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VSCO Stickers Unpeeled: Engaging Critical and Multiliteracies Pedagogy with Preservice English Teachers

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Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative participatory research study was to explore what happens when English language arts (ELA) preservice teachers collaborate to develop multimodal, intersectional, and critical feminist empowerment literacy curricula. This study centered on the following research question: How do ELA preservice teachers make sense of how pop-cultural, multimodal texts such as VSCO stickers frame girlhood and womanhood? Multiple data were collected: audio and video recording transcripts of monthly Saturday workshops, artifacts, such as curriculum writing and workshop photographs, researcher journals, analytic memos, and a shared Google Drive of written student thinking. The constant comparative method was used to analyze and triangulate the data. Analyses of data revealed that preservice teachers were able to critically analyze consumerism relating to VSCO stickers and girlhood and were able to notice how stickers typecast and reify individualism while also navigating authenticity during self-selection and categorizing stickers. Additionally, data analysis demonstrated how critical literacies played a role in the preservice teachers' understanding of how several groups, communities, and individual voices were not recognized in the marketing and consumption of VSCO sticker packaging as well as providing additional gender biases in society.

Keywords: critical literacies, critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, multiliteracies pedagogy, participatory research, preservice teacher, VSCO stickers



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The relationship between critical and multiliteracies pedagogical approaches to the teaching and learning of English language arts (ELA) are naturally intertwined. Vasquez (2010) reminds teacher educators there is “no such thing as a critical literacy text. Rather, there are texts through which we may better be able to create spaces for critical literacies” (p. 2). Extending the pedagogical understanding with critical literacies, there are no multiliteracies texts, just texts through which we may create better spaces for multiliteracies. These spaces for critical-and-multiliteracies in ELA classrooms have the potential to be sites of pedagogical resistance, as they afford meaning-makers the opportunities to deeply question and think critically about their worlds through a variety of multimodal texts. Janks’ (2014) germinal critical literacies instruction of engaging her students in critical meaning-making of a water bottle is inherently a multiliteracies approach to critical literacy instruction, as readers are moving beyond literacy as a passive consumption of print-focused texts, and toward the enactment of critical literacy practices (New London Group, 1996).

In their seminal work on multiliteracies pedagogies, the New London Group (1996) argued for youth-centered spaces to become more agentic in their literacy practices:

actively recognizing and using the ‘available resources’ of multiple modalities as dynamic representational materials and tools for ‘designing’ and then critically ‘redesigning’ their identities, opportunities, and futures as global citizens of an increasingly connected yet diverse world (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 23).

In essence, a multiliteracies framework notes that texts are all around us, and they are placed onto us as we define them through representational and recursive meaning-making. Texts are part of our

identities, and our identities are designed and redesigned by the texts with which we engage, which places our study within a critical, multiliteracies and social semiotic framework. Social semiotics is the study of signs and sign systems (modes of communication) in which the learner is an active participant in the culture that surrounds them to reconstruct knowledge within their framework of understanding (Gee 2012; Halliday, 1978; Street, 2003). Our study aligns with the above example of “available resources of multiple modalities as dynamic representational materials and tools (p. 23)” of which youth, adolescents, and adults “design” and “redesign” their identities through researching the once-popular-but-slightly-fading trend of adhering vinyl stickers to one’s material possessions, such as laptops, refillable water bottles, instrument cases, school folders, and luggage.

These seemingly innocuous multimodal texts are known as VSCO stickers, named after a fad-filled photo editing app popular with adolescent girls in particular, that sparked various trend cycles throughout the late 2010s and early 2020s. From there, the “VSCO Girl” was born: an aesthetic trend characterized by an outdoorsy, environmentally-conscious ethos under the banner of the “Save the Turtles” slogan (Ritschel, 2020). These VSCO slogans and aesthetic icons were transmediated by various companies and businesses, mass-produced onto vinyl sticker paper, and sold for users to adhere them to their possessions and within their spaces. Traditionally, the use of stickers has been marketed to girls early in childhood, from scratch-n-sniff stickers, Disney princess sticker scrapbooks, and the old-school Trapper-Keeper stickers, with canonically-gendered colors of light hues and neons, flowery smells, and overflowing with representations of rainbows, unicorns, and princesses. Therefore, it is no surprise that the VSCO stickers fad directly piqued adolescent girls’ interests, and collecting and applying these stickers became an age-appropriate

practice to continue past childhood into adulthood without the fear of being ridiculed for engaging in a “childish” practice.

Moreover, the birth and participation of the VSCO Girl is rife with stereotypical feminine practices, and by embedding our study of VSCO sticker meaning-making within a cohort of English language arts preservice teachers (ELA PSTs) that traditionally represents the makeup and composition of practicing teachers across the United States (e.g., white, middle-class women), an extra layer of analysis is added to this analysis by adopting a critical feminist lens.

Specifically, this article explains a research study that interrogated, from a critical feminist lens, how VSCO stickers frame girlhood and womanhood with 18 ELA PSTs attending a series of critical curriculum writing workshops at a mid-sized public university in the Midwest. When investigated in a purposefully designed multiliteracies pedagogical site filled with a cohort of ELA PSTs in a critical curriculum writing program, VSCO stickers can exemplify multiliteracies opportunities as spaces of critical feminist pedagogical resistance. Through participatory research methodology and focus group techniques, as well as drawing on workshop/classroom observational data and constant comparative analysis strategies, this research emphasizes the critical-and-multiliteracies practices of the workshop participants. Findings include how ELA PSTs experienced critical considerations of consumerism, interrogated typecasting and individualism regarding feminine practices and expectations of girlhood, and how they adopted a critical literacies stance when making meaning from the texts.

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Researchers’ Positionalities, Multiliteracies Style

To highlight the relationship between multimodal texts and their intricate interrelation with our perceived, situated, and performed identities, we present our positionality as researchers through an analytical excavation of how we have chosen to represent ourselves through our multimodal textual branding. As five researchers who identify as cisgender, middle-class, white women, we understand the many limitations of our intersectional understandings of how feminism affects the racialized lived experiences of BIPOC women in the broader patriarchal society. Therefore, we vulnerably situate ourselves in this research by sharing our understandings of how the texts we choose to present - the vinyl stickers adhered to one of our material possessions —after a critical feminist analysis, lent themselves towards a broader realization of the omnipresent whiteness inherent in the aesthetics of these mass-marketed stickers.

Kelli, understanding that we read the world as a text (Freire & Macedo, 1987), knew that any multimodal text she chose to semi-permanently adhere to her laptop would become a text that could be read onto her identity. Because the intended meaning of the text is out of the author’s hands once it is entered into the meaning-making capacities of the reader (Rosenblatt, 1994), Kelli has always struggled to give up control of the reader’s meaning-making process when it pertains to how she is being read - an intertextual control freak of sorts. Therefore, Kelli has been forever wary of the relative permanence of multimodal texts on her personal (i.e., tattoos, patches on clothing) or material possessions (i.e., bumper stickers, VSCO stickers on her laptop). But,

as a middle-aged woman who grew up obsessing over Trapper Keepers and Lisa Frank in the 1990s, she loves colorful, whimsical stationery and stickers, and she has never said no to free, adhesive, branded swag. She navigates these tensions by putting any and all stickers she receives onto her traveling book cart [see Figure 1], making it a walking collage of texts she exemplifies during her critical-and-multiliteracies instruction with ELA PSTs.

Figure 1

Kelli's Book Cart



Katherine examined her MacBook Pro [see Figure 2], initially feeling confident her sticker selection best represented her sarcastic personality (e.g., “*I clapped because it finished, not because I liked it*” and “*Sorry I’m late; I got here as soon as I wanted to*”) as well as her love for travel (e.g., stickers showcasing Paris, London, Lisbon, and Istanbul), seeking out specific stickers of locations she recently visited. During this activity, Katherine re-examined these sticker choices

through a critical feminist literacy lens (Bruce et al., 2008; Moya-Guijarro & Ventola, 2021) and noticed troubling gender representations, such as her Italy sticker representing a man driving a Vespa with a woman holding onto his shoulders behind him, while also wearing 5-inch red high heels—which are two things Katherine would never identify with (wearing heels and letting someone else drive, especially a man). While critiquing her stickers, she still keeps them on her laptop, partially due to laziness and partially because she still identifies with many of the slogans but now feels confident she can problematize the message.

Figure 2

Katherine's Work Laptop



A relic of Julia’s formative years, this middle school laptop [see Figure 3] showcases less of who she was, and more of who she desired to be seen as by her peers (Kennedy, 2024; Kress, 2000). Since VSCO stickers were a telltale signal of someone’s trendy status, and for middle school students who just wanted to “fit in,” decorating a laptop was the first step. Julia chose stickers that would display her adoration of travel—such as those with maps, quotes like “*Here’s to the Wild*” and “*See the World*,” and the trendy Pura Vida brand. Not only did these stickers

speak to her personal interests, but they also subtly spoke to her craving to be known as a “world-traveler,”: the vinyl stickers acting as performative status symbols. In retrospect, Julia recognizes the inherent issues of this thought process; however, she believes the story of her middle school laptop is valuable when considering how secondary students engage with multimodal texts to craft their personal narratives and outward appearances (Wohlwend, 2009a).

Figure 3

Julia’s Middle School Laptop



As a creative person, Ava loves to portray her interests through a visual medium. She thinks of her laptop stickers [see Figure 4] not as the sole rendering of her character, but instead as a glimpse into her as a person, which can spark conversations with others. As an English major, Ava is passionate about books, which is aptly represented through her stickers, many of them quotes from classic literature, as well as a sticker of smiling books holding a banner that reads “Let’s all go to the library!” Ava’s artistic interests as well as her identity as a proud LGBTQ+ individual are represented through two Keith Haring (a prominent gay artist) stickers on her laptop. She also has a Taurus astrology sticker, a zodiac sign typically associated with dependability, organization, and

loyalty—all traits she hopes to embody. In sum, Ava’s stickers are depictions of what makes her happy and reminders of the type of well-read, artistic, and kind person she hopes to be.

Figure 4

Ava’s Current Laptop Stickers

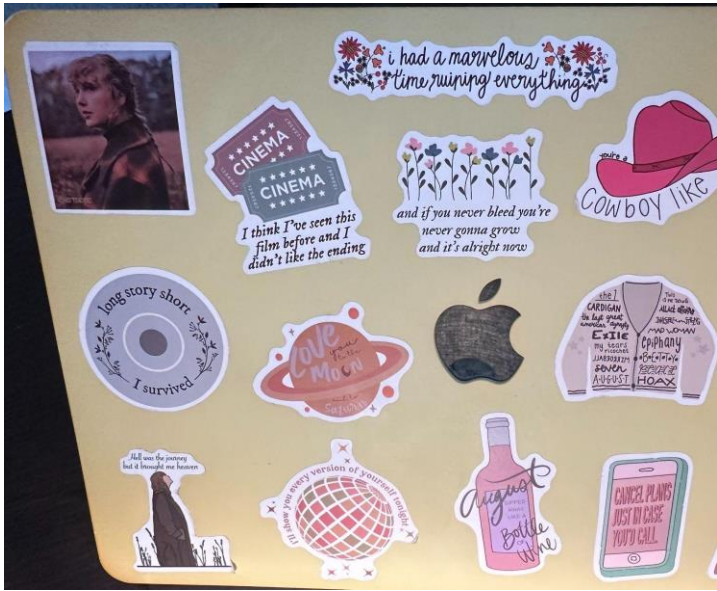


The stickers on Delaney’s laptop noticeably have a common theme: they are all about the global popstar, Taylor Swift [see Figure 5]. Delaney was meticulous in curating the stickers, and painstakingly agonized how the stickers could best represent Delaney’s most meaningful and impactful lived experiences permanently enhanced by Swift’s artistry (Dyson, 1997). Throughout her life, Delaney has grappled with anxiety and depression, inspiring her to choose stickers with some of the most vulnerable of Swift’s lyrics, such as, “and if you never bleed you’re never gonna grow”, as well as “long story short, I survived”. They define the strength that Swift instills in her music, and the presence of the stickers on Delaney’s laptop conveys the ways she found a similar sense of strength while conquering her battles with mental health throughout her life. Each of these stickers defines a different part of Delaney’s identity, therefore demonstrating to the world that she is a young woman who has lived a life comprised of

struggle and darkness, and yet, she has found meaningful art that has aided her in powering through those times to celebrate the love and fearlessness that life has to offer.

Figure 5

Delaney's Current Laptop Stickers



Theoretical Frameworks

There is a dearth of research of empirical studies that engage ELA PSTs in the sensemaking intersection of multiliteracies and critical literacies, specifically pop-cultural texts such as VSCO stickers. However, this study is situated within research that calls for teacher preparation sites to critically unpack how pop culture and mass media are consumed within society (e.g. Flores-Koulish, 2005; Sellnow & Endres, 2023) and highlight the importance of semiotic textual analysis and curation (Baker, 2012).

Research on multiliteracies highlights that preservice teachers have unpacked multimodal playlist assignments to conceptualize multimodal and humanizing teaching methods (Neville & Popielarz, 2023), have engaged in rhetorical analysis of digital

memes to respond to an influx of misinformation (Crovitz & Moran, 2020), and have been engaged with the learning potential of pedagogies of play, citing sticker engagement as a self-chosen creative experience that centered learning (Galbraith, 2022). Engaging K-12 youth in these meaning-making experiences in digital spaces, such as in semiotic understandings of iconography in digital, autobiographical writing (Batchelor et al., 2015), playing with toys and artifacts to imagine identities (Wohlwend, 2009a), and unpacking how youth use (digital) stickers as literacy practices (Pauw, 2023) have also shown the deep meaning-making considerations of semiotic texts.

Paired with multiliteracies, critical feminist pedagogy can be a transformative way to engage in social semiotic analysis. For example, Priske and Amato (2020) engaged middle school students in a critical feminist analysis of peritextual information with texts marketed as feminist. Zhai et al. (2021) examined patterns across picturebooks that showcased family life consisting of husband/wife roles and found that they perpetuated gender stereotypes and gender-biased patterns, which limits the possibilities of women's contributions to family and society. In addition, Amato and Priske (2021) call to support teachers in interrogating how practices upheld by educational institutions reproduce white feminism through the study of young adult literature.

Multiliteracies Pedagogy

The theory of multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) was developed by the New London Group, their theoretical foci on the changing social, economic, and political world. Perry (2012) notes:

Those within the multiliteracies framework place a much greater emphasis on the changing nature of the world – and the power relationships that are constructed within –

and the ways in which language and literacy use change and adapt in response (p. 59).

Additionally, multiliteracies encompass all forms of communication, including out-of-school literacies (Kist, 2005; Kress, 2000) to involve students' cultures and dominant language. It posits that literacy as a whole is situational, social, and multimodal regarding meaning. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) stated that the multiliteracies framework illuminates how literary practices in school and curriculum are only part of the representation in students' lives. There are numerous forms of literacy students engage with, often daily, outside of school, reading, and writing (traditional benchmarks of learning), which are not the only forms of representation.

Moreover, texts that are regarded as multimodal live in many forms of depiction (print- and non-print modes) where one is not privileged over the other. Multiliteracies also examine how these "texts" are created and used in everyday life, thus encouraging both the process of creation as well as the production of meaning, especially when woven together to create a new text (Batchelor, 2018, 2019; Hughes & Robertson, 2010; Kist, 2005; Kress, 2003; Wohlwend, 2009b). When students engage in and critically read a text (e.g., painting, song, dance, writing), they recognize cultural foundations that may influence their interpretation(s) of the text. Furthermore, becoming critically literate means that readers have mastered the ability to study and critique messages and learn to make meaning from texts in a reflective manner.

To continue, multiliteracies and critical literacy assist one another since one aspect of critical literacy is to

analyze visuals with semiotic interpretation. This means that what is presented as an image during the reading of a text can be deconstructed for deeper meaning and cues, which may have an additional, alternative representation. VSCO stickers, in

particular, can serve as visual cues to others by communicating aspects of a person's identity, such as indicating interests, preferences, values, and affiliations. VSCO stickers are a cultural phenomenon that can be examined as an entire text itself: the trend for self-expression and authenticity ironically encapsulated and available in consumer-generic packaging. By exploring this intersection through a critical literacy lens,

this study aims to challenge consumerized preconceptions, seeking a deeper understanding of identity and representation in an educational context.

Critical Feminist Pedagogy

The teacher education program is a space where critical and feminist pedagogy can and should be addressed (Scering, 1997). Critical feminist pedagogy aims to analyze and question society—and the texts subsequently consumed and produced by it—by challenging the dominant voice of men sustained by our patriarchal society (Ahmed, 2017). Furthermore, critical feminist pedagogy draws upon the ideology and lens of feminism, which believes in and fights for not only the equity of the female gender in a patriarchal world but also the equity of all marginalized identities in a society that perpetually uplifts and advantages the voices of dominant populations. This ideology endorses the idea that feminism is for everyone and that employing a critical perspective toward patriarchal ideologies is beneficial

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for anyone looking to recognize and destabilize the norms of our current world (hooks, 2000). In essence, critical feminist pedagogy seeks to uncover, critically consider, and reconstruct our understandings of various texts through a lens of feminism.

Through utilizing critical feminist pedagogy in an ELA classroom setting, secondary students prepare to perceive, analyze, and challenge the systems of power and oppression that inflict our modern society. By gaining this transformative perspective, learners are also primed to interrogate the inequities perpetuated by traditional, print-based texts studied in ELA spaces, including—but not limited to—canonical novels that often privilege a white, heterosexual male experience (e.g., Bruce et al., 2008; Priske & Amato, 2020; Rushek & MacDowell, 2023; Toliver & Hadley, 2021). Moreover, equipped with a feminist lens for reading and responding to texts, educators can not only incite gender empowerment but also open space for interrogating and validating lived experiences across intersectional identities such as age, race, sexual orientations, ethnicity, religion, locality, body, ability, etc. (Crenshaw, 1990; Webb et al., 2002). One of the key ways to curate an empowering, validating space for secondary students in ELA classrooms is by promoting positive representation through text curation, whether that be through literature that displays multidimensional female characters, or inclusive instructional choices that center the voices of marginalized communities (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). In doing so, students are more adept at open-mindedness and compassion: core aspects of critical feminist pedagogy (Hoffmann & Stake, 1998).

The power of combining critical thinking skills—which hooks (2000) argues is imperative to the

development of students' comprehension and empathy—with the instructional lens of feminism, leads students to be able to deconstruct and reconstruct systemic issues in texts they face day-to-day and outside of the purview of their schooling. When approaching VSCO stickers in particular—texts and pop culture phenomena present in students' lives—we enlist critical feminist pedagogy as a framework to question the nuanced, lived experiences of girlhood and womanhood exhibited through and by the text. Moreover, critical feminist pedagogy inspires us to recognize and confront injustice and inequity that might be perpetuated by literacies engaged with by students, such as these stickers that commonly adorn their laptops and water bottles.

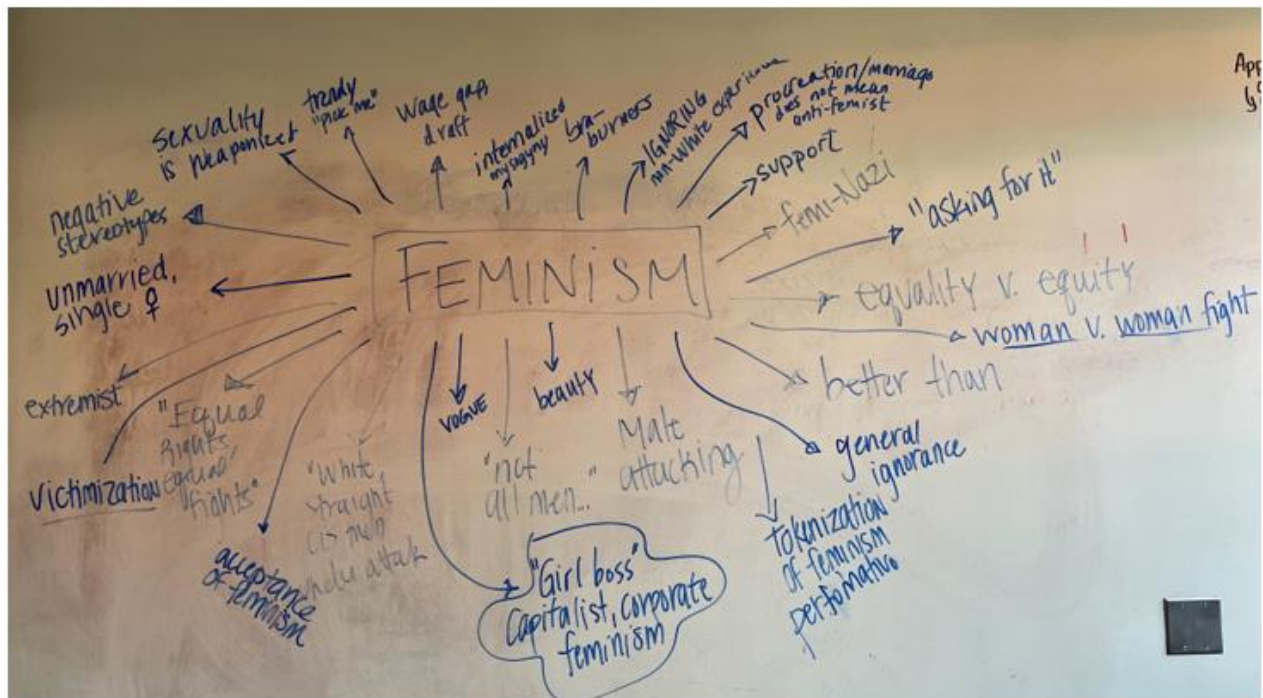
“... critical feminist pedagogy inspires us to recognize and confront injustice and inequity that might be perpetuated by literacies engaged with by students, such as these stickers that commonly adorn their laptops and water bottles.”

Methods for Undertaking Research

The New London Group's (1996) multiliteracies pedagogy is a transformative approach to teaching and learning that includes four dimensions: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice, which have been revisited to align semantically with knowledge processes, namely: experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing, and applying (Kalantzis & Cope, 2010). These multiliteracies' pedagogical tenets were considered when designing this research project as a site of potential pedagogical resistance. Cope and Kalantzis (2015) outline these dimensions, of which we explicitly drew from as methodological frames for this study.

The first dimension, *situated practice/experiencing*, highlights the contextual nature of textual meaning-making experiences by weaving in-school learning with the rest of life. This is highlighted in the current

Figure 6

Building a Collaborative Vocabulary and Schema of Feminism

study by engaging ELA PSTs with the texts they've chosen to adhere to their laptops and water bottles: the VSCO stickers. Next, we utilized *overt instruction/conceptualizing*, which involves bringing students into the languages, discourses, and specialized knowledge of an expert community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Our study was situated within a space of mediated yet co-constructed knowledge production with two literacy teacher educators and 18 ELA PSTs. All were engaged with overt instructional tactics such as generating a shared vocabulary of feminism and critical feminist framing activities to elicit deep discussion [see Figure 6]. *Critical framing/analyzing* fosters the critical capacity of the ELA PST, seen in the interrogation of relationships of power in the analysis of how the text functions in relation to its readers, such as real-world texts like VSCO stickers. The final dimension, *transformed practice/applying*, asks knowledge producers to apply their nuanced understandings to

real-world situations, such as the applicative work ELA PSTs undertake in bridging critical and multiliteracies pedagogy from theory to their future practice with secondary ELA students.

The Site of Multimodal Pedagogical Resistance: Situated Practice/Experiencing

This study is situated within a larger, grant-funded, teacher-scholar, multiple-inquiry project called "Writing Us In: Developing Critical Literacy Curriculum for ELA Classrooms." Developed and enacted by Kelli and Katherine, both ELA teacher educators, this curriculum-writing laboratory provided approximately 18 ELA PSTs the space to build a cohort that collaboratively developed, analyzed, and excavated (e.g., Rushek & Seylar, 2022; Sealey-Ruiz, 2019) ELA curriculum centered on disrupting white, heteronormative, patriarchal, print-text focused, canonical ELA curriculum. The

overarching research question for this grant is: *What happens when ELA PSTs collaborate to develop multimodal, intersectional, and critical feminist empowerment literacy curricula?*

The “Writing Us In” grant equipped the ELA PSTs with texts, literature, and the collaborative expertise and mentorship of Kelli and Katherine to create a repository of transformative curriculum from which the teaching candidates could draw as they moved into their field experiences and initial years of teaching. The cohort consisted of 18 ELA PSTs, 17 who identified as white, 1 as biracial; 17 who self-identified as women, one as a man; and a variety of identities on the spectrum of sexual orientation. The cohort’s demographics were representative of the overall demographics of the secondary ELA program at this mid-size public university, and slightly more white and female than the United States’ teaching force, which is 77% women and 79% white educators (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Before the development of the “Writing Us In” project, the cohort participants were able to democratically determine which critical theoretical framework they wished to interrogate the learning and teaching of ELA, and they chose critical feminism. Kelli and Katherine developed the three Saturday curriculum-building workshops to engage the cohort in disrupting canonical texts such as Arthur Miller’s (1953) *The Crucible* from a critical feminist lens, as it is the most widely-taught canonical text in ELA spaces in our area (see Batchelor, Rushek & Beaumont, 2024).

To develop the theoretical underpinnings of critical feminist pedagogy, monthly full-day workshops involved the ELA PSTs in many researched-based practices and meaning-making experiences. For example, Kelli and Katherine engaged the ELA PSTs in discourse around multimodality and identity intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990) through a critical, feminist, and gender visual literacies instruction of

picture books (Moya-Guijarro & Ventola, 2021), and an analysis of peritextual information of feminist-themed young adult literature (Priske & Amato, 2020). Participants also deconstructed notions of white feminism in young adult literature (Amato & Priske, 2021) and feminist-marketed pop cultural texts such as VSCO stickers. This particular article specifically focuses on the data collected from the workshop activity centering on the VSCO sticker analysis, which reports on the inquiry question, *How do preservice ELA teachers make sense of how pop-cultural, multimodal texts such as VSCO stickers frame girlhood and womanhood?*

VSCO Sticker Instructional Analysis Activity: Overt Instruction/Conceptualizing

As part of the larger critical curriculum writing workshop, the VSCO sticker activity serves as the site for this study. The teaching activity arose when Kelli was teaching a course on Developing Positive Classroom Communities and Cultures in the Fall of 2021. She noted that nearly all of the students in her class had stickers covering their laptops and water bottles. In discussing student-centered external motivators, Kelli noted that educators should be in tune with what is considered “social currency” for their future students, and offhandedly mentioned, “like these vinyl stickers you all have all over your stuff.” A student piped up, “I feel like anybody would do anything for these stickers. They’d actually be great to give out as rewards for students.” Kelli rushed online to purchase a 300-sticker multi-pack, as she was going to engage her cross-disciplinary PSTs in an experiential learning activity that interrogated how competition and meritocratic factors play into teaching and learning in the classroom when the reward system is external. When the pack arrived, she curiously opened them and started, as is her nature, sorting them into piles of similar aesthetics and messaging.

As she engaged in this process, her critical literacies lens was on high alert. She noticed that these stickers—these texts—were very limiting in their marketing and representation. They all seemed to be marketed to girls, with performative identity and character traits, such as ‘wanderlust,’ performative feminism, and ‘girl power’ messages (see Priske & Amato, 2020), pithy quotes, and the dark academia aesthetic, rooted in traditional European romanticization of intellectual pursuits. She immediately ordered five more of the multi-packs and waited for a chance to engage ELA PSTs in a more systematic, deep, co-constructed analytical critical-and-multi-literacies learning experience as she had just experienced.

When Kelli and Katherine started the “Writing Us In” program, and the 18 ELA PSTs chose the critical feminist lens from which to disrupt the teaching and learning of ELA, Kelli knew the VSCO sticker activity would be included in the workshop. While one 300-sticker multi-pack sourced from an online retailer is not a generalization of all of the available VSCO stickers on the market, it serves as an overall sample for the types of available VSCO stickers available for purchase and thus a convenient sample of how a collection of these adhesive texts may overarchingly frame girl- and womanhood. In addition, Kelli noticed that many of the stickers in this multi-pack were exactly the same stickers sold individually (for a markup price) at local coffee shops and boutiques in the area. In addition, the multi-pack being a relatively cost-effective bulk purchase lends itself to the “anthology” of texts that an in-service teacher may purchase for varied classroom uses. Thus, the multi-pack serves as the collection of texts in this sample, yet the authors realize the mass-produced nature limits the breadth of available VSCO sticker texts to analyze. These are considerations the ELA PSTs took up within the analytic and discursive processes outlined in the findings.

After building a feminist vocabulary through dialogue [see Figure 6], which is an instructional method of critical feminist pedagogy (Mathew & Barrow, 2021; Priske & Amato, 2020), the ELA PSTs then engaged in the analysis of feminism through peritextual information as outlined in Priske and Amato (2020). Four groups of four were given one unopened multi-pack of 300 vinyl stickers, a brief introduction to the experiential learning activity, and the directions to “unpack them, talk about them, and organize them into groups however you want” [see Figure 7]. After 30 minutes, Kelli and Katherine asked the ELA PSTs to write down the categories they came up with on a large poster paper and facilitated a long, critical discussion about what they saw, what they found, and what was missing.

Figure 7

ELA PSTs Collaborating on Creating Sticker Categories



Methods

To attempt to answer our inquiry into how the “Writing Us In” cohort members undertook critical feminist meaning-making of pop-cultural, multimodal texts such as VSCO stickers, we turn to qualitative participatory research as the method for understanding the phenomena of how pop-cultural texts such as VSCO stickers frame girlhood and womanhood from the perspectives of ELA PSTs. Participatory research is an overarching term for research frameworks, designs, and methods that directly collaborate with those affected by the issue to engage in systematic inquiry (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). The research is co-constructed with partners who hold insider knowledge and expertise, but may not be trained in formal research methods (Jagosh et al., 2012). There are specific participatory research methodologies often used in educational research, such as teacher action research, where preservice and/or in-service teachers collaborate to systematically study the context of a problem-in-practice they wish to solve (Price & Valli, 2005), and participatory action research with adults and youth that aims to co-constructively identify a problem or inquiry question in a local context (i.e., Watson & Marciano, 2015). However, this current study is a broadly-defined participatory research project and not a participatory/teacher action research, as the phenomena and inquiry questions were developed by Kelli and Katherine, and the co-collaborators, three ELA PSTs, were invited as research stakeholders due to their interest in critical feminist (Ahmed, 2017) and multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) pedagogies.

Therefore, we used a collaborative focus group technique as a research method, which serves to elucidate the topic of interest through applied research methods with a select group of interested stakeholders (Krueger, 2014). Because participatory research integrates academic research and

theoretical expertise with the knowledge and contextual expertise of the collaborators (Cargo & Mercer, 2008), Kelli and Katherine needed to situate the expertise of the collaborators—ELA PSTs—squarely in systemic inquiry for teaching and learning purposes. The focus group (Julia, Ava, and Delaney) were trained by Kelli and Katherine in the techniques of the literature review process, as well as in the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) of qualitative data analysis. The focus group collaborators then completed data analysis and theme-building recursively derived from transcribed data from the VSCO sticker analysis activity in which they were original participants in the process. Therefore, the research undertaken shifted from a top-down approach of teacher educators’ (Kelli and Katherine’s) systematic inquiry into how ELA PSTs made sense of pop-cultural texts, to a collaborative, participatory focus-group technique of three of the 18 total participants’ focused critical meaning-making in the multiliteracies pedagogical site of learning.

Data Collection

The data collected for the “Writing Us In” program included approximately 15 hours of audio and video recordings of the workshops, which were transcribed for data analysis, collected artifacts such as curriculum writing and workshop photographs, and a post-program qualitative survey. The data collected used for this particular study included transcripts from four groups of four-five ELA PSTs in the program, one overlapping transcript of a whole-group 45-minute discussion, researcher journals, analytic memos, and a shared Google drive of written student thinking, process notes, and digital photographs.

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis of the data was ongoing, constantly informing the progression of the study.

Kelli and Katherine performed an initial open coding of the data. While reading the data, they wrote memos of potential ways to code, noting any instances of themes that emerged (Maxwell, 2012). Additionally, both kept a researcher journal throughout the study allowing them to revisit their thinking about each meeting's discussions that occurred during the workshop time.

Specifically, the first phase of data analysis consisted of reading all four groups' transcripts of their recorded conversations during the activity with the VSCO stickers. Here, Kelli and Katherine shared emergent codes revealed in the ELA PSTs' dialogue among the four groups. They individually created a shared document chart that housed larger codes (such as "identity", "stereotyping", and "pop-culture references") of groups' transcripts including students' comments that they felt fit within each of the codes. However, they both found that the part where data overlapped in each group's transcripts included a 45-minute whole-group discussion, which they believed housed rich data for a deeper dive into coding. This belief led Kelli and Katherine to invite the three ELA PSTs (Julia, Ava, and Delaney), who participated in the workshop, to also code the overlapping transcript portion of the VSCO sticker discussion activity. They were instructed to specifically note key moments of conversations in this joint discussion. Since inclusivity is an important part of participatory research, Kelli and Katherine believed this data analysis centered on the "collaborate" and "empower" levels of this research method, which prioritizes shared decision-making and co-leadership in data analysis (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020).

Therefore, in the final phases of data analysis, the five authors met via Zoom, transcribing their two-hour meeting where Julia, Ava, and Delaney shared their data and reflective memos; Kelli and Katherine strictly observed their conversation and took notes to assist in discerning overlapping codes. Then, all five

authors went through each of their student comment examples underneath each code to confirm agreement. They also combined codes from reflections, observations, and transcripts of conversations to create themes using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1967; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), thus triangulating the data. Then, notes were reread with these themes in mind, seeking out quotes that not only verified themes but could also be used as samples. These quotes were inserted into a shared document, separated by themes. These themes emerged through a lengthy discussion, and Julia, Ava, and Delaney unanimously decided to have an overarching umbrella theme of "capitalism", which emerged most frequently during data triangulation and discussion. Then the ELA PSTs created three connected subthemes, making them the findings for this article. Kelli and Katherine agreed with these findings and only then did they reveal to the ELA PSTs their themes, which aligned with what the ELA PSTs noted, thus creating another moment of triangulating data. These three connected subthemes are described in the section below.

Findings

Critical Framing and Analyzing

Throughout the analysis and subsequent discourse production, the ELA PSTs highlighted an overarching, unavoidable critical framework that implicates the ways ELA PSTs made sense of how multimodal, pop-cultural texts framed womanhood and girlhood: capitalism and consumerism. We all exist within a consumer culture, highlighted by consumption and acquisition, a desire for newness, and the democratization of this desire through an unregulated market as the means to achieve individual happiness (Leach, 2011). The ELA PSTs framed their analysis of the VSCO stickers within these critical considerations. Filtering the data through a critical feminist lens, the consumer power

of women cannot be divorced from the marketing toward and subsequent framing of girlhood and womanhood through pop-cultural texts such as VSCO stickers. As Brennan (2015) notes, “if the consumer economy had a sex, it would be female,” as “women drive 70-80% of all consumer purchasing, through a combination of their buying power and influence (n.p).” As this theme weaves through the data, we critically frame the understanding of the ELA PSTs’ sensemaking firstly through the overarching intersection of consumer capitalism, trends, and pop-culture, considering its relationship to women and girls (Kennedy, 2024). Under this umbrella framing, data analysis elucidated the following three themes, revealed in the critical and multiliteracies sensemaking of VSCO stickers: *critical considerations of consumerism, typecasting and reifying individualism, and adopting a critical literacies stance to interrogate whose voices are missing.*

Critical Considerations of Consumerism

“I feel like trends move so fast,” Kelsey¹ noted while sorting through the VSCO stickers. Many other ELA PSTs commented on the revolving door of trends, especially about internet culture and social media, while making meaning of the stickers. Through the task of sorting stickers into categorized piles, one group had a category of stickers that they called, “Outdated Internet.” An ELA PST from that group elaborated on the pile, saying this group of stickers were, “like old trends, like a bunch of Vine stickers and other things like Instagram likes...things like that I forgot some of that had existed.” In this discussion, the ELA PSTs discerned the loss of relevance and obsolescence of the VSCO stickers that refer to outdated Internet jokes, bygone social media

platforms (such as the video app Vine), and social media functions that no longer exist (such as the Instagram thumbs-up “like” button which is now a heart symbol button). Others agreed about the outdated nature of some of the stickers, noting that, “I just feel like it’s cycled around things so quickly...But some of these are, like, obsolete.” Another ELA PST, Josie, also noticed how these outdated stickers felt irrelevant to the current culture because those trends were no longer popular, “They tried to include these to sound, like, trendy but even now, some of that stuff, like, doesn't sound trendy anymore.”

Through analysis of the outdated stickers, Kelli discussed with the group the consumerist nature of printing stickers based on trends that become popular just as quickly as they then lose relevance. Kelli noted that this sticker-making practice was, “Fast-fashion throw away culture...It’s like throw away, single-use, sort of.” Others agreed with this sentiment, mentioning how stickers they might have used years prior, they wouldn’t use now because the content was no longer trendy or popular.

The ELA PSTs made the connection between the fast-fashion culture of the trends depicted on the stickers with the similarly rapidly changing aesthetics of girls and women who follow said trends and buy these stickers to represent those temporary identities. In the same manner that stickers can be peeled off and swapped for a new one, so could the aesthetics and identities of girls and women. As one ELA PST, Veronica noticed:

A lot of them are like aesthetics that are going around with TikTok. You see those girls who are going through the different aesthetics and

¹ All ELA PST names are pseudonyms with the exception of the three participants-turned-researchers, Julia, Ava, and Delaney.

dressing and acting as like, edgy, preppy, all this other stuff.

Veronica linked these trendy social media-inspired aesthetics taken up by girls with the marketing goals of the VSCO stickers. She noted, “It’s like a little bit of a marketing scheme because there’s different aesthetics and stereotypes and types of girls represented in this.” Along the line of analyzing marketing, the ELA PSTs critically considered who the stickers were being targeted towards, and what that said about consumerism. “These are targeted towards people who are teenagers or who have less money,” Josie commented after a discussion of sticker-buying options. They also connected the fact that this targeted audience may also be the same audience who participates in the fast-fashion culture, promoted on social media sites like Instagram and TikTok, geared toward their demographic using famous influencers who look like them. The ELA PSTs analyzed the difference between buying cheap bulk Amazon stickers that depict vague interests versus opting for more personalized, and also more expensive options, such as the sticker website, Redbubble.

The ELA PSTs also made the connection between teachers who may be buying stickers for their students and the economic limitations that teachers may have. They examined how the economic background of a first- or second-year teacher may impact their ability to purchase personalized stickers for their students that might more accurately reflect individualized student identities. As Veronica said, “If teachers want to buy stickers for their students, they’re not going to be able to avoid buying variety packs.”

As the conversation moved toward analyzing the motivations of sticker companies, the ELA PSTs noted how these international companies, distributed through Amazon, benefit from selling

cheap stickers by vaguely mentioning popular trends and aesthetics, outdated as they may be by the time the stickers are sold. In the discussion, Kelli stated that economic profit was the main goal of selling these VSCO stickers, saying, “Like a lot of this is truly capitalism and it always follows the money, right?” They made connections between consumerism and capitalism inherent in the single-use trendy stickers and thus the identities of girls they appealed to. Another ELA PST noticed how sticker companies appeal to vague depictions of identity because of their economic profit end goal. She noted:

And then going back to all the things that we talked about, like capitalism and everything, they are benefiting more from stereotyping people, because then they’ll probably sell more.

Typecasting and Reifying Individualism

From the transcript data, a dichotomy of thought processes arose when the ELA PSTs considered how VSCO Stickers might inform or interact with their idea of female “identities.” This dichotomy is characterized by individualism—the idea that the individual chooses a sticker that describes their specific personality, therefore assigning a definition to the sticker—versus the concept of “typecasting,” which is the idea that the sticker frames an individual into a certain category of interests and personality traits, therefore assigning a label to the person’s identity. In essence, two schools of thought came out of the data: those who believed that the person defines the sticker, and those who believed that the sticker defines the archetype of the person.

Typecasting and Challenging Typecasting.

Many of the ELA PSTs’ initial responses and reactions to sorting the packages of stickers were to assign an archetype or “typecast” to the type of person who

might put a certain sticker on their laptop. When presenting their group's sticker categories, participant-turned-researcher, Julia, shared "Also again [I] thought about, like, the kind of person that was you know, putting it on their laptop." Similarly, Dara, reflected, "I was just gonna say that a lot of the words they chose to, like, identify their categories with could just be applied to a person – you could say 'that's an intellectual person', 'that's an edgy person,' 'a funny person...'" Many others agreed with this concept, describing sticker categories based on different types of "-girls" and "-women": Julia categorized some into "sorority girl stickers"; Grace labeled some as "white mom stickers"; Reagan had categories such as "Hot Cheeto Girl" and "VSCO Girl"; and Kelsey and others had "Women in STEM". Many attributed a category to certain stickers based on who they envisioned owning the sticker. In further depth, Kelsey explained:

We have a teenage girl aesthetic. Yeah, so we just picked this representation. I think it's kind of similar to the like, like stickers for a white mom category, which is like one of them like they don't exactly fit anywhere else but they're just very much something that we would gear towards like, oh, like a teenage girl would like this.

During the large group discussion, Kelli shared her reflection on an in-classroom experience she had regarding VSCO stickers: "I gave everyone stickers. Right? So, then I was like, trying to pick out a sticker for everybody. But then that was very narrowing because it was also like, me deciding what I thought that person was based on one of these [stickers]." In fact, Julia remembers receiving a VSCO sticker from Kelli in that class, which was a sun or a turtle, and Ava still has her sunflower sticker on her journal. Kelli mused, "...when we give these stickers to somebody, what are we saying? Are we redefining their identity in a certain way?"

Others also reflected on how typecasting people based on the sticker categories felt similarly restrictive. Another ELA PST, Melissa, commented on how stickers categorize and limit people's identities: "And sort of in, like, promoting that identity, you sort of pigeonhole yourself." Ultimately, many of the ELA PST collaborators began to recognize and deconstruct the subconscious labels and typecasts that stickers were put onto people—more specifically, teenage girls. Veronica added that "[stickers are] shallow dives into who you are as a person." Upon this, many introduced questions of nuance, attempting to understand how and why they might view VSCO stickers as labels for young women, such as the sticker categories of "Hippie" girls and "Edgy" girls. Moreover, through critical classroom discourse, the concept of typecasting and stereotyping arose from likening certain stickers to certain people; however, a different perspective also came to light underscoring the dichotomy between stickers representing trends or labels and stickers representing one's authentic identity.

Reifying Individualism.

Some ELA PSTs viewed the selection of stickers as strictly an individual experience, categorizing many stickers simply based on nouns rather than the adjective descriptors of "-girls" referred to above. For example, in a joint discussion with her peers, Julia commented that some stickers are "...less having to do with aesthetics and, like, adjectives, and more having to do with nouns, like plants, but not like, intellectual. Or not like 'that girl is aesthetic.'"

Furthermore, other ELA PSTs spoke about personal, individual experiences they had with certain stickers when attempting to sort them into categories. For example, Melissa described her preference to a specific sticker: "It's just very, like, aesthetic, it's like that to me too because I saw this, and I'm like, this is beautiful." In addition, one of the groups chose to

label one of their sticker piles with this individualistic experience in mind:

One of our categories was that ‘we liked’ aesthetic, we just kind of were like, ‘Oh, this one’s cute’ when we put it there. And we chose the books with the little teacup on top. Because I felt like it fit all of our personalities.

Rather than ascribing a definition to the potential owner of a sticker, many were more inclined to ignore potential labels that came with stickers. Rather, a sect endorsed the idea that most people select stickers simply because they like them or feel as though they describe their personality. For example, Ava highlighted this thought in the joint discussion: “People choose if they decorate their laptops, or their water bottles, and will have to kind of pick stickers that fit their personality.”

Although many of the ELA PSTs noted that they didn’t ascribe to labels, they did account for how stickers can promote performative activism. This is indicated through their ability to recognize how stickers may project a false sense of assertive behavior towards change and reform for a given social issue or cause. Josie expressed, “Because it’s kind of performative-like. Because if you have that sticker, are you actually, like, doing anything?” They recognized the discrepancies between owning and using a sticker that promotes a given cause versus a genuine, determined effort and action in taking the initiative to fight for that given cause.

Ultimately, these conversations birthed diverse pathways into the ELA PSTs’ reactions to sticker-sorting: a person finding meaning in a sticker (an individualistic experience), engaging in performative activism through sticker adoption (without doing the work), or a sticker assigning meaning to a person (a “typecasting” experience).

Adopting a Critical Literacies Stance: What’s Missing?

This section showcases how ELA PSTs adopted a critical literacies stance developed from their teacher education program coursework, and how they became critical consumers during this activity. One of the tenets the ELA PSTs have examined within a critical literacies framework is to notice whose voices are missing in texts as well as the “*why*” and “*how*” behind voices who are deemed important and thus included instead (e.g., Batchelor, 2019; Rushek & MacDowell, 2023). Most importantly, the cohort questioned the ramifications surrounding what messages are being consumed by them and then reiterated in society.

To start, the ELA PSTs recognized the aesthetic orientation toward pastel backgrounds and light colors, which they perceived as “gentle” and “fragile.” In contrast, very few stickers in their packages aimed toward “teen girls” contained bold or dark colors, which can be construed as strong, masculine colors. Raegan noted that while there were a few stickers that seemed geared toward men, such as a boxing sticker, the background was red and black compared to the light pink and yellow background hues which contained feminine icons, such as rainbows, butterflies, and flowers.

Not only were the stickers “coded” in terms of masculine-perceived and feminine-perceived color schemes and images, but they also highlighted the dichotomy of activities genders could assume, take up, and relate to in society. For example, the ELA PSTs noticed that sports, superheroes, math, and history stickers were lacking in this bundle, which are often identified as masculine-perceived topics of interest. Regarding sports, Dara noted, “There’s literally other than like the Vine reference, not a single sport or like any kind of anything.” Julia also commented, “There was no like, superheroes like

Marvel, Star Wars, or other things like that.” Katherine stated, “Very few signs, no math. I like math! I will put a calculator on my laptop to represent it, but it's not there.” And Veronica noticed the lack of historical icons and/or events stating a lack of mythology and history in general, “Like there's no, no history like at all.”

In addition to male-perceived activities lacking in the sticker packs, the ELA PSTs also noted a lack of inclusivity in terms of identity. For example, there was no connection to the LGBTQ+ community or representation in the stickers. Fiona noted, “Like, there weren't any, like, gay or anything like that, like the only ones that are ‘Rainbow Saturday,’ and even then it's like, not really.” Ava agreed, noticing that “a lot of these are like rainbows too, which is also queer-coded.” This lack of representation of an entire community led ELA PSTs to explore the “why” in marketing. They discussed how VSCO stickers needed to be marketable and to gain profit, companies had to avoid controversy. Dara stated:

They want to be marketable. Like they can't say anything, basically. Which is why like, the performative stuff... oh, they can include a sticker that says, like, ‘Girl Power,’ but they can't include a sticker that says, ‘I'm a feminist’ or something like that, you know?

The ELA PSTs recognized that the lack of anything perceived as controversial in the stickers may lead consumers, particularly teen girls in this instance, to end up with a narrow view of what they should be interested in and want. Fiona posed to the group, “What does ‘girl power’ really mean if the brand/company does not actually stand for those things?” Fiona answered her question that maybe it had something to do with ostracizing potential buyers by promoting anything “remotely controversial, and for some reason, feminism, being inclusive of racial identities, LGBTQ+, etc. means

getting too controversial.” Political aversion was also noted by the ELA PSTs. Dara noted that one sticker that might be included in the pack, which could be perceived as controversial or political, might lead consumers to not purchase the entire pack, like a “‘We Say Gay’ sticker... like, maybe someone won't want to buy [the whole pack] because there's that *one* sticker in there that says something like that.”

Furthermore, the ELA PSTs discussed the semiotic messages many of the stickers displayed, which showcased a privileged lifestyle of a higher socioeconomic status. For example, the daily need for takeaway coffee, living the “Pura Vida” lifestyle, as well as expensive name brands noted by the students (i.e. Vineyard Vines) are all affordances and luxuries only people with disposable money or wealth can provide. Melissa stated, “I think a lot of these stickers also come from a very high privilege, and white privilege, especially socioeconomic status.” The ELA PSTs noticed that the user/buyer of these particular stickers can maintain and relate to those activities, which can be perceived as obtaining a higher socioeconomic income to sustain those purchases as well as the ability and accessibility to engage in travel, mostly in an overseas, tropical venue.

Overall, the ELA PSTs noticed the important link between what was missing in these packets and how they were marketed toward teen girls as the consumers; moreover, they recognized the lack of representation of male-perceived colors and activities, as well as living a perceived image of a certain lifestyle revolving around a high socioeconomic bracket noted/deemed by consuming those stickers. The deep connection made by the ELA PSTs regarding consumerism, the perception of others, and identity performance, while also maintaining a balance of authenticity, is embedded in VSCO stickers and will be discussed in the next section.

Discussion and Implications

This study is significant because it focused on an underrepresented aspect of multiliteracies using critical feminist pedagogy in an ELA workshop/classroom setting in which ELA PSTs prepared to perceive, analyze, and challenge the systems of power and oppression that inflict our modern society. Therefore, this study aims to build upon existing research but offer a new perspective to explore the affordances of meaning-making opportunities to deeply question and think critically about their worlds through a variety of texts (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Sellnow & Endres, 2023), such as VSCO stickers. Findings suggest that ELA PSTs became critical consumers recognizing the dichotomy between identity and consumerism. More specifically, they posited how texts (e.g., VSCO stickers) represented the way girls currently could identify, or rather, how the texts defined the way girls needed to “be” in society.

The ELA PSTs navigated capitalism by interrogating and noticing the limited roles and ways of being that the pop-cultural stickers showcased how women in society could be defined. They noted the tension that women and girls are ascribed (limiting) societal roles by the consumption of these pop-culture texts as well as noticing these texts also allow women and girls to try on different identities (Crenshaw, 1990; Kennedy, 2024). Adolescence is a developmental space where adolescents are “trying on” multiple and recursive ways of being in the world (Karkou & Joseph, 2017). For girls and young women, VSCO stickers allow for a low-stakes, passive audition of identity to see how they are taken up by those around them just by affixing them to their material possessions. The

“... ELA PSTs became critical consumers recognizing the dichotomy between identity and consumerism. More specifically, they posited how texts (e.g., VSCO stickers) represented the way girls currently could identify, or rather, how the texts defined the way girls needed to “be” in society.”

duality of the experience of these multimodal texts shaping one’s identity versus the identity shaping the choice of text could be an area of future research, as the VSCO marketing audience sells directly to prescribed categories of girlhood and womanhood. The affordances of multiliteracies and critical pedagogies to dismantle the limiting scope of representations of girls and women cannot be minimized in literacy teacher education.

Returning to the critical literacy framework, the authors note what was missing in the sensemaking of how VSCO stickers frame womanhood and girlhood throughout the data. Either the instructional activity, which was constrained by the parameters of the mass-marketed VSCO sticker multi-pack and instructional directions to sort them into categories, or the ELA PSTs’ subsequent discussion did little to interrogate and nuance feminism outside of the purview of whiteness. White feminism is a type of feminism that focuses on the advancement of white women, and either covertly or overtly does not include the advancement of Black, Indigenous, Women of Color, or their racial intersections. It is a feminism that focuses on accumulating individual power, not redistributing it (Beck, 2017). Despite coursework, embedded instruction, and the development of critical literacy lenses with our ELA PSTs, they did not include much critical discussion about race at the intersection of their discussions about how the texts framed girlhood and womanhood.

Moreover, since the majority of the ELA PSTs in this workshop identified as the traditional demographic of the education workforce in the United States (e.g.,

white, middle-class women), it is important to note that the overlook of racial identity in VSCO stickers again signifies the need to examine signs and sign systems not only in consumerism but also in curriculum, from a critical stance, including intersectionality at all points of entry.

Intersectionality, which is such an important aspect of critical feminist pedagogy (Crenshaw, 1990), was not a critical frame that was readily accessed by the ELA PSTs, and discussions of race may not have organically arisen had Katherine not directly questioned what was missing in the culminating discussion. As critical literacy teacher educators within a social justice-aligned teacher education program, Kelli and Katherine reiterate the importance of intersectionality in curriculum writing and textual representation (e.g., Batchelor, 2019; Rushek & Seylar, 2022). However, in the analysis of the data for this study, Kelli and Katherine underscore the importance of overt instruction and guidance to interrogate intersectional feminism with ELA PSTs, as the data highlights a strong focus on the individual rather than a collective ‘we’ of womanhood and girlhood that includes BIPOC women in the fight to dismantle patriarchal oppression. It is apparent that a critical ELA teacher education experience explicitly engages ELA PSTs in specific and pointed textual analysis aimed at enhancing feminism for everybody (hooks, 2009).

Overall, the stickers provided numerous affordances for ELA PSTs to engage in critical analysis from a consumerist and feminist perspective. ELA PSTs recognized that a multiliteracies framework inherently provides a resistant perspective, especially when they go through a critical education program and can practice in a space that was designed for this type of sense-making. This also encourages ELA PSTs to move forward in their teaching and be able to practice this experience using multiliteracies texts with their future students. Affixing a simple sticker to

one's laptop or water bottle showcases more than a reciprocal relationship between identity and text; moreover, the need for space for critical meaning-making ensures that everything is a text. ELA PSTs also realized that everything can be made a text and that these texts can be unpeeled to reveal the deeper and hidden, underlying messages and their relationship to power in society.

Transformed Practice

As the final tenet of multiliteracies pedagogy asks knowledge producers to apply their nuanced understandings to real-world situations, such as their personal literacy practices and future literacy teaching, the three participants-turned-researchers offer their enduring understandings about their engagement with critical and multiliteracies pedagogies.

As cis-women, ELA PSTs, critical consumers, and members of the research inquiry, our identities informed and transformed how we understood the complex diversities of multiliteracies and thus the real world. Julia, Ava, and Delaney began thinking critically about making meaning of visual texts, such as VSCO stickers, by examining their relationships with these texts. As laptop owners in a university setting and long-time sticker users, these visual literacies are used as communication tools to display one's interests and identities, especially in the socially poignant environment of a college campus. Through this study, Julia, Ava, and Delaney deepened their understanding of their stickers and interrogated, supported by a critical feminist lens, what their choices of visual media communicate and represent about themselves.

Furthermore, as participants in the group setting of the “Write Us In: Developing Critical Literacy Curriculum for ELA Classrooms” workshop, Julia, Ava, and Delaney examined and reconstructed their

conceptualization of texts—print and digital—through a critical feminist lens. Through group discussions, professor-led lectures, relevant literature, and collaborative peer work, Julia, Ava, and Delaney learned the tools necessary to critically analyze a text and contextualize its implications in the larger world. Informed by critical feminist pedagogy, they gained various key takeaways that will reflect and improve upon their practices as educators. They also noted the need for diversifying classroom libraries and curricular materials to uplift intersectional perspectives, reconstructing the literary canon to be relevant to students today, expressing teacher identity through vulnerability and authenticity, and recognizing the complexity of student identities as whole individuals.

Lastly, through situated multiliteracies practice, overt instruction, and critical feminist framing, the ELA PST researchers understand that spaces that allow for critical-and-multiliteracies of real-world texts like VSCO stickers can generate thoughtful, analytical discourse among students in and outside of the classroom. When the ELA PST researchers broadened their definition(s) of what constitutes a text poised for thoughtful critical-and-multiliteracies analysis, they broadened their repertoire of real-world texts that can be presented to their future students for study and critical scrutiny. They are inspired to bring texts less commonly used in classrooms for an array of entry points for critical analysis. They are more equipped to be and do critical-and-multiliteracies in the world (Vasquez, Janks, & Comber, 2019), and thus present these ways of being and doing to their future ELA students.

Conclusion

Within this workshop centered around feminism, the ELA PSTs re-examined and reframed their identities and critically considered their place as young women in the 21st century. Aware of the power of women as

consumers, Julia, Ava, and Delaney critically investigated their influence as consumers in a capitalist society. Through this reflection, they achieved the following realizations: the inherent white privilege steeped into the capitalist society that permeates all purchasing decisions, the manipulative power of marketing especially towards young women, and the societal constructs capitalism projects onto young women by perpetuating the idea that women have to fit into preconceived and digestible representations of womanhood.

As a whole, the ELA PSTs had a transformative experience engaging in critical and multiliteracies, making sense of VSCO stickers through critical feminist understandings. Undoubtedly, their future endeavors as educators will be informed by critical feminist pedagogy and critical multiliteracies pedagogy as they navigate the in-classroom environment with authenticity, open-mindedness, and the intention to uplift their students' multidimensional identities.

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