writing. Malon internalized Tracy’s feedback, so he did to share his work with me. I did not analyze his writing until April 2014, near the end of the project. The essays he shared with me were written for his College English (English Composition I) instructor.
that helps first-year writers learn how to improve their writing skills by teaching writing concerns in the context of their writing. This assignment helps student learn how to talk about their writing concerns and ways they can improve them. After students receive their first graded assignment, I ask them to identify one writing concern that they want to strengthen throughout the semester. Students and I create a list of their writing concerns; then I assign one or two concerns to each student who becomes a specialist on that topic. Most students appreciate this assignment because they acquire and develop multiple literacies such improving their writing skills, demonstrating their technological skills, and enhancing their public speaking and critical thinking skills, to name a few (see Appendix C for a lesson plan and assignment sheet). At the end of the semester, I noticed an improvement in some students’ ability to clearly articulate their writing concerns and to improve those concerns, even if they made new ones. At the end of the semester in their course evaluations, some students praised the assignment while one student stated that he found one value in it.

During our fifty-four minute interview, Tracy provided her view on Malon’s literacy development, stating that she “saw growth in the first half of the semester, but less growth in the second half of the semester.” What she proffered next aligned with Malon’s perception of his own identity as a writer and critical thinker as well as his reason for challenging his placement in a basic writing course and a skills course.

Tracy: I think a part of the problem is that when you are as smart and as deep thinking as Malon is and you end up in classes that are in essence remedial, you are insulted on some level. You’re bored on some level. You look around at your peers and you’re like really. These guys are not thinking. I love to find someone who is innately a critical thinker. He struck me as someone who had a lot of potential to think deeply
about things. I think he was a little jaded by the end of the semester. He was not trying the same way.

According to Malon and Tracy, he was the kind of reader and critical thinker the course was designed to produce, on a small scale. Nonetheless, Tracy’s perspective on Malon’s literacies aligns with Malon’s perspective of his own literate development and the value he placed on his literacies. Further, Tracy’s assessment of Malon’s literacies also helped me understand Malon’s insistence that he was not challenged in ways he thought a college-level writing course should have challenged him.

Tracy believed she was preparing Malon for the rigorous writing he would perform across the disciplines and in his potential profession, particularly since literacies and higher education are linked to the economy (Beaufort 2007; Brandt 2001; Prendergast 2008; Tatum and Guy 2012). Again, Malon explained that Tracy saw a non-writer when she read his papers because she focused on lower order concerns, specifically grammar, which was the major objective of the basic writing course—to improve students’ written grammar. On the other hand, Malon believed that Jennifer, his Applied College Skills instructor, and later his first-year writing teacher recognized a writer when they read his papers because first they focused on content—his voice—then they focused on his writing concerns.

Because Malon’s Applied College Skills course was linked to his basic writing course, I decided to interview his skills instructor as well. Besides he composed essays in his skills course. The pseudonym I assigned her was Jennifer, and I interviewed her at the beginning of the Spring 2014 semester, after Malon had completed the course. In Applied College Skills, students who perform unsatisfactorily are disenrolled from the university, according to Jennifer. This type of administrative withdrawal occurs because school administrators expect
undergraduates to demonstrate college-level proficiency in fundamental writing and thinking skills. Therefore, if students are successful in other courses yet earn a “D” in *Applied College Skills*, they are dismissed from the university (not placed on academic probation). Malon was placed in *Applied College Skills* two weeks after classes began at his university because of an administrative oversight. Not only did he feel disempowered by the school’s administrative decision, he argued that his teacher’s pedagogical strategies reminded him of his high school English courses that also undermined his intellect since Jennifer used a decontextualized approach to literacy learning. If Malon had been aware of the history of basic writing at his university, he would have known that the majority of Black male athletes placed in basic writing courses and the skills course, according to Jennifer and Tracy when I interviewed them in the spring of 2014. However, I must ask if that history would have changed Malon perspective of courses where writing conventions were not taught in the context of his writing?

Despite his frustrations with the way writing was taught at his university, Jennifer concluded that “Malon was probably one of the better writers in the class.” I asked Jennifer to explain Malon’s literacy development, and she noted:

> He made fewer grammatical errors than many students with whom I worked. He was able to give examples in his writing and not just make general statements. I work with a lot of students who have difficulties with run-on sentence, and he is a student that I did not have that problem with, with run-on sentences. . . . I always enjoyed reading his work too . . . there are some students when, you know, it’s painful because . . . . they have so many issues with their writing so you have to read it over and over, [asking] what are they trying to say. So his was enjoyable. I could get through it the first time, and say, “Hey, that was kinda cool to read.
You know and then go back through and help work on some mechanics and things like that. So his, his writing was always easy to read and enjoyable as well.

So those were the things that I think he did well.

Jennifer’s and Tracy’s courses were linked. Jennifer and Tracy read Malon’s papers differently. Malon’s writing course and his skills courses prove that writing and assessing are contextual, personal, and political (Huot 2002), and they prove that some four-year university still do not design writing courses that consider the full range of literacies that students bring into them.

Furthermore, although Jennifer enjoyed reading Malon’s composition, she criticized his demeanor, calling him disrespectful because he told her that he disliked the course and the pedagogical strategies she used. As I discussed earlier, Jennifer lowered Malon’s grade because of his behavior; thus, he was graded on his behavior, as opposed to the work he produced in class. However, Jennifer also pointed out that she and Malon discussed his grade, and she readjusted it because she realized that she had graded him on his behavior. (Malon and I had discussed classroom etiquette, and I asked him to contact his teacher about his grade and his conduct.) She also stated that she did not excuse his behavior and that Malon was “very respectful” outside class, but he was competitive, which was disruptive and disrespectful, because he did not give his classmates an opportunity to participate in class. According to Malon, his peers did not willingly participate in class, and “when [his teacher] asked questions, no one answered, and [he] always produced the most responses and wrote the most answers on the board.” Even Jennifer admitted that Malon was the most engaged student in class. While Malon’s approach to learning might have been inappropriate, he was exerting self-efficacy. Finally, Jennifer asserted that Malon’s displacement contributed to his negative perspective on the course and that he told her that the course “felt like” a high school English language arts
course because she used worksheets to help him strengthen his writing and critical thinking skills. Jennifer stated that she understood Malon’s anamiosity toward a “basic” course that he entered two weeks late.

Now I will shift back to Tracy, Malon’s basic writing teacher. Near the end of Tracy’s fifty-four minute interview, she offered what appeared to be an apology for Malon’s placement in a basic writing course. I have integrated an extensive section of the transcription here, for to paraphrase Tracy is to reduce the gravity of her palpable narrative:

When you got someone like Malon who comes in smart, really smart and curious, and capable of thinking and engaging deeply and you put him in a program that has a lot of remedial elements is that where the disconnect came from. Did we kill his intellectual curiosity by remediating these surface issues? What would have happened to him if he had been put right away into a standard college English class or better yet we have an honors level, advanced level college English class, would have been higher, more vigorous, more stimulating rather than this: ‘We need to clean up your grammar kind of thing.’ I’m saying this as a person who teaches the class the way it is, but we put someone in there to fix his presentation. We’ve ignored the fact that he has such a strong intellect and such strong curiosity, and so much potential to be an awesome student. I mean in terms of the way he thinks about, the way he views the world and the way he is, is he so different from the average honor student? I don’t think so. And yet we’re so worried about the surface presentation. So what have we done? What have we done to this kid?

Shirley: How do you think that disconnection you witnessed last semester might impact Malon’s engagement this semester?
Tracy: How is this semester going to go for him? Is he gonna be able to pull it back? Will he start to feel challenged? Don’t people learn better when things are expected of them that seem to be beyond their grasp? Right. I don’t know. I think that the emphasis we put on grammar in the academic writing class (pause). I don’t know. You know. I mean, on the one hand, I put a lot less emphasis on it than I ever wanted too. On the other hand, would they do better if we didn’t do any of that? And yet when will they get the instructions for the presentation. I don’t know. I wonder what we have done to this kid. Because. Yea! He didn’t have the code down. He didn’t have the standard academic code down, but he had the advanced thinking. So what have we done to him?

Although I find Mina Shaughnessy’s *Errors and Expectations* (1977) problematic because she identifies basic writers as “illiterate,” I also find it beneficial, specifically where she calls on basic writing teachers to relinquish their obsession with errors and replace it with a lens that allows them to see how students experiment with language. While attempting to remain objective, I commented, “It sounds like you are redesigning your basic writing course. Did you talk with him about his detachment?” Tracy whispered, “I redesign it every year.” She went on to say, “That made me sad, but I was not sure how to bring him back into the fold. He was not trying the same way that he was at the beginning of the semester. Malon was so mad with me because (pause). He started attending class late.” Tracy also stated that she and Malon did not communicate near the end of the semester.

Shirley: Do you think you should have met with Malon about the transformation he made?
Tracy: I wish I had talked with him. I kinda wish I had done that. At least let him know
that not only did I notice but that I cared enough to ask.

But she didn’t ask. And I didn’t ask her if she would have attempted to meet with another
student, but I did ask her if race mattered in her basic writing class. Some writing teachers might
ask: Could she have mainstreamed Malon by placing him in a first-year writing course? Would
Malon have changed his attitude on improving his writing skills if he had been placed in a
traditional first-year writing course?

Tracy asked a question that resonates with me: “Don’t people learn better when things are
expected of them that seem to be beyond their grasp?” How can basic writing courses that are
designed “to fix their grammar” account for all the literacies students’ bring into those courses
while offering students meaningful assignments? How can basic writing teachers help students
who place in basic writing courses understand that they will be judged, inside and outside the
academy, as Tracy’s colleagues across the disciplines did?

Malon’s university perpetuated the deficit model and called on its writing specialists to
attempt to “convert the native” (Shaughnessy 1976). Because quantitative data matter in U.S.
universities, Malon’s ACT score positioned Malon in a basic writing course, but his cognitive
skills qualified him for placement in an “advanced level college English” course, according to
Tracy. In other words, neither Malon’s teacher nor his university had a landscape for its
“academically at risk student” because his university maintained an essentialist vision of basic
writers as one-dimensional monolithic students who cannot write, talk, or think. By no means
am I suggesting that basic writing courses are meaningless; however, similar to the way Steve
Lamos argues about the implication of basic writing courses, I espouse that Malon’s experience
in a basic writing course demonstrates how many African American males are marginalized in
schools that privilege a Western ideology about what writing should look like on placement examinations. In “Minority-Serving Institutions, Race-Conscious ‘Dwelling, and Possible Futures for Basic Writing at Predominantly White institutions” Lamos studies predominantly White institutions and the ways they can “grow and cultivate new BW spaces” (4) that he calls third-spaces. In those spaces “students are invited to consider how issues of race and racism profoundly shape their educational and literate lives” (8). Lamos’ design aligns with the type of writing spaces that James Berlin imagined for composition courses that asked students to critique the cultural codes that attempt to define them (1991). Lisa Delpit argues that writing teachers should introduce students of color and students from low-income homes to the “‘codes of power’of standard English” (1995), which is vital to their survival in the academy and in the wider society. Delpit believes that the standard dialect and student literacies are linked to the economy, as Deborah Brandt shows in her literacy learning research. According to Brandt, literacies become technologies that are connected to the economy (2001, 2009). Jordan also argues that “[e]ven though HCBUs appeal to the rich cultural experiences of black students, they will encounter the challenging of assessing linguistically diverse students. Like their white counterparts, HBCUs want their students to produce in speech and writing the Edited American English valued in academe and business settings” (101). Jordan speaks to one of my positions on the role of teaching writing. While I celebrate linguistic diversity, I also believe it is my ethical mission to help prepare students for citizenship and for the workforce, which was one of the primary reasons Malon and Rashad went to college.

Joanne Addison and Sharon James McGee conducted a large-scale interdisciplinary study that examines U.S. high school and university students’ literacy practices and shows the skills that employers value. In “Writing in High School/Writing in College: Research Trends and
Future Directions,” Addison and McGee combined their study results with what they describe as “some of the most prominent and promising large-scale projects in writing studies” such as the U.S. Department of Education, the National Commission on Writing, the Council on Writing Program Administration, the National Survey of Student Engagement, Harvard Study on Writing, Stanford Study on Writing, and the Longitudinal Study of Writing at the University of Denver (147, 150, and 152). The part of Addison and McGee’s study that is relevant to my discussion here is a report of the National Commission on Writing, which includes data collected from the “Business Roundtable, an association of CEOs of many of the leading U.S. corporation” (163). Addison and McGee’s results are important to my project because Malon’s and Rashad’s fathers’ taught them that a college degree would prepare them for a profession. The report reveals the skills that students need to prepare for the workforce (Addison and McGee’s study is not comprehensive). The Commission reported that:

- “97% of employers view clarity as ‘extremely important’ or ‘important’” (166),
- “96% of employers view accuracy as ‘extremely important’ or ‘important’” (166),
- “95% view spelling, punctuation and grammar as ‘extremely important’” (166),
- “70% of salaried employees have writing responsibilities” (166).

Additionally, Figure 16 below shows the results from Addison and McGee’s survey on good writing in the disciplines. The survey asked faculty “to identify the five most important characteristics of good writing in their field” (166). Addison and McGee sent surveys to faculty and students across the curriculum at high schools, community colleges, and four-year public and private universities (149). Eventually, twenty-one faculty and fourteen students completed the study (149).
Addison and McGee also found that although high school and college faculty believed that writing is required outside school, particularly in the professions, few educators teach workplace genres in the academy (164-65) such as the genres outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 5. Workplace Genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace Genres</th>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“email and oral presentations with visuals aids such as PowerPoint are ‘frequently’ or almost always’ required”</td>
<td>80-95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“memos and official correspondence”</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“formal reports”</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“technical reports”</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Addison and McGee also found that “[m]any faculty resist workplace genres on philosophical grounds, often arguing that their role is to help prepare citizens of the world, not train workers”
They also found that more writing teachers should focus on improving students’ surface errors, according to the Business Roundtable.

Two strategies that Tracy used to help students improve lower order concerns were peer review and revision. However, in an interview during the fall of 2013, Malon argued that Tracy did not teach him how to perform a peer review or how to revise his drafts. Scholars such as Lisa Delpit argue that process writing limits students’ voices and choices. Delpit believes that some process theorists misunderstand the language competence of students of color and students from low-income homes and force them to dwell in the first stage of the writing process, “with no attention to editing or completing final products. . . . When teachers do not understand the potential of the students they teach, they will underteach them no matter what the methodology” (175), argues Delpit. I observed Malon writing process twice during the Fall 2013 semester before I suspended the sessions due to inadequate spacing. I concluded that Malon did not know how to systematically revise his drafts in ways that might improve lower order concerns.

Watching Malon Write: The Observation

As I discussed in Chapter Two, Malon’s schedule made it difficult for me to observe his composing process. My protocol indicated that I would observe Malon’s writing three times: once in October of 2013 and once in December of 2013 then again in January of 2014. Because of his football schedule, we planned the observations between 7:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. During the two sessions that I captured on video, I learned how Malon produced alphabetic texts, at least how he wrote while I observed his process. Before the first session began, Malon stated that he did not have a writing process, as he “just writes.” However, I learned that Malon composes, reads, and edits simultaneously, while listening to music. He also saved his work by emailing it to himself. Malon described his process accordingly:
Malon: I just go [into the Curriculum Resource Center]. I bring music, so I put in headphones and play music. It helps me focus. I think about what I have to do and go to work.

Shirley: Talk about writing, thinking, typing while you are listening to someone, while someone else is in your head. . . . How does that work? How do you function? How do you think when you are listening to someone else while you are composing a paper?

Malon: I mostly put on some relaxing music, not like Mozart, but it’s like calm, not fast tempo. It helps me clear my mind of any distractions.

Malon added that without music, he reflected on what transpired during football practice, “but the music drowns out football and everything”

Malon: I hear the music, but my thoughts are louder than the music, so I turn it on low because I don't want it blaring in my ears. But I can write while listening to music, and it doesn't influence really the way I write or what I'm listening too.

Shirley: How do you know how it influences your writing?

Malon: I have written without music. You know, sometimes I forget my music. . . . My work slows down because . . . I’ll be in there and somebody will be talking next to me, and I have to reread what I have read because people talk to me. Once I put my headphones in, people won't talk to me. I’m a personable person because people will come up next to me. If I'm listening to my music, I can just start typing.

Shirley: When did you begin this strategy and why?
Malon: I have been listening to music to do work since maybe middle school. I don’t know why. We would be in study hall classes, and I would rather listen to music . . . than to sit in a dead silent room.

Shirley: Did you see a change in your grades after you started listening to music?

Malon: Nope!

Shirley: No.

Malon: Nope!

Shirley: So [listening to music] is beneficial in the sense that it decreases distractions.

Malon: Um hum.

In other words, Malon used music as a therapeutic device and a method for blocking distractions.

The following images are from two different observations of Malon’s composing process.

Fig. 17. Image from Malon’s First Observation in a Conference Room
Again, I made a one-hour reservation for the first observation, but when Malon and I arrived at the Curriculum Resource Center, the room was unavailable. Therefore, the director suggested that we use a conference room that did not create a healthy ecology. Yet Malon drafted a paper for his course. The assignment asked him to type a 600-900 word paper titled “Becoming a Scholar,” which was due on Friday (it was Wednesday).

Writing about Malon: The Observation

8:00 p.m.—The observation began. Malon forgot his writing prompt and outline, so he went to a classroom next door and took a picture of one of his peers’ prompts. He placed the computer on the end of the conference table, but his power cord could not reach the closest power outlet. Therefore, Malon placed his computer on his lap, plugged it into the wall, and sat in the oversized green leather conference chair. Next, Malon read the prompt, moving the screen from left to right and zooming in and out. Then, he untangled his earplugs, found “calm” music on his iPod, he said, and he began to type again. (Before the semester ended, Malon started listening to Mozart, which he said made him even more productive.) Immediately after he placed his
fingers on his keypad, he let out a long sigh, so I asked him if I were distracting him. He could not recall the date that he had written four times that day, he stressed. Afterward, he replaced his earplug and began to type again. He typed rapidly, looking primarily at the screen. (Malon took a typing class when he was in the sixth grade.)

When we discussed his word processing skills, he was critical of his processing method: “I hated it,” he lamented. “I still can’t type with my hands on the keyboard. I can’t type like that. I also had a typing class freshman year [in high school]. My phone is a keyboard. It’s just scaled down. I type almost as fast as I text. I text pretty fast,” Malon confirmed.

8:28 p.m.—paused and said, “Dag.” He read and moved his cursor around on the page. Malon changed his music again and resumed typing.

8:30 p.m.—checked his iphone again. Then, he resumed typing and edited as he typed. He typed rapidly, moving his eyes from the keyboard to the screen, but focusing primarily on the keyboard.

8:31 p.m.—checked his instructions to remind himself of his paper’s word count requirement, he said. (I asked Malon why he paused.) At this point, he had typed two-hundred and sixty-four words.

8:35 p.m.—said, “Okay. I’m replying to a text now.” He ended the text, but he looked at his phone again.

8:36 p.m.—checked his music on his iPod.

8:36 p.m.—resumed reading and typing. I asked Malon to explain his proofreading process, and he stated that he checked his paper for punctuation errors.

8:37 p.m.—looked at prompt again.
8:40 p.m.—read the screen then resumed typing.

8:45 p.m.—paused again to read the screen.

8:50 p.m.—I left the room with the recorder on, and I return at 9:00 p.m.

9:15 p.m.—Malon proofread and edited the paper on the screen. He doubled-spaced the paper and reread it to “make sure it sounds right” because when he typed, he “just let [his] thoughts go.” His revision process occurred on the screen, while he proofread his paper for organization and punctuation errors. Malon also stated that he would read it again on Thursday to assure that it was organized. Then, he saved it and emailed it to himself.

When I studied the observation video at home, I concluded that Malon checked his phone more often than he read his prompt. However, when he and I viewed the video together, he told me that he was reading his prompt when I thought he was checking his phone. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Malon experienced observer’s paradox and that he composed in an unhealthy ecology, factors that I believed negatively impacted his writing process. Malon stated that neither I nor his environment affected his writing. The following images are from the second observation that took place in a classroom in the Curriculum Resource Center.
Fig. 19. Image from Malon Reading One of his Classmates’ Drafts

Fig. 20. Image from Malon Composing a Review of One of his Classmates’ Papers
In figures 19 and 20 Malon reads one of his classmates’ drafts and composes a review that was part of an assignment for his basic writing course. The assignment asked students to compose a four-page draft and email it to one of their peers. Malon read his peer’s paper, but he did not annotate it. Instead, he composed a review on his computer, and emailed it to his classmate.

Later Malon typed a paper for another class. He began the invention process by composing by hand in a notebook because he said that he could not prewrite on his computer. After he brainstormed for approximately thirty minutes, he typed quietly until he completed a three-page paper. Again, Malon listened to music while he composed. His phone was on his desk, but he did not use it as he did when I observed his writing process earlier. Nonetheless, Malon proofread and edited his paper on the screen then emailed it to himself so he could print it before his class began the next day. Malon appeared to have introduced several distractions into his composing space. For example, Malon listened to music, texted, typed, and revised his paper simultaneously. After observing his writing process, I concluded that Malon did not know how to engage a writing process that might have helped him revise his drafts in ways that reduced his lower order concerns, as Zandra L. Jordan acknowledges about her African American female writers who wrote in African American Vernacular (2012).

In this sense, Malon did not consciously resist the idea that he needed to change his written language in order to effectively communicate with an audience, although Malon believed that he entered the university with a dialect that should have been recognized and respected. Again, his critical stance on writing assessment challenges traditional notions on what students’ academic writing should look like, especially in a basic writing course. Here, I will briefly expand my conversation on teaching writing to students who write in a nonstandard dialect. Deborah Mutnick reasons in “On the Academic Margins: Basic Writing Pedagogy,” that the “denigration
of basic writing as a skills course, designed to ‘clean up’ students’ error-ridden writing and promote a univocal standard language’ reinforced linguistic prejudices and masked the underlying problem of racism, class discrimination, and other forms of social inequality that had necessitated Open Admissions in the first place’” (194). Similarly, in “Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach,” Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur contend that”[l]anguage use in our classrooms, our communities, the nation, and the world has always been multilingual rather than monolingual. Around the globe, most people speak more than one language” (303). Therefore, Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur call for a translingual approach to teaching writing, a pedagogical practice that honors all students’ languages and dialects. This approach to teaching writing is promoted by other students’ rights to their language advocates such as A. Suresh Canagarajah, Staci Maree Perryman-Clark, Elaine Richardson, Mike Rose, Geneva Smitherman, and Victor Villanueva, to name a few. Though Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur promote an alternative approach to teaching writing, they do not offer a methodology for assessing translingual writing.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss how Malon acquired technological skills and developed them because those skills helped him succeed in writing courses. Data reveal that Malon used his word processing skills to produce essays in his skills, basic writing, first-year writing courses. Consequently, Malon carried technological skills to his writing courses, although he contended that Tracy did not help him develop them.

Malon Goes Digital: The Extracurricular

As I discuss in Chapter Two, Malon developed his own technological skills. In an interview with Malon in the fall of 2013, he ruminated that Tracy “did not teach us how touse
anything new. We just used Word and the Internet. It was pretty basic.” Malon explained how he acquired technological skills:

Malon: I didn’t type. I didn’t text. I didn’t send my first text until I was in the fourth grade. It was the hardest thing I had ever done in my life.

Shirley: Why?

Malon: I had no idea what to do with it. I never really had a phone. I never really wanted one. I talked with all the people I saw. This girl was like, “Ha, will you text me.” I was like, “No, I don’t know what that is.” Then, she showed me. I was in the fourth grade, and she showed me how to text.

Shirley: Are you telling me that you had a cell phone when you were in the fourth grade?

Malon: I don’t remember whose phone it was. I think it was her phone, and she showed me how to text.

Shirley: Why was it difficult? What made it difficult?

Malon: It wasn’t a keyboard. You know it was like the human eyes are not used to reading off the screen. That is why it is harder to read on the screen than it is to read papers. I was used to paper and writing, so I was text messaging one button at a time, and one button would have an A, B, and C. I was like, ‘Oh God, should I hit it and get lucky?’ I can’t remember the first text message I sent, but I remember the experience. I actually still talk to the girl who taught me how to text. I will text her later. (laughs)

Shirley: How did you feel when you were texting?

Malon: I didn’t like it. I didn’t like it.

Shirley: Yet you completed the task.
Malon: I learned something new. I was like, why would I use this because I live in the apartment complex with everyone I talk too. I had no need to text because I could call them from the house phone, but back then texting became the craze. I text a lot now.

Shirley: Talk about that. I’ve noticed that you text a lot.

Malon: Times change.

The digital writing that mediated Malon’s literate engagements primarily comprised texts and tweets. At the end of our study, Malon had posted 60,000 tweets and 3,000 videos and images on his Twitter site. Before the study concluded, I invited Malon to describe his dynamic literate engagement on social media sites, specifically Twitter.

“It ain’t writing,” he countered.

Malon also added that Twitter restricted his communication to one-hundred-forty characters, a composing space that did not equate to the “writing” he produced in school. Malon offered an explicit explanation of the dichotomous relationship he created between writing in curricular and extracurricular spaces. Social media sites, particularly Twitter, created spaces for Malon to freely express himself, to exchange diverse, authentic communicative knowledge with a diverse audience.

Despite Malon’s definition of the writing he produced in extracurricular spaces, his engagement encouraged him to think critically, something that he was not challenged to do in his basic writing classroom, according to Malon. In her 2004 case study, Selfe argues that “we need to integrate new media literacies, as well as alphabet literacy, into a full range of composition classes if we want to do a responsible job of preparing students for the world they face outside the classroom,” and she goes on to say, “and if we want to do a responsible job, for ourselves, of
understanding how meaning is being made in the new multimodal communication context” (57). Selfe postulates that David’s case (her participant) can teach us “what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century and help us understand our own role in relation to change” (44) in much the same way that Malon’s case can teach us. Malon’s and David’s cases are similar. Selfe describes David’s academic dilemma accordingly:

David’s intellectual curiosity, his skill at adapting to new situations, his unusual ability to self-sponsor and self-direct his own learning efforts, his love of language and communication, and his insight about the growing importance of new forms of communication functioned to his advantage as he taught himself new literacies . . . within the electronic environments he countered in college.

But, his story also suggests the contested nature of the literacy landscape David inhabited. (50)

While Malon passed his writing courses the first time he took them, David “failed two of his more conventional communication classes—a move that dropped his GPA below the level allowed by the university [and] he . . . failed out of the university” (49). David was unsuccessful because, according to Self,

his skills in communicating in Standard English remained seriously underdeveloped—and his teachers in the English Department were very concerned about his ability to organize and write formal essays, his inattention to standard spelling, his inability to write sentences that were grammatically correct according to conventional standards, and his problems with development and logical argumentation. (49)
Malon’s basic writing and skills teachers identified some of the same types of writing concerns in Malon’s writing such as grammar and punctuation, which he apparently improved upon. However, Malon possessed characteristics that David appears not to have possessed, which are persistence, motivation, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. Of equal importance to his study, Malon had a male mentor and literacy sponsor who held him accountable for attaining his academic goals.

Selfe’s assertion about students’ technological skills is timely, although more students are developing technological skills in writing classrooms. Selfe’s insistence that writing teachers must pay more attention to competing literacies and to the way they value language at the expense of other valuable literacies ignores the fact that writing teachers reside in a postmodern world that has begun to recognize world Englishes and other languages and dialects. Selfe’s final lesson is that “[i]n a postmodern world, new media literacies may play an important role in identity formation, the exercise of power, and the negotiation of new social codes” (51).

However, similar to the way that Malon’s basic writing course was designed to teach functional writing skills, David’s composition teachers “failed to take advantage of, build on, and even to recognize, in some cases, the literacy strengths he did bring to the classroom and, therefore, missed important opportunities to link their instruction goals to his developing strengths” (51). Based on Selfe’s findings and the parallels between David’s and Malon’s literacies, I wonder: “Could Tracy have integrated the digital literacy skills that Malon carried to his basic writing courses into her writing instructions? And if she had, would Malon have been even more successful in his basic writing courses?
Conclusion

This chapter opened a narrow window into Malon’s literate life, specifically his academic life. As I progressed though my coding, decoding, and listening processes, data revealed factors that contributed to Malon’s success in first-year writing courses such as his reading and cognitive skills, his persistence, and his sense of self. Malon’s identity as a writer prepared him to write in college, which is an accomplishment that many African American males who place in basic writing courses do not experience. According to Malon’s father and godfather, Malon was advised to “take advantage of every opportunity that [was] presented to him” because “he [could not go] back home without a degree. He’s got to stay the course.” To reiterate, data show that the positive reinforcement Malon received from his African American male models contributed to his success in first-year writing courses, particularly his basic writing course.
CHAPTER FIVE: WHAT RASHAD AND MALON CAN TEACH US

Why study African American males? Composition Studies researchers have not conducted enough case studies that have dealt adequately with the non-school literacies and resources that African American males draw on in school. By examining African American males who are transitioning from high school to first-year writing courses, we can learn how they practice literacies and in turn we might better understand how to teach and study them. However, teaching them and studying them are not linear processes, as this study demonstrates.

General Findings

Findings show that the interplay between non-school and school literacies shaped the way Rashad and Malon, two eighteen-year-old African American males, experienced and articulated their success in first-year writing courses at two separate four-year universities in Northwest Ohio. I began this study with the proposition: African American males are succeeding in first-year writing courses. I formulated one primary research question that asked how sociocultural factors impacted African American males’ writing. However, as I progressed through the data collection and data analysis processes, logically connecting themes to research questions, I refined my questions to the following:

- What factors contribute to African American males’ success in first-year writing courses?
- What value do African American males place on their identities and literacies, and what is the source of that value?

49 Again, I have included basic writing courses in my discussion on Rashad’s and Malon’s first-year writing experiences because Malon placed in a basic writing course.
Four major factors that contributed to Rashad’s and Malon’s success in first-year writing courses were the literacies their parents and guardians taught them at home, the literacies they carried to school, the school resources (writing teachers, tutors, and writing centers) they used to help them further develop their literacies, and how they connected their fathers’ expectations of them to school expectations. In general, Rashad’s and Malon’s determination to succeed in first-year writing courses was shaped by their African American fathers’ perspectives of their sons’ formal education.\(^{50}\) Data also demonstrate that Rashad’s and Malon’s fathers’ connected higher education to their sons’ potential professions (the economy) and assured them that a formal education would lead to professional and social mobility. In fact, Rashad invited me to interview his father about his role in the development of Rashad’s literacies. Jimmy’s and my dialogic relationship\(^{51}\) helped to make the bridge between home and school clearer. Additionally, when Malon’s godfather and former high school principal told me that Malon’s primary job and responsibility to his family and community was to earn a college degree, I learned an additional role that home and community played in Malon’s education process. In short, Rashad’s and Malon’s literacy practices are only one of the primary factors that impacted their school-sponsored writing and success in first-year writing courses.

**Limitations of Conducting Case Study Research**

Although the case study design resulted in the collection of rich and detailed data, two eighteen-year-old African American males are not a representative population. Therefore, I have generalized to theories, concepts, and case studies (Yin 1984). However, if Composition Studies

\(^{50}\) Again, I must acknowledge that Malon’s mother and maternal great-grandmother also influenced this perspective on schooling. However, Rashad and Malon lived with their fathers in single-parent homes and had formed close bonds with them.

\(^{51}\) Jimmy and I had two official telephone interviews, and we talked informally about Rashad’s literate life.
researchers want to help more African American males succeed in first-year writing courses, they must conduct case studies on a larger population of African American males.

Drawing general conclusions from key participants’ narratives, these data are limited in several other ways. For example, though I interviewed Rashad’s adoptive father, I did not interview his biological parents, particularly his mother with whom he lived for two years before she lost custody of him. When I met Rashad in the fall of 2013, he had severed his relationship with his mother. In fact, he did not identify her as someone who contributed to his literacy development. I believe she might have offered a perspective on the early stages of his home literacy development. Likewise, I did not interview Malon’s mother and great-grandmother because he did not consent for me to contact them. Could these silenced female voices have offered additional data on Rashad’s and Malon’s literacy development? I may never know because I respected Rashad’s and Malon’s decisions. Furthermore, Malon gave me his father’s email address and suggested that I interview him. I emailed his father twice after Malon told me that he had discussed the study with his father, yet his father did not respond to my call for a description of his son’s literacy development and literacy practices. Why did Malon’s father mute his own voice regarding his son’s literacy practices?

Also missing from this data are the voices of Rashad’s and Malon’s high school English teachers. Their teachers might have offered insight into the type of assignments Rashad and Malon were given and their written responses to those assignments. Though I did not collect them, these types of data will also be valuable in future studies on African American male literacy practices, particularly because the Common Core State Standards Initiative promises to prepare all students for the workforce and college, which will result in more writing assignments
and which might increase writing teachers’ knowledge on the literacies African American males carry to first-year writing courses.

Finally, these missing links disrupted my chain of evidence (story-beside-story) on how Rashad and Malon developed and practiced literacies in curricular and extracurricular spaces, evidence that might have lent even more validity to this multivocal case study research project. In contrast, the missing links create room for further research. Regarding the limitations of case studies in general, they also present issues of validity and reliability because they are subjective, sometimes resulting in researchers’ manipulating data so that results tell their stories rather than the stories that connect to research questions. While my research questions changed as I progressed through the data analysis process, this empirical research study was rigorous in its design, data collection process, and analysis of data because the cacophony of voices I placed beside each other strengthened Rashad’s, Malon’s, and my credibility and the validity of the rich complex data I collected.52

Before I proceed, I must revisit my definition of academic success that is delineated in Chapter One. Both Rashad and Malon meet first-year writing requirements at their universities with a grade of “C” or better without having to repeat those courses. At the end of their first academic year in college, they had not only fulfilled academic requirements, they had also come closer to meeting their fathers’ expectations. In short, success for Rashad and Malon was also tied to meeting expectations and completing requirements that came from home. This

52 Data collection/triangulation methods: audio- and video-recorded interviews of multiple participants, telephone interviews, surveys, textual analysis, and field notes. I also sent transcriptions to participants, and I scheduled follow-up interviews. I discussed Rashad’s chapter with him, and he offered several suggestions such as where I should place his reaction to Claudia’s feedback. He also asked me to delete texts in the conclusion. After I completed Malon’s chapter, he had transferred to a new university, and he did not return my calls until later in my writing process. I decided not to email the chapter to him because after I sent him an excerpt from one of his interview transcriptions for his approval, he published it on Twitter before he consented for me to use it. On the other hand, they were his words, and he was free to do with them as he chose. Perhaps his publication of his own words was my approval notification.
understanding of success is important because it foregrounds how people outside the university impacted the literacies and attitudes that Rashad and Malon carried to school.

**Implications for Conducting Literacy Research: Acquiring Literacies at Home**

**Specific Results**

Rashad’s and Malon’s narratives teach us that some African American males have literacy sponsors at home who help them acquire literacies that they carry to school and develop there. Rashad’s and Malon’s fathers’ connected their literacies to social, political, and economic contexts and thus defining what it meant to be literate in a twenty-first century U.S. economy. For example, Rashad developed writing, reading, analytical, and critical thinking skills at home by composing argumentative essays that Jimmy assessed and asked Rashad to revise. When I interviewed Rashad at the end of the Fall 2013 semester, he reasoned that Jimmy helped him “increase [his] literacy skills . . . the more you write, the more you read, the more you know. It helped my brain develop,” he proudly proclaimed. While Rashad looked toward home for validation of his identity as a writer, he expected his writing teachers to recognize and honor that identity and assist him in further developing it in ways that would prepare him for his potential profession. In a telephone interview in the fall of 2013, Jimmy insisted that he wanted Rashad to be an effective speaker and writer because he would need to know how to communicate effective in the workplace and in the wider society. Hence, Jimmy, an academic, linked his educational experience with his professional experience and oriented Rashad to standard American English by modeling it and teaching it through the writing and reading strategies he designed at home. Rashad also learned about his African American literary heritage because Jimmy called on him to use African American textual models to show him how to

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53 For more details on literacy sponsors see Deborah Brandt’s *Literacy in American Lives* (2001).
access academic, social, and professional mobility, according to Jimmy in an interview in the fall of 2013. Because of Rashad’s rigorous home literacy orientation, when I met him in the fall of 2013, he self-identified as “a good writer [and] a good reader.”

Moreover, during the Fall 2013 semester, Malon identified as a reader and a critical thinker and thus validated the skills he acquired at home. At home, Malon’s maternal great-grandmother taught him the alphabet and how to read; she also assessed his reading comprehension skills, asserted Malon. He stated that his maternal great-grandmother’s library had a long history, as she had used her books to teach many of his cousins before he became her student when he was a preschooler. Additionally, Malon’s mother taught him how to write his name and encouraged him to increase his vocabulary by reading the dictionary, a literacy learning strategy he acquired from reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965). Malon’s mother and maternal great-grandmother sponsored his early literacy learning, yet in Malon’s home, writing was perceived as a school-sanctioned practice that was taught in school by formal educators. In this regard, Malon’s literacy sponsors promoted a traditional definition of literacy that narrowed literacy learning to decoding text. In fact, it was his eighth-grade English language arts teacher who helped Malon establish an identity as a writer.

These findings support Deborah Brandt’s ethnographic research findings on African Americans’ literacy practices. Brandt found that African Americans who lived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries acquired literacies at three core social institutions where they learned how to read and write: school, church, and home (Brandt 2001). While Brandt’s study supports my findings, Rashad’s case extends her findings because it offers insight on how Jimmy, a single African American father, sponsored his son’s education. As discussed above, data show that Jimmy became an agent who sponsored his son’s literacies by
transforming his home into a school. Further, on a survey and in an interview in 2013, Jimmy described how he invested in Rashad’s education and maintained that he knew he, like Rashad’s teachers, had a responsibility to develop Rashad’s literacies. Therefore, he placed Rashad in what he identified as top performing schools so Rashad might receive an equitable and quality education in a competitive society. During a telephone interview in 2014, Jimmy urged me to share Rashad’s narrative with a diverse audience of educators, administrators, parents, and African American males who might learn something from reading this narrative of a dissertation.

Similar to how Rashad’s and Malon’s parents and guardians spearheaded their education, other African American parents contribute to their children’s literacy development as well. Therefore, data also support other findings on how African American parents prepare their children for school. For example, in What African American Parents want Educators to Know (2003), Gail L. Thompson argues,

because of the persistent achievement between African American students and White students, there is a need for African American parents/guardians and educators to form stronger partnerships. Moreover, if educators are truly sincere about improving the academic achievement of African American students, they can no longer hold a negative view of African American parents/guardians or ignore their input as they have usually done. (xvi)

Thompson collected qualitative and quantitative research from one-hundred fifty-two African American parents/guardians of school-aged children who lived in southern California (xvii). She reports that parents who interviewed with her had talked with their children about the importance of college and its benefits “when the children [were] very young” (187). Another finding that Thompson reports is that parents of high achieving children noted that both parents and teachers
are “responsible for educating their children” (47), and that those parents began “preparing their children for academic success during the preschool years by helping them hone their speaking skills and by teaching them to read, spell, and problem-solve. A third characteristic of the parents of high achievers was that they had high expectations for their children regarding school attendance, punctuality, and class participation” (48). In contrast, parents of children who were struggling in school believed that formal schooling was important, but “[t]heir parents were preoccupied with immediate survival needs,” and thus “school became the onus of their children and their teachers” (48), as Rashad noted about the Hispanic family with whom he lived before he was adopted by Jimmy. Finally, Thompson’s study shows that Ron, a thirty-four-year-old male college student and full-time employee, modeled good study habits by taking his children to the university library with him, which prepared them for what to expect when they enrolled in college (63), according to Ron. Again, these data support findings that African American children acquire literacies and attitudes on schooling at home, as in the case of Rashad and Malon. Based on my data, it is evident that Rashad and Malon acquired literacies at home and that they are not anomalies, but instead are members of a community of people who value formal education. If Composition Studies is serious about helping more African American males succeed in first-year writing courses, then Composition Studies researchers must visit sites outside school where African American males’ literacies are developed—in their homes—as this study unveils.

Implications for Teaching First-Year Writing

The broad assertions and recommendations that Rashad, Malon, and I have made in this narrative of a dissertation do not mean to suggest that Composition Studies scholars, writing

54 I have included basic writing in my discussion on participants’ first-year writing experience.
teachers, administrators, and parents are not already implementing theories and practices that assist African American males in meeting the requirements of first-year writing courses. Yet several conclusions can be drawn about teaching first-year writing to African American males. One approach to teaching writing to African American males that connects school to their home culture is a culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995). Findings suggest that writing was more meaningful for Rashad and Malon when they wrote about successful African American males and about African American culture. For instance, once when Malon and I met in the fall of 2013, he asserted that in high school “Black History Month was the only time [he] read about African American “civil rights leaders.” He went on to argue that the books he read in high school had “no real meaning” because they were books that his English language arts teachers wanted to read. Malon read those books and wrote book reports on them because he was an engaged student. However, Malon also stated that he enjoyed writing papers for his College English (English Composition I) teacher because those papers explored the lives of diverse people. Rashad shared the same perspective on first-year writing courses. In his first-year writing course, he also wrote about the African American experience in the United States. More specifically, as discussed in Chapter Three, Rashad wrote a paper about the reasons some African American students do not attend college, which he attributed to a lack of parental support and environmental and economic factors. Rashad also wrote about how African American males are exploited in mass media in American society.

Additionally, Rashad and Malon measured their self-worth, in part, by textual models such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. Rashad and Malon told me that while they had high esteem for Dr. King, they “like[d] Malcolm X better.” At the end of the Fall 2013 semester, Rashad articulated his admiration for Malcolm X this way:
I feel like if I do not complete my college career, he will be looking at me disappointed. . . . Sometimes I ask myself should I do this work or go to the gym. Then, I say, naw man, Malcolm X would tell me to do this work, so I sit down and do it. It sounds stupid, but sometimes I feel like that. I really look up to Malcolm X and my dad too. Malcolm X was an intelligent man.

One day in the fall of 2013 when Malon and I were talking about books he had read, he replied that “Malcolm X” was the last and the best book he had read. He added: “He is the most intelligent man I know, with an exception to my father.” Rashad and Malon felt empowered when they evoked Malcolm X and their fathers. One solution I offer to this conclusion is to create culturally relevant pedagogies that promote all students’ cultures, as espoused by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, and 2000).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: African American Males Need to See their Culture in School

A culturally relevant pedagogy might empower African American males by affirming their cultural identities and enhancing their literacies (Gay 2000; Ladson-Billings 1994, 1995, 2000, 2009; Tatum 2009, 2013; Tatum and Gue 2012). In “But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” Gloria Ladson-Billings writes that for six years she studied the pedagogical practices of “excellent teachers of African American students” (159) who exposed students to their cultures while helping them meet course requirements. Ladson-Billings defines,

culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy of opposition . . . not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must
develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (160)

In order to fully engage students in the teaching and learning process, content knowledge should link to their lived experiences outside school (111), according to Ladson-Billings. Ladson-Billings concludes in *The Dream-Keepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (2009) that in order for the pedagogy to benefit all students, teachers should not only focus on race, gender, and teaching style but also on the rich literacies that all students bring to the classroom (2009). Geneva Gay defines culturally relevant pedagogy in “Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Curriculum Content,” where she writes, “The fundamental aim of culturally responsive pedagogy is to empower ethnically diverse students through academic success, cultural affiliation, and personal efficacy. Knowledge in the form of curriculum content is central to this empowerment” (111). In addition, reading specialist Alfred Tatum asserts that “few studies have examined the relationship between culture and education among adolescents” (74). He also urges English language arts teachers to design functional and empowering curricula and to merge required texts with “enabling” or “must-read” texts. According to Tatum, enabling/must-read texts are texts that help African American males transition from the “turmoil . . . into which they were born” (56), and I will add as Jimmy did for Rashad by introducing him to his African American literary heritage. Enabling texts are books that are written by African Americans that positively promote African American culture and African American lives. What can first-year writing teachers take away from these conversations on pedagogies that connect students’ courses to their cultures? Again, as findings show, Rashad and Malon deeply engaged in the writing process when they believed their cultural identities and their voices mattered.
Tatum offers a framework for culturally responsive teaching that I have articulated verbatim in Table 6 below:

Table 6. Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching

| Acknowledges students’ cultural heritage as it affects their dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning, and recognizes that it contains content worthy to be included in the curriculum. |
| Builds meaning between students’ home and school experiences as well as ‘school stuff” and the students’ lived realities. |
| Uses a wide variety of instructional strategies. |
| Teaches an appreciation of the students’ cultural heritage as well as that of others. |
| Incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all subjects and skills routinely taught in school (75). |

Similar to education specialists, I also promote racial and cultural diversity in my first-year writing courses by creating assignments that are grounded in culturally responsive teaching. For example, at the predominantly White four-year institution where I teach first-year writing as a graduate student, I designed an assignment that asked students to evaluate a children’s book that was written by a person of color for its ability to be taught as a book that promotes cultural diversity. With a slight modification, this assignment can be used in any first-year-writing course at any institution. Students and I went to the library together so they could select books. After they selected books, I approved them so students could read the books at home. I also read the books or summaries of them so I could become familiar with their content. When students returned to class, we defined key terms and thoroughly discussed the assignments. Each student provided a brief explanation of how his or her book promoted cultural diversity. Then, students composed essays to an elementary school teacher or an elementary school principal that explained how the books promoted cultural diversity and why they should be taught at the
teacher’s or principal’s school (see Appendix D). This assignment was designed to help students appreciate and promote diversity. It also helped students of color appreciate their culture, and it developed students’ critical thinking, technological, and public speaking skills, among other skills.

*Teaching with Technology: African American Males Know How to Use It*

Another conclusion that can be drawn from my findings is that African American males need a pedagogy that develops their technological skills. Here I will focus primarily on Malon, an athlete who carried rich technological skills to his basic writing course that he argued were not nurtured by his basic writing teacher, Tracy. Malon also asserted that he was not encouraged to think critically because the course was designed to teach foundational skills of literacy. According to Malon, the course focused primarily on improving his use of commas; however, Tracy pointed out that the course was designed to “fix their grammar.” In the spring of 2014, when I asked Malon to describe the technologies he engaged in his basic writing course, he insisted that “it was basic.” He also argued that “[w]hen you’re in a basic writing course they treat you like you’re basic.” Malon went on to note that he used Microsoft Word to compose essays, Moodle to complete assignments and communicate with his peers, and Microsoft PowerPoint to demonstrate his knowledge of MLA style. Malon voiced: “When you put an educated person in a remedial class, you don’t learn nothing.” Tracy stated that she and Malon had stopped communicating near the end of the semester. How can writing teachers sustain positive literacy sponsorships? Perhaps Tracy could have turned to Richard J. Selfe who urges “English studies teachers” to form what he calls “sustainable systems of relationships with other

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55 Letters or email communication would have been more appropriate, but I had programmatic constraints that limited students’ choice of modality.
people to support multimodal composing, and identifying a sustainable system of technological
support for such projects” that include teachers, students, colleagues, technologists, and
administrators” to help students produce “media-rich projects” while developing their traditional
literacies and teaching them about the importance of audience awareness and other rhetorical
strategies (168-69). Malon’s technological skills reflected, to a limited degree, the evolving
technology-driven society in which we live, specifically the social media sites where he wrote
and produced digital media.

Malon’s literacy learning experience in many ways validates Cynthia Selfe’s (2004) and
Kevin Roozen’s (2008 and 2014) arguments that more writing teachers need to expand their
definition of literacy so they might help more African American males meet the objectives of
writing courses. Malon could be described as autodidactic because he self-sponsored his own
learning efforts when he increased his vocabulary by studying the dictionary and by teaching
himself digital literacies such as how to use a word-processor, video production tools, and his
cell phone and other digital media for use in extracurricular and curricular spaces. In 2004, Selfe
argues that “we need to integrate new media literacies, as well as alphabet literacy, into a full
range of composition classes if we want to do a responsible job of preparing students for the
world they face outside the classroom; and if we want to do a responsible job, for ourselves, of
understanding how meaning is being made in the new multimodal communication context” (57).
Selfe’s case was David Damon, an athlete and “one of those smart, talented, and insightful
individuals who, every once in a while, manages to help teachers glimpse the importance of
different literacy values and practices—in this case those literacies associated with new media
texts” (44), writes Selfe. David’s technological skills grew exponentially while his written
communication in standard English did not improve, so, according to Selfe, “he failed out of the
Selfe’s findings show that literacies are social practices that are widely distributed; therefore, writing teachers must get to know their students so they can attempt to place their students’ literacies in social, historical, and personal contexts and in what Selfe calls “a matrix of material conditions” (49). Selfe postulates that David’s case can teach us “what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century and help us understand our own role in relation to change” (44), in much the same way that Malon’s case can teach us. In this regard, Selfe’s eleven-year-old article is timely.

Malon appeared to have lost his academic sponsors in his basic writing course and in high school, but he made use of technology by entering a discourse community of a social media site. In this discourse community, it appears as though its members appreciate Malon’s linguistic and technological literacies. I must note that some of Malon’s language and images might be offensive to some women and some African Americans. Yet when I entered his personal discourse community, I remained mindful that he was an eighteen-year-old who engaged language that many African American adolescents use today with no regard to its troubled history or consequences. Besides, Malon did what he could not do in his basic writing or skills course, which was to think critically, according to Malon. Because I care about him and other African American males and their survival in the United States, I encouraged him to think critically about the identity he had created on the Internet where he believed he could speak freely. When I critically imagine (Royster and Kirsch 2001) what Malon’s experience could have been in his basic writing course, I perceive Tracy and Malon collaborating: I also imagine Malon learning why he should become multilingual and Tracy learning that Malon’s literacies are practiced across seemingly “disconnected texts and textual activities” (Roozen, *Journalism* 2014). In my imagination, Tracy also helps Malon repurpose the skills he uses in a social media
site so he can revise drafts for an academic audience or other contexts outside the university where he might write formally for an audience. Finally, I conceptualize basic writing teachers who challenge African American male writers to improve their literacies.

Knowledge Transfer: African American Males are Doing It

Some Composition Studies scholars such as Elizabeth Wardle argue that students do not carry literacies from one writing course to another (2007, 2009). Do students know what writing teachers do not know about their own literacy practices and how they are practiced across curricular and extracurricular spaces (Kirkland 2013; Mahiri 1991, 1994, 1996, 1998; Moss 1994; Richardson 2002; Roozen 2008; Selfe 2004)? Another conclusion that can be drawn from findings is that Rashad transferred knowledge from one first-year writing course to another. At the beginning of the 2013-2014 academic year, Rashad questioned the value of his writing course, but after he immersed himself in Introduction to Academic Writing (English Composition I), he deduced that what he had learned at home closely aligned with his course objectives. In other words, Rashad pointed out that he carried knowledge and skills from home to his first-year writing courses where he further developed them. At the beginning of the Spring 2014 semester, I queried Rashad about the knowledge and skills he might have transferred from his first-semester writing course to his second-semester writing course:

Shirley: Let’s discuss the knowledge and skills you [pause]. I am making an assumption (pause) the knowledge and skills you transferred from 1110 to 1120.

I went on to ask Rashad if he carried knowledge and skills from 1110 to 1120.

Rashad: Yea, I did. You know being able to formulate an introduction and conclusion . .

. knowing what I ‘m gonna put in my body paragraphs, knowing what type of support
that I’m looking for, my claims or my reasons. . . . development as a whole . . .

constructing the essay—the basics of the essay.

Again, when I first met Rashad in 2013, he could not discern the usefulness of his first-year writing course. Rashad’s major concern was the connection, or the lack of, between his writing course and his potential profession, yet while Rashad did not always want to write, he engaged writing so he could attain his academic and professional goals, as Jimmy has urged him to do.

Again, near the end of the Fall 2013 semester, Rashad clearly articulated specific skills he transferred from one writing course to another (as demonstrated above). Then, at the end of the Spring 2014 semester, he drew a connection between first-year writing and his potential career, as articulated below:

Rashad: If I’m gonna try to get a doctorate degree, I will need to write papers and present my ideas. Whenever you are presenting your ideas, you are gonna need sources, so papers that we read involving gathering sources, gathering information, research paper, that’s gonna help with . . . the types of papers that I have to write for my profession. When I’m presenting my ideas, I have to cite sources . . . because there are other ideas out there . . . that you might not agree with, so you can . . . refute their ideas. Critiquing their work is something that I might have to do in my profession. So critiquing essays and [citing sources] are good examples of writing that I will have to do in the future.

Rashad had discovered a connection between first-year writing and his future job as a physicist,56 a metacognitive awareness that he could not articulate when he was enrolled in his first-semester

56 Later Rashad changed his major to criminal justice and psychology because he decided to become an attorney like his father.
writing course. These findings teach us that first-year writers believe that they carry literacies from home to school and across the curriculum. Of equal importance to Rashad, he believed that he would carry his literacies from college to his profession because Jimmy told him that he would need them there.

However, Rashad expressed one concern about the disconnection between the English language arts classes he took in high school and his first-year writing course. In an interview with Rashad at the end of the Fall 2013 semester, he observed: “I have passed four out of four essays... As I [wrote] each paper, it became increasingly [pause] more simple for me to compose those papers.” He also emphasized that he expended more time on the papers he composed in his college-level writing courses than he did on any papers he completed in his high school in Ohio. Rashad did not connect the literacies he acquired and developed in high school in Ohio with the literacies he carried to his first-year writing course because he “did not learn anything” in his high school English courses in Ohio, insisted Rashad. He also pointed out that in his eleventh-grade English course, he “did not write a single paper.” He noted that when he was in the twelfth grade, he completed in-class writing assignments and “wrote a couple of papers” outside class, but he usually did not receive feedback on them. Those classes, he contended, were “really basic... I don’t remember [learning] about a topic sentence, thesis statement... I kinda wonder about those high school writing classes.” Next, Rashad asked: “Were they really doing anything to help students transfer from high school to college?” Thus, he maintained that he “didn’t know what was required to write in college” because his high school English courses in Ohio ill-prepared him for college. Through his reflection, Rashad had learned the situatedness of writing, and perhaps he learned why Jimmy insisted that he needed to teach himself how to become an effective writer.
The last conclusion that can be drawn from my data about teaching first-year writing is that Rashad and Malon benefitted from meeting with their first-year writing teachers. Data show that after Rashad began conferring with Claudia about his writing, his perspective on academic writing and his perception of Claudia improved. He learned that Claudia’s responsibilities as his writing teacher extended beyond the classroom, and he carried that knowledge to his second writing course, where he also met with his second-semester writing teacher. Claudia learned that although Rashad did not participate in class, outside class, he was a full participant in the teaching and learning process. One lesson that Rashad carried away from his first-year writing experience is that he preferred face-to-face conferences rather than email communication or other communication that is mediated through digital media because miscommunication occurs thorough digital media that is not readily clarified, according to Rashad in an interview in the fall of 2013. He also argued that “it takes days for professors to respond” to students’ email communication. Claudia indicated that during their conferences she and Rashad addressed his writing concerns, and he advocated for himself, a quality she valued in him. Of course, Claudia and Rashad’s experience is only one experience that went well, and I do not use it to generalize about the effectiveness of writing conferences, but to show that Rashad was teaching Claudia how to teach him.

Malon, on the other hand, did not share stories about conferences he had with his basic writing teacher, but his skills teacher asserted that he met with her regularly, and that they had productive conferences. As Laurel Johnson Black argues: “Conferencing is something we do,

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57 Tracy told me in an interview in the spring of 2014 that Malon did exceptionally well at the beginning of the semester. However, after she and he disagreed about a grade he received because he followed instructions that one of his peers offered him on a peer-review assignment, they severed their relationship. Therefore, he turned in the same paper, and Tracy deducted points because he should have reread the paper and revised it, according to Tracy.
but unexamined, it remains something we do not understand and thus cannot improve” (5). Rashad’s and Malon’s narratives teach us that writing conferences are an extension of the classroom, where African American males can ask questions that they do not or cannot ask in class, as was Rashad’s situation during the Fall 2013 semester after he had transferred from high school to college. Although Jimmy had attempted to prepare Rashad for college, Rashad could not fully understand all the lessons that he was taught until they became his lived experiences.

Consequently, I urge more writing teachers to learn about their students’ literacies by conferencing with them and by creating student questionnaires that they distribute on the first day of class (electronically or manually). It is important that student responses remain private and that the questionnaire becomes a part of a portfolio of materials that writing teachers collect on students to help them address students’ writing needs or any other accommodations they might need to help them meet course objectives. After students complete the questionnaires, teachers should meet with students in their offices or other places on campus so they can discuss the content of the questionnaires. It is important that the meetings occur before students receive their first writing assignment or before they receive feedback on drafts. It is during those intimate moments in our offices or other locations on campus that we must try to let our students get to know us and for us to get to know our students.

An awareness of African American males’ literate development, literacy practices, “the strength of their attitudes and beliefs on writing” (Wardle and Roozen 113) and writing assessment are imperative in creating assignments that further develop students’ communication skills and that appeal to their learning styles, goals, and interests. Additionally, it is vital that students accept the conferences as an individualized approach to learning where they self-access their writing and articulate their writer identities, as Rashad did when he met with Claudia.
Furthermore, it is important that writing conferences become a continuum—students should schedule appointments at the beginning of the semester, similar to the two required conferences that Rashad’s writing program integrated into the curriculum. However, in order to enhance students’ literacy learning processes, I suggest that teachers schedule structured monthly conferences and maintain a progress report in students’ portfolios so students can reflect on their progress. This metacognitive strategy might help African American males understand their writing processes and whether they are meeting course objectives.

Conducting this research as a teacher-researcher taught me that two African American males were unfamiliar with conferencing with their teachers. Many high school students do not meet with English language arts teachers unless there is a problem, according to Malon. In fact, Malon noted that his teachers never expressed interest in him until they thought he had a problem; then, they asked him if the source of the problem was “home.” He went on to argue, “They never ask if the problem is them.” Based on that data, I must add that teachers who are not already reflective practitioners might consider using this rhetorical strategy to improve their pedagogies and the way they interact with all students and study participants, as David E. Kirkland warns us in *A Search Past Silence: The Literacy Practices of African Males* (2013), as Jacqueline Jones Royster and Rebecca Greenberg Williams warns us in “Constructing Teacher Identity in the Basic Writing Classroom” and as Gesa Kirsch warn us in “Friendship, Friendliness, and Feminist Fieldwork.” According to my findings, if we engage these practices they are likely to help writing teachers improve all their students’ writing skills and attitudes on writing.
Ecological Assessment Portfolio: The Teacher-Researchers Meet African American Males

Elizabeth Wardle and Kevin Roozen theorize that if compositionists and writing program administrators maintain an assessment portfolio on student writers after they complete first-year writing requirements, this assessment method would help first-year writing teachers better understand how students transfer knowledge and skills from one writing course to another (2012). In their 2012 article “Addressing the Complexity of Writing Development: Toward an Ecological Model of Assessment,” Wardle and Roozen write that “An ecological assessment recognizes and acts from the assumption that the breadth of students’ . . . literate experiences—in and out of school—impacts their ability to ‘do’ academic literacy tasks” (107). Traditionally, writing development has been studied vertically and in school settings, and this “monocontextual view of literate development that privileges school settings” (107) ignores major literacy learning sites such as homes, as demonstrated in this research project. Wardle and Roozen explain that an ecological assessment model “would require relationship-building among and across groups that often do not talk” (114), and my findings suggest that researchers must include African American males and their literacy sponsors in the concerted effort to understand how students write across curricular and extracurricular spaces. Wardle and Roozen also add that the combination of “assessment and ethnographic and longitudinal methodologies can also help us consider more fully the relationship between writing and identity” (113). Building on Yancey’s work, they contend, “[w]e know that writing assessment can shape how students understand themselves (as well as how they understand writing), and Yancey has challenged us to design assessments that allow for a fuller understanding of multiple selves of students as literate learners and for students to bring their own understanding to bear as active agents” (113). Yancey also contends that “‘the self is constructed . . . through multiple school discourses . . . [each of which]
assumes a somewhat different self: how are these selves represented—or even evoked—in writing assessment?’’ (qtd. in Wardle and Roozen 113). My findings on how Rashad’s and Malon’s race, gender, and dispositions impacted their writing skills are consistent with Yancey’s argument about the way teachers shape students’ writer identities. This study also reveals the complexity of their identities and literacies and how they are deeply rooted in a particular social context outside school that Composition Studies researchers have neglected to explore, which is why first-year writing teachers keep asking: “Why are students writing like this?” (Wardle and Roozen 113). My data answer this pivotal question because my research questions moved me beyond an examination of Rashad’s and Malon’s school literacies. Moreover, in 1971, Janet Emig’s imagined “longitudinal case studies of a given sample of students, following them from the time they begin to write in the earliest elementary grades through their school careers, up to and including graduate school” (95). One critique that could be made of Emig’s and Wardle and Roozen’s recommendations is that they ignore the literacies that people acquire at home. This way of thinking about school situates the academy as the only literacy-learning site. One critique that could be made of my study is that I did not collect artifacts that represent the writing that Rashad and Malon did across wide curricular and extracurricular spaces.

Additionally, the Common Core State Standards Initiative is ambitious and makes assumptions about students’ literacy practices and literacy development. However, if aspects of the CCSS were merged with Wardle and Roozen’s ecological model of literate development, the model would achieve the kind of boundary-crossing research and assessments that might help writing teachers understand how, why, and where African American males develop literacies across their lifetimes and carry them to school where they expect to develop them. In this regard, Composition Studies researchers might respond to Geneva Smitherman’s call to
educators to muse on: “How can I use what the kids already know to move them to what they need to know? This question presumes that you genuinely accept as viable the language and culture the child has acquired by the time he or she comes to school” (Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin* 219). I studied the literacy practices of two African American males so they could articulate their success in first-year writing courses because too many literacy-based research projects in Composition Studies have failed to show how non-school success factors are responsible for helping African American males meet the requirements of first-year writing courses. Of equal importance, this study might help writing teachers understand what African American males already know about their own literacy practices (219).

**Final Word**

Rashad and Malon articulated their opinions on how they satisfied the objectives of first-year writing courses at two separate predominantly White four-year universities in Northwest Ohio during the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semesters. They trusted me to accurately transcribe their narratives and carry them to an academic community that will recognize them as different yet not deficient. They have proven that African American males are succeeding in first-year writing courses and more of them are likely to succeed if more teacher-researchers and literacy studies scholars would document their achievements, a paradigm shift that requires writing teachers to listen to African American males’ voices, as I did. Although our study has ended, the bond I created with Rashad and Malon will never be broken because of what they taught me.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Interview Script (one-third of these questions or a variation of them will be asked in each interview.)

What is your favorite non-academic activity and why?  
What is your least favorite non-academic activity and why?  
Do you enjoy writing outside of school? Why or why not?  
When do you write outside of school?  
Where do you write outside of school?  
What genre(s) do you prefer to write and why?  
What do you think of yourself as a writer?  
Do you keep a writing journal or a notebook of your writing?  
What is your biggest challenge as a writer?  
Who influences or encourages you to write?  
How do you write? Do you have a method, a process for writing? If you do, describe it.  
Do you compose online and why?  
Do you use social media to exchange information with others?  
Do you use a computer or other technology to compose?  
What did you compose today and why?  
Do you enjoy reading outside of school and why?  
What did you read outside of school today?  
How do you read?  
Where do you read outside of school?  
When do you read outside of school?  
Do you visit the library to read or write independent of any assignment from your teachers?
APPENDIX B: RASHAD THOMPSON TRANSFER REQUEST LETTER

Jimmy’s transfer request letter for Rashad’s transfer to a new elementary school

July 10, 2006

Re: School Assignment

Dear Mr. ___:

I am writing this letter to formally request that you reconsider my son, Rashad Alexander Melroy Thompson, (“Alex”), for admission to ____.

____ was my first choice for the 2006 – 2007 school year. Although I indicated this preference, for reasons that are not clear, Alex was assigned to the ______ in ____. Enclosed is a copy of this assignment, dated June 30, 2006. After speaking with ____, on July 7, 2006, he suggested that I inform you of my concerns. Below are the reasons why I believe Alex should return to ____.

1. Alex attended ____ for the third and fourth grades. ____ suggested that I send Alex to ____ because she thought it would be a good fit. During this time, he was very successful academically and behaviorally. In fact, he scored beyond grade level in many of his classes.

2. Alex has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, (“ADHD”), which is a neurobiological condition. The inability to consistently focus or remember, which can take the form of inattention or not following directions, is a symptom of ADHD as are fidgeting and hyperactivity. While schools have a legal obligation to provide appropriate educational services to students who have been identified as having ADHD, some schools undertake and perform their obligations better than others. Regular education teachers and other personnel require training to develop a greater awareness of children with ADHD and of adaptations that can be implemented in regular education programs to address the instructional needs of these children. The administrators, teachers and staff at ____ have a history of successfully doing this for Alex. The same cannot be said for ____.

3. Alex has no history at that school and the laborious process of successfully managing his ADHD would have to start all over again.

3. Alex is on a 504 plan because of issues arising from his stay in foster care for half of his life. I adopted Alex in 2004 and moved him to ___ where I subsequently enrolled him in ___. Dr. ____, his teachers, the special education liaison, and myself worked together to make Alex’s transition into the ____ public schools a smooth one. ____ invested a significant amount of time to accommodate Alex through meetings with myself and with Alex’s therapist.
4. Alex is extremely intelligent, as demonstrated by his academic record and by how well he performed on the MCAS. At the end of the 4th grade year, Alex was invited to Advanced Work Class for school year 2005 – 2006. I have spoken to The Advanced Work Class Review team for the 2006 – 2007 school year and they are considering Alex for the AWC after they receive his MCAS scores from his current school. Alex has attended the ______ after school program, for 3 years. In fact, he has continued to attend the program even after he left ______. The program is located directly behind ________, which is within walking distance for Alex. As a single father, this is very convenient for Alex and me.

5. Last month, I spoke to ____ and she stated that she would be happy to see Alex return to the _____ community.

It is my hope that this matter will be resolved amiably. I look forward to your response and thank you very much for the opportunity to explain why Alex should attend ______ for the 2006 – 2007 school year.

In closing, Alex has had to overcome many challenges in his life. Through trial and error, I now know that moving Alex from school to school is not in his best interests. Both Alex and I have put our hope in the _____ community and trust that a positive answer will be forthcoming. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require additional information.

Best Regards,

CC: Mr. ___

Enclosure
APPENDIX C: TEACHING WRITING CONCERNS IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUR OWN WRITING

Lesson Plan: Teaching Writing Concerns in the Context of your own Writing
Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield
ENG 000

Overview
This mini-lesson will help students improve their writing concerns by synthesizing information about those concerns. In this sense, this mini-lesson offers students’ the tools students need to help guide their own learning process as an academic writer by introducing them to two concepts: active inquiry and experiential learning.

Objectives/Connection to Course Goals
- Increase students’ awareness of different writing concerns that manifest in students’ writing and how to correct them
- Demonstrate the rationale for teaching writing conventions in the context of students’ writing
- Demonstrate students’ ability to synthesize materials and develop appropriate teaching and learning strategies
- Demonstrate students’ ability to persuasively engage in verbal and written communicative acts
- Demonstrate students’ ability to use technology as a method of inquiry
- Provide students with tools and guidelines that might help them control global and surface concerns

Materials
- Paper and pen
- Assignment sheet
- Students drafts that contain feedback
- Computer
- A projector capable of displaying a short video
- A white or black board
- Course handbook

Activities
- The instructor will give an eight-minute presentation that:
  - Presents her completed assignment sheet (see attached)
  - Identifies a writing concern in her writing
  - Uses the course handbook to identify the writing concern
  - Displays the corrected version of the writing concern on the screen or on the white board
  - Shows a 3-4 minute video that discusses the writing concern
- Students will freewrite on their responses to the presentation (5 mins)
- Instructor will engage students in a discussion on the writing concern and assignment format (15 mins)
- Students will identify one writing concern and agree to become a specialist on that concerns (5 mins)
- Students will complete the assignment sheet using their drafts and handbook (in class or hw)
- Students will use the Internet to locate a video that discusses their writing concern (in class or hw)
Teacher will create a presentation schedule and give students their presentation dates (next class)

In order to complete the assignment, students must:

- Write down a sentence from their essays that contains a writing concern
- Refer to the appropriate section in the handbook on the concern
- Write down the rules on the concern
- Write down one example of the rule
- Write down the corrected version from students’ own writing
  - Incorrect: The chair of the committees introduce the members.
  - Error: subject/verb agreement (34a)
  - Rule: "A singular subject takes a singular verb, even if the form of the subject is plural.
  - Example: "Statistics deals with the collection and analysis of data.
  - Correct: The chair of the committees introduces the members.
- Find a 3-4 minute video that teaches you how to improve your proficiency in your writing concern (one video)
- Be prepared to discuss what you learned in the next class in an eight-minute presentation. Follow the instructions you saw today

Evaluation

- Students should be willing to freewrite and civilly participate in class discussion
- Students should be willing to become learners and teachers, producers and consumers
- Students should be willing to invest in an assignment that does not result in a grade but that will improve students’ writing skills, thus, their grades
Activity: Becoming Proficient in your Writing Concerns   Instructor: Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield
Write down the sentence or sentences from your essay that contain the writing concern(s) you selected and underline or circle the error(s) in your sentence or sentences.
Identify and refer to the appropriate section in the handbook on the error(s).
Write down the rule(s) on the errors (from the handbook).
Write down examples of the rule(s) (from the handbook).
Write down the corrected version of your sentence.
Incorrect: The chair of the committees introduce the members. “chair” = singular subject / “introduce” = plural verb
Error: subject/verb agreement (34a).
Rule: "A singular subject takes a singular verb, even if the form of the subject is plural" (Kirszner & Mandell 409).
Example: "Statistics deals with the collection and analysis of data. “Statistics” = singular subject / “deals” = singular verb
Correct: The chair of the committees introduces the members. “chair” = singular subject / “introduces” = singular verb

Homework: Find a 3-4 minute video that teaches you how to improve your proficiency in your writing concern (one video per topic). In the next class, be prepared to discuss what you learned in an eight-minute presentation to your classmates.

Writing Concern:
Your Sentence:

____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________

The rule from the handbook that relates to your writing concern:
____________________________________________________________________________________________

The example from the handbook that relates to your writing concern:
____________________________________________________________________________________________

Your corrected sentence:
____________________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX D: CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING

Evaluating a Children’s Book

Essay #

Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield, Writing Instructor

Alphabet Kids

The Black Caucus of NCTE and the NCTE have named February “The National African American Read-In” month. NCTE is the National Council of Teachers of English, and it urges educators, citizens, institutions, and organizations to promote literacy during Black History Month by forming groups that will read and discuss a book by or about professional African American writers. I have connected NCTE’s promotion of literacy to your final writing assignment, which is evaluating a text. Additionally, I have expanded the Black Caucus of NCTE’s call for literacy development and application by promoting cultural diversity. Therefore, my assignment asks you to celebrate Black History Month in November by selecting a book by or about a person who does not share a racial or ethnic identity with you. In this sense, we will evaluate children’s books by or about people of color and celebrate difference and the uniqueness of others.

Essay X asks you to evaluate a text. Again, the text or genre that I have selected is a children’s book. This assignment also asks you to create criteria on which you will evaluate the book. I have included nine criteria that you should consider. However, after you have read your book closely and critically, you should determine the value or applicability of the nine criteria to the book you chose to evaluate, narrowing your focus to three of these nine or creating your own criteria based on your book:

- Is visually appealing and engaging to its intended audience
- Is objective and without prejudice or bias
- Uses language appropriate to the intended audience’s reading-level
- Demonstrates effective problem resolution strategies
- Reflects intriguing relationships between its characters
- Promotes positive self-esteem among its readers
- Has a solid and meaningful storyline
- Shows multicultural perspectives
- Promotes thinking about values (criteria for this assignment are from X)

On X, we will visit the Children’s Center, which is located on the X floor of the X Library so you can learn about the Center and select a book for this assignment. You should read your book and be prepared to discuss it and your criteria in class on X. You should also bring your definition of cultural diversity to class on X and state your source if you borrowed your definitions from someone, which is acceptable.
Rhetorical Value of this Assignment

I. You might strengthen your discursive practices by writing to a specific audience.
   • You should identify an audience for your evaluation.
   • Your audience must be an elementary school district, an elementary school, or an elementary school teacher (first through sixth grades).
   • You may not select another audience.

II. You might learn that a piece of writing should have a purpose.
   • You should identify your primary purpose for composing your evaluation (Do not state that your purpose is to earn a passing grade or because your instructor gave you an assignment).
     • What do you hope to accomplish in your written evaluation as a writer and as a reader?
     • What do you want your audience to know about the book you will evaluate?
     • Why do you want your audience to acquire this information?
     • How do you think your audience(s) will respond to the information?

III. You should identify three local and global consequences of your evaluation.
   • What might change as a result of your audience’s or audiences’ exposure to your evaluation?
   • How might that change impact other people or other environments?
   • Have you changed after reading the children’s book you selected? How? Why? When?

Structure of the Evaluation

Introduction: Create a context by clearly describing the book: its author, its date of publication, its reading level, its target audience, and its main idea. You should determine the logical arrangement of these elements.

Thesis: Your evaluation should contain a thesis that includes your general perspective on the value of the book as a text that promotes cultural diversity and that teaches an appreciation for difference. Your thesis should also contain three major criteria that will help you reach a conclusion about the book’s ability to promote cultural diversity, according to your interpretation of the book. Do not conduct research. Apply your analytical and critical thinking skills.

Example One—Acceptance—The author of Alphabetic Kids uses imagery, language, and logic to help children learn about Native Americans and their culture, making Alphabetic Kids the ideal book for third-grade readers.

Example Two—Rejection—Although Alphabetic Kids contains visual components that promote difference, its language is subjective, its dialogue is complex, and its racially diverse characters do not resolve their conflicts. Therefore, Alphabetic Kids is inappropriate reading material for second-grader.

Supporting Paragraphs: Your evaluation should comprise well-supported and persuasive supporting paragraphs. More specifically, your supporting paragraphs should contain specific details that show your audience what the book does, strong evidence, and examples from the book that place your reader inside the book you have evaluated. As a result of your careful analysis of the book, your audience should find you to be a credible writer and thus should make a decision about the value of the book based on your assessment of it. Counterargument: Your evaluation should also contain a counterargument that highlights either a weakness of the book (if you approved the book) or a strength of the book (if you disapprove the use of the book).

Rebuttal: After you have composed a paragraph that opposes aspect of your argument, you should compose a paragraph that reiterates your argument. Again, this should be your strongest paragraph. In order for it to be your strongest paragraph, it should address an aspect of the counterargument, reminding your opponent why your argument is reasonable.

Conclusion: Compose a strong conclusion that returns to your main ideas and reiterates the decision you made about the book.

Paper Parameters: MLA page format; no sources; four (4) pages in length
Draft is due: Draft is returned: Final draft is due:
APPENDIX E: HUMAN SUBJECT REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

DATE: June 14, 2013

TO: Shirley Faulkner-Springfield
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: June 13, 2013
EXPIRATION DATE: March 24, 2014
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exempt review category # 2

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 4 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on March 24, 2014. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.
This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 20 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

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This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
Informed Consent for Participant
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

Introduction
My name is Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield, and I am a Ph.D. student in the English Department at Bowling Green State University. I am conducting a research study that examines the literacy practices of African American males, ages 18-20, who are enrolled in basic/developmental writing courses and first-year writing courses at four-year universities in Ohio. This research study is for my dissertation, and I would like to work with you on this study.

Purpose
The purpose of this research study is to learn about the ways African American male writers acquire, develop, and apply knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings inside and outside the university and how these concepts affect their academic writing. Therefore, my primary focus will be on your writing practices. During your 2013-14 academic year (fall and spring semesters), we will discuss the ways you learned how to write, read, and use technologies, etc. We will also discuss the ways you apply and where you apply various knowledge and skills. The total amount of time you will spend on this project is approximately 5 hours per month or 15 hours during your nine-month academic year (see schedule on page 4). I hope the data I collect from your participation in this study will help writing teachers, administrators, and researchers: 1) understand how cultural, social, political, and academic factors influence your learning, thinking, and writing processes; 2) understand the social benefits of your writing and reading practices; 3) understand how high school English courses and college-level writing courses prepare you for college-level writing, and 4) suggest best practices for you and all African American males who test into basic/developmental writing courses and who take first-year composition courses.

Procedures
You are being asked to participate in this research study by allowing me to learn about the ways you write, read, speak, learn, listen, think, and use technology inside and outside the university. I will use four research methods to gather data about your literacy practices: observation, interview, survey, and textual analysis. A textual analysis is the close reading of texts.

The first part of the study asks you to sit for a 35-45 minute recorded interview with me in August or September 2013 that is intended for me to get acquainted with you, to introduce you to the study, and to collect some data about your literacy practices. During the week of the interview, I will ask you to complete a 15-minute online survey that directly relates to our 35-45 minute interview. I will also ask you to review my transcription of (notes on) our interview and your survey responses, so you can think about and discuss the information you provided in the interview and on the survey. As stated above, this series of interviews and surveys will occur in August or September 2013, November 2013, and February 2014.
Informed Consent for Participant
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

During our observation sessions, I will observe the ways you create and interact with texts, and the ways you interact with other people, specifically those who might influence the ways you write, read, speak, learn, etc. Three times during the study (August or September 2013, November 2013, and February 2014), I will ask you for original and/or copies of your electronic and/or alphabetic compositions. I will ask you to keep a journal of your composing experiences outside and inside your writing classrooms, which should include the feelings you experienced before, during, and after various writing and reading tasks and any thoughts you experienced while completing those tasks. I will ask you to share your journal content with me each time we meet for an interview in August or September 2013, November 2013, and February 2014. Therefore, you should try to dedicate at least 10 minutes, three days a week to writing in your journal.

I understand that we might not complete the interviews and surveys in the months identified above; however, in order for the research to be effective, you should complete three interviews and three surveys during the 2013-14 academic year.

This study will take place throughout the 2013-14 academic year (August 2013-April 2014). If you participate, you and I will define the locations where I will observe your literacy practices (e.g., library, union, etc.), which might include some observations that occur on the weekend. These locations are subject to change at your discretion throughout the study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Potential Risks
There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. Any risks that you might experience are no greater than those experienced in daily life.

Benefits
I believe this study might benefit you in several ways. This study might help you improve your writing, reading, critical thinking, and other literacies since it asks you to reflect on your literacy practices and think critically about the ways you obtain knowledge and apply it in various contexts. This study might help you create a plan that successfully moves you through your academic and professional goals. Your participation in this research will generate data that contributes to the limited research that has been conducted on African American males’ literacy practices in English or composition studies. It might also contribute to writing teachers’ understanding of why your ways of knowing might conflict with the requirements in secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, which might have a positive influence on your performance in writing classrooms. The data gathered from the survey will become a part of my dissertation and will be used in publications for research and teaching purposes, which might also benefit high school English teachers, basic
Informed Consent for Participant
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

writing teachers, rhetoric and composition researchers, and future basic writers. After you complete this nine-month study, you will receive a video camera or a gift card of equivalent value for your participation.
Informed Consent for Participant  
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

Confidentiality
I cannot guarantee full confidentiality nor anonymity (hide your identity) since I will ask you to place your name on the surveys and ask you to identify yourself during the recorded interviews. Your survey will be completed online using Survey Monkey, an online survey tool. The survey data is password-protected through surveymonkey.com to keep your responses secure, but to protect your confidentiality, you should clear your browser history and cache after completing the survey if you do not use your personal computer to complete the survey.

Your signed consent form, survey results, recorded interviews, interview transcriptions, and other materials will be stored in a locked file in my office at home. Five people will have access to some of your data throughout this study: the four members of my doctoral committee and I. Since your data will be used for publication purposes, it will remain in a locked file for an undetermined period of time. I will always assign a pseudonym (false name) to your data that will be used to refer to you, your school, and your community when I discuss you in my dissertation, in other publications, and in projects for teaching purposes. Additionally, I will not use your name when I quote you directly, nor will I reveal other information that might expose your identity, the identity of your school, or other communities you are associated with, unless you request such identification.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. Declining to participate or deciding to withdraw your participation at any time will have no consequences on your relationship with me, your professors, your grades, or your educational institution.

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me, Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield, principal investigator, at 919-236-8740 or by e-mail at sfaulkn@bgsu.edu. You may also contact my research advisor and dissertation committee chairperson, Professor Lee Nickoson, at leenick@bgsu.edu or at 419-372-7556.

If you have questions about the conduct of this study or about your rights as a research participant, I encourage you to contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Thank you for your time.

Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield
Informed Consent for Participant  
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

Participant’s Agreement
By signing this consent form, you agree that you have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. Your signature also indicates that you had the opportunity to have all your questions answered, you have been informed that your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I agree to participate in this research study, and I have received a copy of the consent form. My signature certifies that I am 18 years of age or older.

Completing the Study:
Completion of the study includes the following:
1. Complete one 45 minute informal, recorded interview and one 15-minute online survey in August or September 2013.
2. Complete one 45 minute informal, recorded interview and one 15-minute online survey in November 2013.
3. Complete one 45 minute informal, recorded interview and one 15-minute online survey in February 2014.
4. Give Mrs. Faulkner-Springfield a copy of my journal content during the three interviews. I will journal 3 days a week for 10 minutes a day (for a total of 30 minutes a week or 2 hours a month).
5. Give Mrs. Faulkner-Springfield originals or copies of my electronic and/or alphabetical compositions in during the three interviews.
6. Allow Mrs. Faulkner-Springfield to observe my literacy practices for one hour (60 minutes) in October 2013, December 2013, and January 2014. Mrs. Faulkner-Springfield and I will determine, in writing, the dates, times, and locations of these observations.
7. Review Mrs. Faulkner-Springfield’s transcriptions of (notes on) our interviews and my survey responses for one hour or less (60 minutes or less) in August or September 2013, November 2013, and February 2014.

I understand that if I complete the tasks outlined above, I will receive a video camera or a gift card of equivalent value.

Printed Name of Research Participant __________________________ Signature of Research Participant __________________________

Date __________________________
Informed Consent for Parents who Helped Participant’s Acquire and/or Develop Literacies (parents and grandparents)

“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

Introduction
My name is Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield, and I am a third-year doctoral student in the English Department at Bowling Green State University. I am researching the literacy practices of African American males, ages 18-20, who are enrolled in basic/developmental writing courses and first-year writing courses at four-year universities in Ohio. This research study is for my dissertation, and my dissertation advisor is Lee Nickoson, an Associate Professor in the English Department at Bowling Green State University.

I am contacting you because I have been meeting with your son/grandson about his literacy practices and have learned from him that you have made significant contributions to his literacy acquisition and development such as reading, writing, and using technology. Therefore, I invite you to become a participant on my project so I can record your commentary on the ways you prepared your son/grandson for school and society, specifically the way you taught him how to write and read.

Purpose
The purpose of this research study is to examine the ways that African American male writers acquire, develop, and apply knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs inside and outside the academy. However, my primary focus is on their out-of-school literacy practices, specifically on your writing practices. I hope the data I collect from you will help writing teachers, administrators, and researchers: 1) understand how cultural, social, political, and academic factors impact my participants’ learning, thinking, and writing processes; 2) understand the social benefits of my participants’ writing and reading practices; 3) understand how high school English courses and college-level writing courses prepare(d) my participants for post-secondary writing courses, and 4) suggest best practices for all African American males who take writing courses.

Procedures
You are being asked to participate in this study by allowing me to ask you questions about your contribution to your son’s/grandson’s education as a writer and reader. I also invite you to volunteer any information about his literacy practices that you believe will benefit my project. If you consent, I will ask you to sit for a recorded one-hour face-to-face interview with me between January and February 2014. At least one one-hour follow-up interview will take place between March and April 2014 to get your perspective on my interpretation of our interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study (the interview) at any time without penalty.
Informed Consent for Persons who Helped Participant’s Acquire and/or Develop Literacies (parents and grandparents)
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

Voluntary nature:
Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. You may decide not to participate in interviews with me. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship or your son’s/grandson’s relationship with his university or with me.

Confidentiality/Anonymity Protection:
Your participation will be confidential, meaning that I will use a pseudonym to refer to you. I will not use videotaped excerpts from our interviews, but I will include transcriptions of our recorded interviews. However, your son/grandson has requested that I use his name in my research data, such as my dissertation, scholarly publications, presentations, and teaching materials. Your son’s/grandson’s decision to reveal his identity might inadvertently reveal your identity.

My data will be stored in a password protected electronic file, on a password protected computer, and in a locked file cabinet in my home. In addition to myself, my advisor will also have access to the data. I plan to archive the data indefinitely.

Risks:
Your consent will pose no risks to you. You and I will engage in a conversation about your son’s/grandson’s literacy practices and your contributions to those practices, specifically writing and reading. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect my relationship with you or your son/grandson.

Potential Risks
There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study; any risks are no greater than that experienced in daily life.

Benefits
This study has no immediate, direct, conceivable benefits to you, but your participation in this research will generate data that contributes to the limited research that has been conducted on African American males’ literacy practices in Composition Studies. It also contributes to writing teachers’ understanding of why your son’s/grandson’s learning style might conflict with school-sanctioned literacy practices. Consequently, this study will be of benefit to high school English teachers, post-secondary writing teachers, rhetoric and composition researchers, and African American male writers. The data gathered from the survey will become a part of my dissertation and will be used in publications for research and teaching purposes.

Contact Information
Informed Consent for Persons who Helped Participant’s Acquire and/or Develop Literacies
(parents and grandparents)
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me, Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield, principal investigator, at 919-236-8740 or by e-mail at sfaulkn@bgsu.edu. You may also contact Professor Lee Nicokson, my research advisor and dissertation committee chairperson, at leenick@bgsu.edu or at 419-372-7556.

If you have questions about the conduct of this study or about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Thank you for your time.

Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered, and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

_________  ______________
Printed Name of Research Participant                  Signature of Research Participant                  Date
Informed Consent for Persons who Helped Participant’s Acquire and/or Develop Literacies
(former writing teachers)
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

Introduction
My name is Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield, and I am a third-year doctoral student in the English Department at Bowling Green State University. I am researching the literacy practices of African American males, ages 18-20, who are enrolled in basic/developmental writing courses and first-year writing courses at four-year universities in Ohio. This research study is for my dissertation, and my dissertation advisor is Lee Nickoson, an Associate Professor in the English Department at Bowling Green State University.

I am contacting you because I have been meeting with one of your former students about his literacy practices and have learned from him that you have contributed to his literacy acquisition and development. Therefore, I invite you to become a participant on my project so I can record your commentary on the ways you contributed to my participant’s education.

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to examine the ways that African American male writers acquire, develop, and apply knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs inside and outside the academy. However, my primary focus is on their out-of-school literacy practices, specifically on their writing practices. I hope the data I collect from you will help writing teachers, administrators, and researchers: 1) understand how cultural, social, political, and academic factors impact my participants’ learning, thinking, and writing processes; 2) understand the social benefits of my participants’ writing and reading practices; 3) understand how high school English courses and college-level writing courses prepare(d) my participants for post-secondary writing courses, and 4) suggest best practices for all African American males who take writing courses.

Procedures
You are being asked to participate in this study by allowing me to ask you questions about your contribution to my participant’s education. I also invite you to volunteer any information about his literacy practices that you believe will benefit my project. I welcome your thoughts on any socio-cultural factors you believe impacted participant’s performance in your writing course. If you consent, I will ask you to sit for a recorded one-hour face-to-face interview with me between January and February 2014. At least one one-hour follow-up interview will take place between March and April 2014 to get your perspective on my interpretation of our interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study (the interview) at any time without penalty.
Informed Consent for Persons who Helped Participant’s Acquire and/or Develop Literacies (former writing teachers)

“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

Voluntary nature:
Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. You may decide not to participate in interviews with me. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship or your former student’s relationship with his university or with me.

Confidentiality/Anonymity Protection:
Your participation will be confidential, meaning that I will use a pseudonym to refer to you. I will not use videotaped excerpts from our interviews, but I will include transcriptions of our recorded interviews. However, my participant has requested that I use his name in my research data, such as my dissertation, scholarly publications, presentations, and teaching materials. My participant’s decision to reveal his identity might inadvertently reveal your identity.

My data will be stored in a password protected electronic file, on a password protected computer, and in a locked file cabinet in my home. In addition to myself, my advisor will also have access to the data. I plan to archive the data indefinitely.

Risks:
Your consent will pose no risks to you. You and I will engage in conversations about your former student’s literacy practices, your contributions to those practices, and any socio-cultural factors that might have impacted his writing and reading practices. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect my relationship with you or my participant.

Potential Risks
There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study; any risks are no greater than that experienced in daily life.

Benefits
This study has no immediate, direct, conceivable benefits to you, but your participation in this research will generate data that contributes to the limited research that has been conducted on African American males’ literacy practices in Composition Studies. It also contributes to writing teachers’ understanding of why my participant’s learning style or way of knowing might conflict with school-sanctioned literacy practices. Consequently, this study will be of benefit to high school English teachers, post-secondary writing teachers, rhetoric and composition researchers, and African American male writers. The data gathered from the survey will become a part of my dissertation and will be used in publications for research and teaching purposes.
Informed Consent for Persons who Helped Participant’s Acquire and/or Develop Literacies (former writing teachers)  
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

**Contact Information**
If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me, Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield, principal investigator, at 919-236-8740 or by e-mail at sfaulkn@bgsu.edu. You may also contact Professor Lee Nicokson, my research advisor and dissertation committee chairperson, at leenick@bgsu.edu or at 419-372-7556.

If you have questions about the conduct of this study or about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Thank you for your time.

Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered, and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

_____________________________________________________
Printed Name of Research Participant

_____________________________________________________            _______________
Signature of Research Participant                  Date
Introduction
My name is Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield, and I am a third-year doctoral student in the English Department at Bowling Green State University. I am researching the literacy practices of African American males, ages 18-20, who are enrolled in basic/developmental writing courses and first-year writing courses at four-year universities in Ohio. This research study is for my dissertation, and my dissertation advisor is Lee Nickoson, an Associate Professor in the English Department at Bowling Green State University.

I am contacting you because I have been meeting with one of your high school’s former students about his literacy practices and have learned from him that you have contributed to his literacy development such as reading and critical thinking. Therefore, I invite you to become a participant on my project so I can record your commentary on the ways you contributed to my participant’s education.

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to examine the ways that African American male writers acquire, develop, and apply knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs inside and outside the academy. However, my primary focus is on their out-of-school literacy practices, specifically on their writing practices. I hope the data I collect from you will help writing teachers, administrators, and researchers: 1) understand how cultural, social, political, and academic factors impact my participants’ learning, thinking, and writing processes; 2) understand the social benefits of my participants’ writing and reading practices; 3) understand how high school English courses and college-level writing courses prepare(d) my participants for post-secondary writing courses, and 4) suggest best practices for all African American males who take writing courses.

Procedures
You are being asked to participate in this study by allowing me to ask you questions about your contribution to my participant’s education. I also invite you to volunteer any information about his literacy practices that you believe will benefit my project. If you consent, I will ask you to sit for a recorded one-hour face-to-face interview with me between January and February 2014. At least one one-hour follow-up interview will take place between March and April 2014 to get your perspective on my interpretation of our interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study (the interview) at any time without penalty.
Informed Consent for Persons who Helped Participant’s Acquire and/or Develop Literacies (former principals and coaches)
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

Voluntary nature:
Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. You may decide not to participate in interviews with me. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship or your former student’s relationship with his university or with me.

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Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield  
Graduate Student  
English Department  
213 East Hall  
Bowling Green, Ohio  43403  
(919) 236-8740 (cell phone)  
(419) 372-0333 (fax)

Informed Consent for Persons who Helped Participant’s Acquire and/or Develop Literacies  
(former principals and coaches)  
“A Study of African American Male Literate Practices”

Contact Information
If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me, Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield, principal investigator, at 919-236-8740 or by e-mail at sfaulkn@bgsu.edu. You may also contact Professor Lee Nicokson, my research advisor and dissertation committee chairperson, at leenick@bgsu.edu or at 419-372-7556.

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Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of Research Participant ____________________________ Date ________________

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