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Her-Story: Black, Middle-school Girls Exploring Their Intersectional Identities

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HER-STORY: BLACK, MIDDLE-SCHOOL GIRLS
EXPLORING THEIR INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

by

Crystal Edwards

A Dissertation Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Africology

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ABSTRACT

HER-STORY: BLACK, MIDDLE-SCHOOL GIRLS EXPLORING THEIR INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

by

Crystal Edwards

The University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee, 2017
Under the Supervision of Dr. Erin Winkler

While intra-racial-group comparisons have lead scholars to argue that Black girls are succeeding academically and therefore require less explicit focus in educational research, there is little literature that focuses on the ways that Black girls' experiences in formal educational spaces shape their emotional wellbeing and sense of intersectional identity—specifically, from their own perspectives (Paul, 2003; Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, and Jackson, 2010). In recognizing this relative invisibility, my research redirects focus to obstacles that typically go relatively unnoticed and unaddressed. Utilizing focus groups and diary/follow-up interviews as methods, I explore the subjective experience of Black girls within the educational context. Placing two theoretical approaches in conversation, my study applies a *decolonial Black feminist epistemology* (coined here) framework to provide both a narrative description of the experience of Black girls (i.e. the micro level) and a context (i.e. the macro level) of the system functioning to maintain and perpetuate the volatile conditions. I argue that challenges associated with physical appearance, complex interpersonal relationships, and emotional oppression—in the form of microaggression—from both peers and

teachers/administration/staff prevents schools from being a safe and beneficial space for Black, middle school girls. While I highlight some of the coping strategies developed to combat the volatility of the space (i.e. the demand for mutual respect, and an increased perception of strength and toughness), I propose the implementation of Black Feminist Pedagogy, an “Ethic of Caring,” and partnerships with Black Girl Empowerment organizations to mediate the negative experiences and create spaces for growth.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTERS	PAGE
I. Introduction	1
II. Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework	16
III. Methodology and Research Design	57
IV. "A regular day..." - Everyday Stressors	89
a. "Mess"	89
b. "Cause a lot of drama happens."	93
V. Emotional Oppression	100
a. Amongst Peers	100
b. Teachers, Administrators, and Staff	131
VI. Perceptions of Identity and Coping Strategies	161
a. Perceptions of Identity	161
b. Coping Strategies	175
VII. Summary and Significance of Findings	194
a. Making Meaning: Implications of the Major Themes	194
b. Most Salient Themes: Differences Among Grade Levels	199
c. Behavioral Differences: Focus Groups vs. Diary/ Interviews	201
d. From Theory to Praxis	202
e. Implications for Future Research	208
f. Concluding Thoughts	210

References	212
Curriculum Vitae	284

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Image that Monet drew reflecting the messages she receives from teachers

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Last, but not least, I would like to thank my girls. Without your insight and experiential knowledge none of this would be possible. It is my hope that you all always understand your worth and remember that you are brilliant, amazing, and beautiful. You all are Black Girl Magic.

Black girls be melting pots of melanin.
Hair straight, kinky, curls-strains rooted in greatness and royalty.
Crowns adorned in confidence;
Existence sits on a pedestal and sprinkles, "Black Girl Magic" on the universe, while
everyone else is waiting on the world to change.
Black girls be game changers: revolutionaries!
Hidden Figures in the untold stories of Amerikkkan HiStory-
Our days be filled with schoolin' the unconscious mind;
We fight for visibility and respect.
Sometimes we trade in our afros, but the fight for a revolution sits on our shoulders like
a bob-
We weave the strengths of Assata Shakur and Coretta Scott King and walk alongside
racism, with systems built with doors that don't revolve-
Or reflect.

I knock.
Chains clashing, like chances-
History is on repeat.
See, when I was born, pieces of my ancestors grew in me so this fight for the revolution
isn't new to me.
I was born Black-
Never free.
Made it my life's mission to find freedom in my existence.
Truth guides me.
Yield to no man that wishes to silence the narrative of Black people.
Don't appropriate our culture and then look at us as if we're the blank canvas.

Black girls be the masterpiece;
The Mother of this land with hair straight, kinky, and curled-strains rooted in greatness
and royalty.
Crowns adorned in confidence-
Sprinkle, "Black Girl Magic" on the universe-
And watch it flourish.

Written by Wrain Jennings

Chapter 1

Background and Statement of the Problem:

According to the National Association for Educational Statistics (NCES), the national high school graduation rate average for African Americans is 73%-- 9% below the national average-- while 87% of White students graduate annually (Digest of Education Statistics, 2015). Similar disparities are seen in national averages of proficiency levels for African American students in contrast to their White counterparts, with the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) noting a 37% difference in both mathematics and reading scores for eighth grade students (nces.ed.gov, 2015). African American, eighth grade students in Texas are performing significantly below both the national and state average in math proficiency—24% and 25% respectively— with a math proficiency of 16%, 32% below their white counterparts (nationsreportcard.gov, 2015). Likewise, Black students are performing 23% below White students in reading proficiency, 10% below the national average of 29% (nationsreportcard.gov, 2015). Comparatively, Black girls are performing slightly higher than Black boys in reading, scoring 16 points higher; however, and Black girls are only scoring 3 points higher in mathematics. While Black girls are minimally outperforming their male counterparts, according to NAEP scales, in line with national disparities, Black girls are performing 29 and 21 points below White girls in math and reading respectively (nationsreportcard.gov, 2015).

In a February 27, 2014 speech, President Obama expressed his commitment to improving the academic and economic possibilities for young men of color with the implementation of the “My Brother’s Keeper” Initiative. President Obama’s initiative illuminates a critical problem in the United States, the persistent disparity of access to and quality of education experienced by children of color. Absent from President Obama’s speech, however, is a discussion of the volatility of educational spaces—particularly in regards to the development of positive racial and gendered identities for African American youth. Further missing from this initiative—and most national discussions of youth achievement—is the explicit acknowledgement of the condition of African American girls in U.S. schools. The initiative fails to bring attention to the volatility of the educational space for Black girls, and their unique concerns such as

doubts about the relevance of the curricula and their teachers’ cultural competence; the poor physical condition of their schools; violence, harassment, and abusive experiences within their schools; perceptions of unfair policies and disinterested teachers; the lack of effective counseling, conflict resolution, and problem-solving interventions; the absence of academic support and the appropriate incentives to complete school; and the threat of psychological and physical abuse (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015, p. 27).

Although intra-racial-group comparisons lead many to argue that African American girls are succeeding academically and therefore require less explicit focus,

these figures fail to represent the innumerable challenges faced by African American girls within the educational context (Chavous & Cogburn, 2007; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Crenshaw et. al (2015) reveal that Black girls experience additional factors that impact their school experience such as “the quality of their relationships with peers, the safety risks associated with the physical space surrounding their schools, and the messages girls receive about the importance of their education at home...[and] familial responsibilities, including parenting, caring for siblings, and domestic responsibilities” (p. 25). Often times, discussions of African American girls within educational scholarship and research tends to focus on: 1) academic performance in comparison to their male counterparts (Hare, 1979; Sommers, 2000; Davis, 2003; Riordan, 2003); 2) perceptions of Black girls by teachers and peers (Lopez, 2003; Morris, 2005:2007); and/ or 3) an exploration of differences in disciplinary experiences (Mendez and Knoff, 2003; Blake, Butler, Lewis, Darenbourg, 2010). However, there is little literature that focuses on the explicit ways in which Black girls experience the primary and secondary educational setting, particularly the ways these experiences shape their mental wellbeing and sense of identity, from their own perspectives (Paul, 2003; Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, and Jackson, 2010). As Evans-Winter (2007) asserts the experience of Black girls has “been left out, whited out (subsumed under White girls' experiences), blacked out (generalized within the Black male experience), or simply pathologized” (p. 9). This relative invisibility of Black girls in discussions of academic inequality and educational scholarship fits within the historical trend of the silent suffering and invisibility of Black women and girls (Carby, 1982; Thronhill, 1985; Gray

White, 1987; Scott, 1990). In recognizing this reality, my research seeks to redirect focus to the lived experience of Black girls, particularly within the educational context. Rather than merely seeking to explore and explain causes for academic under- or high achievement, or the perceptions of Black girls by *others*, this study will explore the subjective experience of Black girls—in their own words.

Research Questions

Throughout my research I seek to make visible the experiences of African American girls within the educational setting not only as a means to describe the phenomena, but most importantly, to allow for The Girls¹, themselves, to highlight the obstacles they routinely face as well as the strategies they have developed as a means to cope with the volatility of the formal educational space. Additionally, my research seeks to propose strategies to be implemented by teachers, administration, and staff that aims to mediate common challenges.

In my research I will address the primary research question of: How do African American girls experience middle school, particularly in relation to their unique, intersectional identities? I also explore the following supplemental questions of: What types of situations do African American girls typically face? From their perspectives, what are some of the challenges and obstacles African American girls experience in the educational setting? Who are some of the people that play a role in these situations?

¹ I explain my use of this term later in this chapter on page 11.

What are the girls' reactions to their experiences? Have the girls developed any strategies for coping with their experiences, and if yes, what are they? And lastly, what policies or practices can be implemented to prevent or limit negative experiences in the educational setting and instead promote positive educational spaces?

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is to provide a narrative account of the experiences of 23 middle school aged, Black girls in Houston, Texas. This study will provide a detailed account of the girls' experience, from their own perspectives and in their own voices, in the formal school environment as it relates to their interactions with teachers, peers, administration, and staff; giving particular attention to how they experience their racialized and gendered identity. From this research, I will identify the specific challenges and obstacles that take place within the formal educational setting and discuss the myriad of ways in which these situations impact Black, middle school girls. Additionally, the research will make visible the contexts or channels that negative messages are transmitted, which enable the informed development of pragmatic interventions.

More broadly, the significance of my research is two-fold. First, through making visible the conditions experienced by Black girls—and their psychologically damaging subjection to negative messages and situations—I seek to encourage the exploration of solutions and the establishment of educational philosophies and pedagogies that address the totality of oppression (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Sue, 2010). In an

effort to identify and implement educational philosophies and pedagogies, this research has implications for informing the tangible actions educators can take to create spaces of liberation and humanization; as well as, ways that administration and instructional staff can assist Black girls in dealing with the realities associated with occupying a status of marginalization and oppression, with the ultimate aim of asserting the girls' agency. The significance of my proposed research is to identify both practical campus interventions, as well as strategies to be implemented by instructional and administrative staff that will successfully address the covert, oppressive, discriminatory messages transmitted in the educational setting

Secondly—and arguably most important—the questions explored throughout this research have the potential to empower Black girls by providing them with the tools to effectively identify, describe, and name their experiences on their own terms. Consistent with a theoretical framework I call Decolonial Black Feminist Epistemology—which I define in detail below—this study will primarily implement the research methods of focus groups and diary-follow up interviews to provide a cohesive discussion of the experience of the Black middle school girls.

Overview of Methodology

Consistent with a theoretical framework I call Decolonial Black Feminist Epistemology—which I define in detail below—this study will primarily implement the research methods of focus groups and diary-follow up interviews to provide a cohesive discussion of the experience of the African American middle school girls. Considering

the significance of dialogue, as asserted by Patricia Hill Collins and the Black Feminist tradition, the focus groups and follow up interviews will allow for the girls to explore and exchange their experiences, fulfilling the one of the primary objectives of the study; which is allowing the girls to provide a narrative of their reality in their own words. In a similar vein, the use of the solicited diaries with follow-up interviews ensures that the participants discuss their realities in their own words with a level of self-prioritization, allowing them to exercise agency—the “capacity for autonomous social action...[or] the ability of actors to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure” (Calhoun as quoted in Biesta and Tedder, 2005, p. 5; Hull and Smith, 2001).

Terminology

Recognizing the significance and political nature of language, and acknowledging that meaning is largely dependent on social context, I will now make clear how I am utilizing key terms that will appear throughout my research (Hill-Collins, 1998; Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000).

Race/Racism/Racialized²

When using the term “race” throughout the analysis, I will be utilizing the Fanonian lens to reference an idea of inferiority and superiority within a structure of power. Kane (2007) argues that, for Fanon, “Race is not a biological trait, but, rather, a historically constructed phenomenon and culturally mediated artifact,” (p. 356). Kane (2007) says

² See Appendix A.

Fanon's perspective on race utilizes "human comparison in the construction of inferiority and superiority" and "bestows individuals with their sense of inferiority and superiority, in effect, with their sense of human worth and esteem" (p.356). Within the United States context, race is organized and articulated through phenotype or physical appearance, which is accompanied by a vast array of assumptions regarding intellect, morality, work ethic, aesthetic, culture, and behavior. My explicit mention of context or geographical location—in this instance the United States—is to acknowledge that the concept of race is organized around ideals of inferiority/superiority within a structure of power. Although, in the United States race is organized through the Black/White dichotomy, globally, the concept of race is articulated in terms other than "color" or phenotype (Quijano, 2000). Quijano (2000) argues that race as an idea of superiority and inferiority along with the International Division of Labor is articulated through structures of power such as, authority, labor, sexuality, and knowledge/identity.

I utilize the term "racism"—both overt and covert—to refer to a "structure, that is...a network of relations at social, political, economic, and ideological levels that shape the life chances of the various races"(Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich, 2011, p. 41). Henry and Tator (2002) add that "social racism," or the social level of racism, is:

racialized language or discourse [that] manifests itself in euphemisms, metaphors, and omissions that support given ideologies and policies. It is reflected in the collective belief systems of the dominant culture, and it is woven into the laws, languages, rules, and norms.... (p. 11)

Throughout the analysis I will use the terms “racist” and “racialized” as adjectives interchangeably to refer to “a process by which ethno-racial populations are categorized, constructed, thought inferior, and marginalized” (Henry and Tator, 2002, p. 248). Additionally, “racist” and “racialized” will be used in discussions of discourse and language that has been encoded with additional negative meanings that are associated with a given “race” or ethnicity.

Coloniality

In my discussion of decolonial theory, I will use the term *coloniality* to describe the global power structure that has resulted from a history of European expansion and domination (Quijano, 2000). Further, *coloniality* is

one of the specific and constitutive elements of global model of capitalist power. It is based on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the global population at the cornerstone of that model of power, and it operates on every level, in every arena and dimension (both material and subjective) of everyday social existence, and does so on a social scale (Quijano, 2000, p. 342).

Using *coloniality* as defined by Quijano, we can now juxtapose this to *colonialism* in an effort to understand the distinct difference. *Colonialism* refers to the “conquering power over the juridical-political boundaries of a state, that is, by achieving control over a single nation-state;” *coloniality* does not merely denote political and economic

relations or challenges to a nation's sovereignty; rather, additionally, it refers to the persistent patterns of power as they are reflected in social arrangements (Grosfoguel, 2011, p 13; Grosfoguel, 2003). *Coloniality* will be useful in my discussion of decolonial theory as the term is utilized to frame the components of the theory. Additionally, the term *coloniality* will be used in discussions of the key areas that have historically been impacted by European global domination—power, knowledge, and being—which will inform my argument that the formal educational space as significant area of focus.

Intersectionality

Black Feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1993) defines the term *intersectionality* as “the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s [experiences]” (p. 1244; Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality seeks to make visible the ways in which the experiences of Black women cannot be understood within narrow frameworks that do not recognize the “multidimensionality of Black women’s experiences” by expanding the traditional boundaries of analysis that isolate either race or gender (Crenshaw, 1989, p.139; Crenshaw, 1993). Ultimately, the goal of including *intersectionality* in the analysis and discussion of the experiences of Black women and girls is to assert that single dimensional analyses—that seek to separate categories of discrimination—cannot fully capture the role oppression and marginalization play in their lived realities (Crenshaw, 1989: 1993; Hill Collins, 1993:2009). As such, in this study I will explore more deeply the

ways in which the interconnected factors of race and gender impact the experiences of Black girls in the educational context (Morris, 2007).

Further, in my use of the term intersectionality, I seek to adopt the decolonial theorists' notion of entanglements which makes visible the "multiple dimensions of social life, from economic, sexual, or gender relations, to political organizations, structures of knowledge, state institutions, and households" that are impacted in the modern world system (Grosfoguel, 2011, 12; Quijano, 2000). From this perspective there are "multiple hierarchies" that exist and are entangled to construct the totality of an individual's or group's experience (Grosfoguel, 2011).

"The Girls"

The phrase "The Girls" will be used throughout the discussions to identify to the reader the collective group of girls that collaborated with this research. The intent of the reference is not to homogenize, overly generalize, or objectify the individual participants. Nor is it an attempt to conflate their individual experiences, which will be expressed explicitly. Instead, the use of the phrase is to identify that, throughout the process, collective experiences were shared. The phrase will be capitalized to denote the specificity of this particular group of girls among the many groups of Black girls that exist throughout the Diaspora. This phrase is meant to establish a sense of collective, shared agency and experience even amongst the individuality. Additionally, in the same vein, as common idioms unique to Black women and girls—such as the terms "homegirl," "sista'," "girlfriend," and "boo"—I utilize the term to demonstrate a

connectedness with the participants that exists outside of the study; a connection that is greatly based on a shared, lived experience.

Organization

In Chapter 1 I have provided an introduction to the study, including the research questions and the significance of the study. Further, I have provided a brief overview of the methodology, as well as relevant terminology that will be utilized throughout the study. In Chapter 2 I will provide a general historical discussion of the significance of formal educational spaces, i.e. schools, as a space of study. Additionally, I will provide a review of the patterns of existing empirical research particularly, mistreatment in schools, microaggressions, adolescent girl challenges, and research focused on Black girls' narrative experience; arguing the relevance of my study which focuses on Texas as a geographical location, utilizes diary/follow up interviews as a primary method of data collection, and centers the voices and experiences of Black girls. Lastly, Chapter 2 will provide a description of the three areas of scholarly thought that frame the study—Decolonial Theory, Black Feminist Epistemology, and Black Girlhood Studies—concluding with an in depth discussion of my theoretical framework, Decolonial Black Feminist Epistemology; which is utilized to offer both a narrative description of the experience of Black girls in the middle-school setting (i.e. the micro level) and provide a context (i.e. the macro level) of how the formal educational space upholds systems and structures that deem it detrimental to Black girls. In Chapter 3 I explain that qualitative methods in general, and focus groups and diary-interviews in

particular, are the best fit for this study because they allow for the utilization of dialogue to highlight the narrative experiences and allows for The Girls to express their reality in their own words, with a level of self-prioritization. I also describe my sample of 23 Black, middle-school girls in Texas, as well as the data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapters 4 explores the everyday stressors that ultimately create challenges and obstacles with in the formal educational space, specifically I discuss the conflicts in interpersonal relationships, "mess", and challenges of social media. In Chapter 5 I focus on The Girls' revelations of what I call emotional oppressions or psychic violence, particularly the insults from peer appraisal of hair and clothing, and microaggressions associated with gender, sexual orientation, and intersectional microaggressions.

Additionally, the chapter discusses the perception of The Girls that teachers, administration and staff demonstrate a lack of respect, and simultaneously a heightened sense of in/visibility. Ultimately, the chapter provides insight into the particular ways intersectional identities cause the experiences of Black girls. Chapter 6, points out The Girls perception of their identity, asserting a belief that Black girls are tough, aggressive, and independent. Further, the chapter also discusses coping strategies—demand for reciprocal respect, development of complex social networks, disengagement and apathy, and desire to commit self-harm and/or run away— developed as a means to mediate the negative experiences and challenges of the formal educational space.

Chapter 7 will discuss the most salient themes based on grade level and noted behavioral differences during the distinct phases of the study. Additionally, the chapter will serve as my conclusion with the proposal of pragmatic strategies, particularly the

implementation of Black Feminist Pedagogy, the practice of an “Ethic of Caring,” and partnerships with Black Girl Empowerment organizations to create liberatory educational spaces and address the negative experiences highlighted throughout their discussions and diary entries.

Chapter 2- Review of Literature and Theoretical

Framework

This chapter provides the theoretical background of this research by reviewing literature on Black Feminist Thought/ Epistemology, Decolonial Theory, and Black Girlhood Studies, the three areas of scholarly thought which frame the study. In this literature review, I will discuss empirical research centered on: 1) the mistreatment of students in schools, including discipline and punishment, teacher perceptions, and invisibility/ lack of care; 2) microaggressions; 3) challenges faced by adolescent girls, and 4) Black girls' narrative experience. After discussing these current patterns in empirical research, I will argue the need for additional research that seeks to challenge existing studies that fail to recognize or make visible the experiences of Black girls. I will then review the theoretical traditions that are typically utilized to address and discuss the experience of students of color. Specifically, I will address Essentialist, Feminist, Structuralist, and Cultural Relativist approaches. Finally, I will discuss Decolonial Theory, which provides the context for understanding the larger systems that ultimately lead to detrimental educational spaces; as well as Black Feminist Theory—specifically Black Feminist Epistemology— that undergirds the discussion of significance and consequences of intersectional identities. It is through the conversation of both theories that I introduce my theoretical framework, Decolonial Black Feminist Epistemology.

Patterns in Empirical Research

Because my research includes components that overlap with several scholarly discussions, my review of existing literature will cover and engage four distinct sections: 1) mistreatment in the classroom including teacher perceptions, discipline and punishment, teacher perceptions, and lack of care; 2) microaggressions; 3) the unique challenges of adolescent girls, such as self-esteem, and peer relationships and 4) Black girls' narrative experience. I will close my review of existing empirical research with a discussion of what is missing from the present studies and the ways in which my study seeks to contribute.

Mistreatment in the Classroom

Teachers' Perceptions.

Scholars have explored the impact of teacher perceptions or expectations on academic achievement (Brophy, 1983; Jussim, 1986,1989; Babad, 1993; Weinstein, 1993). Research has explored varied demographic characteristics to account for teacher perceptions and expectations—such as gender and socioeconomic status. Additionally, a great deal of research has explored race or ethnicity as the basis for teacher expectations (Dusek & Joseph, 1983; Baron, Tom, and Cooper, 1985; Hall, Howe, Merkel, and Lederman, 1986; Garabaldi, 1992). Dusek & Joseph (1983) focus their study on identifying factors that influence teacher expectations, uncovering factors to include teachers' perceived attractiveness of the student, race, and social class. Similarly, Ferguson (2003) explores the impact of teacher expectations on the achievement gap.

Ferguson concludes that “teachers’ perceptions, expectations, and behaviors are biased by racial stereotypes,” which ultimately effects student performance (p. 461). Studies have pointed out that teachers’ expectations tend to reflect bias for white students, particularly regarding their academic abilities and skills (Roscigno, 1998).

While a great deal of empirical research investigating school experience has centered on Black boys, several scholars have sought to explore the challenges and conditions Black girls face in the educational setting as a result of their intersectional identity (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1976; Grant, 1984; Riley, 1985; Fordham, 1993; Paul, 2003; Evans- Winters, 2005; Morris, 2007; Winn, 2010, 2011). The gendered and racial identity of Black girls has led academics to ask questions that consider the impact of intersectionality on teacher’s perceptions and treatment of students. Grant (1992) focuses her study on the treatment of Black girls in comparison to the treatment of their white female counterparts. Grant (1992) concludes that there is evident differential treatment of African American girls; particularly, teachers tend to focus on modifying “the social, rather than academic, skills of Black girls” (Morris, 2007, p. 493).

Similarly, a qualitative study conducted by Morris (2007) explores the perceptions of Black girls by their teachers based on their appraisal of student’s femininity, leading to efforts—on the part of teachers— “to mold them into a particular model of womanhood” (p. 491). Morris (2007) concluded that the teacher’s perception was that female Black students were overly assertive or abrasive, lacking the “gender specific qualities associated with a ‘well behaved’ student”—such as “passivity,”

“silence,” and “deferential”—resulted in consistent efforts to discipline the girls in ways that “re-form the femininity of African American girls into something more ‘acceptable’” (p. 510-512). Koonce (2012) also seeks to explore the interactions between Black girls and their teachers. Through conducting interviews with two Black girls, she seeks to understand the circumstances and situations that the girl’s initiated “talking with an attitude” or “TWA” (p 27). Koonce uncovers several themes that she argues are tied to the instances of “TWA;” specifically, the overall hostility of the school environment, which leads to “feelings of confusion, feelings of disrespect, [and] their compulsion to talk with an attitude” (Koonce, 2012, p 39). Koonce concludes that the participants utilized TWA as a form of resistance to the oppressive experiences with their teachers. Another significant topic of empirical research in the classroom is disciplinary practices particularly in relation to Black girls (Morris, 2012; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda 2015; Wun, 2016; Annamma, Anyon, Joseph, Farrar, Greer, Downing, & Simmons, 2016).

Discipline and Punishment.

The Children’s Defense Fund (1975) report found a disproportionate suspension and punishment of black students (Beck & Smith, 1975). Similarly, Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman (2008) examine the racial, ethnic, and gender differences and their impact on disciplinary practices, concluding that “American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students are consistently more likely than White youth to receive school discipline” and Black boys and girls are “significantly more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to have been suspended or expelled” (p. 54). Scholars have sought to explore the impact of zero-tolerance policies on the disproportionate discipline and

punishment of Black and Brown students (Children’s Defense Fund, 1975; McCarthy and Hoge, 1987; Skiba, Peterson, and Williams, 1997; Thornton and Trent, 1988; Wu, Pink, Crain, and Moles, 1982; Skiba, 2001; Skiba, et al., 2002; Casella, 2003; Lewin; 2012; Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox, 2012; Wun, 2014). Morris (2007) points out that the current scholarship in this area of inquiry has primarily been centered on the experience of Black and Latino males, focusing primarily on the criminalization, fear and differential treatment of Black and Latino males (Taylor and Foster, 1986; Gregory, 1996; Ferguson, 2000; Lopez, 2003; Monroe, 2005; Morris, 2007; Noguera, 2003:2009; Canton, 2012; Butler, Robinson, and Lewis, 2014). Morris (2007) further adds, the “focus on Blackness and masculinity often implicitly leaves young Black women on the sidelines” (p. 490). Researchers have begun to explore the ways in which Black girls are subjected to “distinctive disciplinary regimes in their schooling... [and how many teachers and administrators view] Black girls as problematic and subject them to discipline, but in a different way than for Black boys” (Morris, 2007, p. 494; Mendez and Knoff, 2003; Mendez, 2003; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, Bachman, 2008; Blake, Butler, Lewis, Darensbourg, 2011; Murphy, Acosta, Kennedy-Lewis, 2013; Wun, 2014).

Crenshaw et. al (2015) discuss the largely ignored crisis of disproportionately targeting Black girls for “disciplinary actions,” ultimately concluding that this leads to increasing rates of drop outs and expulsions (p. 14). Black students are consistently subjected to harsher punishments and “punitive discipline” policies, which results in Black girls being suspended “six times as often” as their white counterparts (Crenshaw et. al., 2015, p. 16). Ultimately, the scholars conclude that the disproportionate

suspension and expulsion rates have severe, long term consequences such as decreased career and economic opportunities for girls of color.

Lack of Care

Empirical studies have explored the lack of care, as well as feelings of invisibility felt by students of color (Lightfoot, 1978; Noddings 1984, 1992, 1995, 2002; Rauner, 2000; Kohn, 2000; Cassidy and Bates, 2005). Valenzuela (1999) discusses the notion of “subtractive schooling.” Primarily focused on the experience of Mexican American students, the scholar explores the ways that schools dismiss student’s cultural definitions of education and ultimately demonstrates a lack of care. She goes on to assert that a “moral ethic of caring that nurtures the values of relationships, schools pursue a narrow, instrumentalist logic” (p. 22). Ultimately, Valenzuela concludes that the lack of care and reciprocity results in students’ disengagement, a similar conclusion reiterated by Morris (2016) in the asserts that for Black girls “to have an ‘attitude’ is to reject a doctrine of invisibility and mistreatment” (p.19).

Ferreira and Bosworth (2001) conduct interviews with 101 students from 6th, 7th, and 8th grade to explore student’s perceptions of how caring their teachers were. The researchers conclude that based on the student responses the school failed to establish “a caring community of learners—a community whose members feel valued, personally connected to one another, and committed to everyone’s growth and learning” (Lewis, Schaps, & Watson, 1996, p. 16 as quoted by Ferreira & Bosworth, 2001, p. 28).

Microaggressions

Although a great deal of research has explored the topic of covert manifestations of discrimination in American society (McConahay, 1986; Sears, 1988; Butler and Geis, 1990; Fiske, 1993; Banaji, Hardin, and Rothman, 1993; Dovidio and Gaertner, 1996; Swim and Cohen, 1997), discussions of microaggression are relatively new in scholarly literature. Microaggressions are defined as the “constant and continuing everyday reality of slights, insults, invalidations, and indignities visited upon marginalized groups” (Sue, 2010, p xv). Empirical research on microaggressions has primarily focused on racial microaggressions, particularly those perpetuated against African Americans (Sue, Capodilupo, Holder, 2008; Torres, Driscoll, Burrow, 2010;) Latinas/os (Rivera, Forquer, and Rangel, 2010) and Asians (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Torino, 2009; Wang, Leu, and Shoda, 2011; Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, and Sue, 2013). In addition to the focus on racialized microaggressions, microaggression research has focused heavily on counseling situations (Constantine, 2007; Sue, Nadal, Capodilupo, Lin, Torino, Rivera, 2008; Nadal and Johnston, 2010; Owen, Tao, Rodolfa, 2010) and college campus climate (Solorzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, Solorzano, 2010; Watkins, LaBarrie, and Appio, 2010; Gomez, Khurshid, Freitag, and Lachuk; 2011; Lu, 2014; Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, Sriken, 2014).

As stated by Capodilupo et al (2010), “most research on microaggressions...has failed to examine the ways that subtle forms of discrimination may have an impact on

other oppressed groups, including women” (p. 193); however, several scholars have sought to explore questions of gendered microaggressions (Sue and Capodilupo, 2008; Nadal, 2010; Capodilupo, Nadal, Corman, Hamit, Lyons, and Weinberg, 2010; Owen, Tao, Rodolfa, 2010; Nadal, Hamit, Lyons, Weinberg, and Corman, 2013; Judson, 2014). Similarly, there has also been limited research on religious microaggressions (Edwards, 2010; Nadal, Griffin, Hamit, Leon, Tobio, Rivera, 2012), gender identity microaggressions (Nadal, Rivera, and Corpus, 2010 ; Nadal, 2013), and sexual orientation microaggression (Shelton and Delgado-Romero, 2011; Nadal, Wong, Issa, Merterko, Leon, and Wideman, 2011; Nadal, Issa, Leon, Meterko, Wideman, and Wong, 2011; Wright and Wegner, 2012).

Challenges faced by Adolescent Girls

Scholars have sought to understand and explain the overall the challenges faced by adolescent girls (AAUW, 1992, 1998; Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Eder, 1995; Pipher, 2005; Sadker & Sadker, 2010). Researcher have asserted that self-esteem “during the adolescent years appears to undergo a process of metamorphosis...[with] a decline in self-esteem at age 11, [and] a low between ages 12 and 13” (Quatman & Watson, 2001, p. 94). Further, studies have shown that girl and boy adolescents experience differences in overall self-esteem and the factors that influence self-esteem. Greenberg-Lake conducts the AAUW’s national self-esteem poll, which “surveyed roughly 3,000 children— 2,374 girls and 600 boys—between grades 4 and 10 in 12 locations nationwide” (AAUW, 1994, p. 6). The survey uncovered a significant gender gap in overall feeling of self-esteem.

Particularly, the study showed “dramatic differences in levels and trends in esteem between girls and boys, with more boys than girls entering adolescence with high self-esteem and many more young men than young women leaving adolescence with high self-esteem” (AAUW, 1994, p. 7). While there are several factors that impact the overall self-esteem of adolescent girls, appearance and perception of attractiveness by peers is a significant determinant (Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004; Mendelson, White, & Mendelson, 1996; Throton & Ryckman, 1991; Harter, 1990). Quatman and Watson (2001) utilized questionnaires to identify the factors that contribute to the self-esteem of 545 adolescents, ages 12 to 18. The scholars found that girls experienced greater pressure to be perceived as attractive and in were “less confident in their physical attractiveness” (Quatman & Watson, 2001, p. 111). It is significant to note that while scholars acknowledge that gender plays a significant role in overall self-esteem, some empirical studies have argued that Black girls self-esteem tends to be slightly higher than their white counterparts (Buckley and Carter, 2005; Carlson, Uppal, & Prosser, 2000; Brown, McMahon, Biro, Crawford, Schreiber, Mimilo, Waclawiw, & Striegel-Moore, 1998;).

Prinstein, Borelli, Cheah, and Simon (2005) assert,

adolescents establish peer relationships that involve more sophisticated interpersonal behaviors than in childhood. Investment in feedback from peers increases dramatically. Peers become primary sources of social support during times of distress, adolescents’ susceptibility to peer

influence increases, and through reflected appraisal and social comparison, adolescents use peer experiences as primary bases for identity and self-concept development (p. 677).

As such, in addition to affecting the overall self-esteem of adolescent girls, peer relationships also have an impact on overall psychological wellbeing. Prinstein et al (2005) conduct a longitudinal study with 520 adolescents to determine the role that interpersonal relationships play on the experience of depressive symptoms and reassurance seeking. The researchers find that girls tend to experience greater depressive symptoms associated with “negative interpersonal experiences” (Prinstein et al., 2005, p. 686; La Greca & Harrison, 2005; La Greca & Lopez, 1998). In addition to perception of attractiveness the overall relationship with peers proves to be a significant factor in self-esteem. Greene and Walker (1986) conducted a study with 91 students, 53 girls and 38 boys between the ages of 11 and 18, to identify the factors that contributed most greatly to overall self-esteem of adolescents. They found that relationships with peers is “predictive for self-esteem...for girls but not boys” (Greene & Walker, 1986, p. 320).

Black Girls’ Narrative Experience.

Recognizing the unique intersectional identities of Black girls and their resulting unique perspectives, another focus of empirical research has been to highlight the narrative experiences of Black girls (Sister Soulijah, 1996; Carroll, 1997; Jacob, 2002; Brown, 2009, 2013; Love, 2012). Carroll (1997) utilizes interviews to collect the narrative

experience of Black girls between the ages of 11 and 20 years old. Throughout the text, Black girls provide insight into the feelings, emotions, and experiences that are unique and significant to them. Brown (2013) presents the experience of Black girls, while highlighting the organization, Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), that aims to create “spaces to practice and enact a visionary Black girlhood” (p. 1). Not only does Brown’s work highlight the experience of Black girls, she utilizes poetry, performance, photography, and interviews. Muhammad and MacArthur (2015) interviewed eight girls, ages 12-17, to gain insight on their perspective of dominate portrayals of Black women and girls in popular culture. The participants revealed that the image of Black women and girls was largely centered on judgements about hair, portrayals as loud, angry and violent, and “the hyper-sexualizing of Black women and girls” (Muhammad & MacArthur, 2015, p 138). Muhammad and MacArthur (2015) conclude that Black girls’ utilize writing to not only directly challenge the negative messages and stereotypes, but to assert agency in defining who they are. Similarly, Love (2012) conducts a focus group with six Black, teenage girls to explore the influence of Hip Hop’s depiction of Black women on Black girls’ perceptions of their racialized and gendered identity. Love reveals a complicated relationship with hip hop. Ultimately, the girls conclude that while Hip Hop does tend to display Black women as inferior to White women, it is primarily the poor choices of the Black women to participate in the videos that leads to their devaluation.

What is Missing?

With the review of existing empirical research in education, it is evident that researchers have effectively explored and discussed many factors of student experience in schools . However, there are still gaps in literature that provide the narrative experience of Black girls. Empirical studies still tend to focus largely on the experience of Black boys, particularly as it relates to punitive punishment and discipline. Further, empirical research that focuses on the disparities of discipline and punishment, and teacher perceptions focuses primarily on the correlation between these factors and academic achievement or outcomes. While this is important, this type of educational scholarship is one-sided in its focus on cognition and outcomes. Research on adolescent girls tends to focus heavily on the experience of white adolescents and rarely acknowledges the racial differences, with the exception of the assertion that race mediates the effects of Black adolescent girls' challenges with self-esteem. The reality that Black girls are essentially ignored, or merely conflated into racial or gendered groups in existing empirical research on student challenges is problematic. It is in this same vein that my research seeks to address the invisibility of Black girls by shifting focus from merely comparatives of academic performance to exploring the detrimental emotional environment created in the educational setting, and specifically centering the narrative of "those in a body marked as Black, female, and young [experiencing the] marginalizing processes of racialization, gender, class, and sexualization" (Brown, 2009, p. 30). Further, while scholars from diverse disciplines such as Black Studies, Psychology, Education, and the Arts have executed empirical research that centers the voices and

experiences of Black girls, few have particularly focused on the experiences of microaggressions or looked at Houston, Texas as a significant site of study. Additionally, the utilization of the diary/ follow-up interview method is seldom utilized as a method for extracting the narratives and experiences of Black girls.

Theoretical Traditions

Since the integration of African American students, there have been many approaches seeking to explain—and at times justify—disparity and inequality in overall experience. Before introducing the conceptual approach to be utilized in this study, a review of the theoretical approaches that have been used to discuss, account for, and describe the experiences of children of color at school is beneficial. The approaches discussed include the essentialist, feminists, structuralist and culturist perspectives.

Essentialist

There is a bevy of existing scholarship that utilizes an essentialist theoretical approach, in discussions of children of color. This framework's basic argument is that differences in academic performance and experience between children of color and white children are associated with the child's inherent developmental capacity. In this context, essentialism is defined as:

The view that certain categories (e.g., women, racial groups, dinosaurs, original Picasso artwork) have an underlying reality or true nature that one cannot observe directly. Furthermore, this underlying reality (or "essence") is thought to

give objects their identity, and to be responsible for similarities that category members share (Gelman, 2005).

From this perspective, there is an assumption of “a unitary, “essential”[experience]... [that] can be isolated and described independently of...realities of experience” (Harris, 1990, 585). Irrespective of the established justification, the logic that undergirds this theoretical approach is the belief that there is an inescapable, “essence” that determines academic performance and capacity (Gelman, 2005). Further, there is an inherent subscription to *determinism*— the assumption that human behavior and actions are “grounded primarily or exclusively” in factors that are beyond individual control (2009, 4). Scott (2005) proclaims that this theoretical approach is typically in the form of “genetic predisposition and institutional or structural predetermination” (641). For the purpose of this review I will refer to the two forms of essentialist theory as *genetic* and *culturalist*.

Genetic.

A key form of the essentialist theoretical approach is the assertion of genetic predispositions. Scholars who subscribe to this tradition argue that there are biological and genetic predictors that determine intelligence and therefore predict academic achievement and performance. Dating back to the 1800s there has been much debate surrounding the origins of intelligence. Sir Francis Galton’s (1865; 1869; 1892) work *Hereditary Genius* asserts that “a man’s natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as are the form and physical features of the whole

organic world” (1). In this same vein, it is necessary to consider the implementation of intelligence testing in the form of the Intelligence Quotient or IQ test. Throughout the early 20th century this form of testing became the basis for demonstrating genetic or hereditary difference in academic ability based on inherent differences in intellectual capacity (Stern, 1914; Eckberg, 1979; Herrnstein, 1994).

Educational psychologist, Arthur Jensen, furthered this theoretical approach in his 1967 work in which he concluded that “currently used IQ tests do indeed reflect innate genetically determined aspects of intellectual ability” (p. 8). Those who utilize a genetic essentialist framework further defend their position that it is genetic inferiority—and not inequalities in educational facilities and resources—that are the cause of differences in academic achievement; supporting Jensen’s (1967) assertion that:

The removal of all such inequalities barely sets the stage for the kinds of changes and improvements we will need to make in our educational system if the large segment of our population called disadvantaged is to benefit markedly (p. 5).

Continuing the tradition of early theorists, Herrnstein and Murray deploy this theoretical principle in their 1994 work *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. From their study, Herrnstein and Murray argue that there exist differences in cognitive abilities based on biological differences, which they say fall along racial and ethnic lines (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994, p. 269). Herrnstein and Murray (1994) further demonstrate their subscription to a genetic or hereditary predisposition

in their conclusion stating, “We have found that the genetic aspect of ethnic difference has assumed an overwhelming importance.... [We are concerned with] not only ethnic difference in cognitive ability but the genetic source of those differences” (p. 312).

Culturalist.

In the essentialist theoretical approach, there are also those that argue that cultural factors are the sole determinants of student academic achievement and outcomes. One of the primary examples of the subscription to this theoretical tradition is the scholarship that subscribes to cultural pathologies, the most common being the culture of poverty argument. In the 1960s, Oscar Lewis coined the term “culture of poverty” based on his ethnographic research and resulting text “The Children of Sanchez” (Lewis, 1963; Gorski, 2008). In Lewis’ analysis and scholarship he asserts that a “culture of poverty,” refers to the value system and attitudes developed by impoverished communities of people of color, reflected “in the structure of their families, in interpersonal relations, in spending habits, in their value systems and in their orientation in time” (Lewis, 1966, p. 2). The value system to which Lewis refers is based on the following characteristics: female-headed households; propensity for violence; minimal intellectual capacity; sexism; unstable; unorganized; lack direction; and feelings of inferiority (Lewis 1963, 1968; Payne, 2003). The “culture of poverty” argument has historically been used to argue that communities that experience persistent poverty and inequality are “to blame” for their marginalization, due to their subscription to an ideology that consistently recreates their reality. Within educational discourse, the theory has been used to make the argument that “poor people are unmotivated and

have weak work ethics;" "poor parents are uninvolved in their children's learning, largely because they do not value education;" "poor people are linguistically deficient;" and "poor people tend to abuse drugs and alcohol." (Groski, 2008, p. 33).

The "culture of poverty" theory makes the claim that within impoverished communities there is an environmental perpetuation and cultivation of innate values and attitudes that devalue education; similarly, the cultural ecological model asserts a collective devaluation of formal education. The cultural ecological model is the argument that:

A population uses its natural environment influences, and is influenced by, its social organization and cultural values. It also explores how the relationship between the personal attributes (i.e. instrumental competencies) and behaviors of its members and the environment is influenced by the strategies or tasks that they have devised for coping with environmental demands (Ogbu, 2013, p. 51).

This model that seeks to describe and explain how cultural values derive from a group's need to survive and cope with environmental burdens has been utilized in discussions of academic achievement. In the discussion of child development—particularly the development of African American children and the acquisition of instrumental competencies—Ogbu and Fordham offer that, as a result of the uniquely oppressive conditions of most African Americans, "Blacks do not believe as strongly as whites that school credentials are sufficient to achieve" economic success (Ogbu, 2013, p. 57). Ogbu and Fordham's analytical approach has been identified as the "racial identity as risk

factor approach” or the “cultural-ecological framework of ethnic minority achievement.” This framework ultimately argues that:

Sustained school success for high-achieving African American students’ entails minimizing their connectedness to their racial identity in exchange for mainstream attitudes and values that are better aligned with an academic identity, a process termed as becoming “race-less.” (Chavous, 2011)

The rationale that undergirds this argument is the recognition that, because African Americans experienced forced migration and continued oppression in the United States, the African American community at large has garnered an attitude that rejects “formal” schooling through oppressive institutions. Specifically, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argue that African Americans have “oppositional collective or social identity and an oppositional cultural frame of reference” both of which signify a collective devaluation of and disengagement from accepted forms of education and a resistance to succeeding academically (p. 192-194; Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 1978, 1981, 2003). The scholars who adhere to this theory conclude that in order to promote greater academic achievement, marginalized students must embrace a form of “colorblind” ideology and “de-emphasize their ethnic/cultural backgrounds in order to develop a positive academic identity and emphasize thinking and acting in ways more consistent with White middle-class norms” (Chavous, 2011). Thus, the cultural ecological theory endorsed by Ogbu is essentialist in that it, although adapted in response to oppressive

institutions, its ultimately an accepted culture that determines academic achievement and success.

While the essentialist theoretical approach has received relative support, throughout the early 1800s and again throughout the 1990s, scholars have challenged the subscription to this theory, asserting that all of these theories make invisible significant psychological factors that can account for differences in academic achievement (Smalls, White, Chavous, and Sellers, 2007). Specifically, scholars point to depression, stress, and low self-esteem as three of the most common. For example, Steele (2011) explores the complex psychological reaction of individuals to “stereotype threat” – the predicament a stereotyped group faces when they feel their performance has the potential to confirm a negative view of their group and of themselves as members of a particular social group. He concludes that the experience of “stereotype threat” has the capacity to significantly hinder performance, resulting in underperformance. Additionally, scholars have argued that essentialist arguments regarding intellect are insufficient because they fail to consider other significant environmental factors that contribute to differences in intellectual capacity (Chomsky, 1995; Fisher, Hout, Janowski, Lucas, Swidler, and Vos, 1996; Foley, 1997). Ultimately, both forms of the essentialist theoretical approach fall into the same tradition of individual reductionism. Critiques of this form of inquiry avow the limits of scientific correlation to adequately prove causation (Verschuren, 2001). Particularly as it relates to my research, I reject this theoretical approach due to the inherent Eurocentrism that undergirds this theory.

Feminist

The feminist theoretical approach primarily focuses on gender inequity within the educational context. Academics utilizing this framework seek to make visible the differences in educational opportunity, socialization of prescribed gender roles, and the overall discrimination faced by girls in the social institution of education (Greenberg, 1985; Bryne, 1987; Acker, 1987; Sadker, Sadker, and Klein, 1986, 1991; Manicom, 1992; David, 2013; Blackmore, 2015). Feminist educational scholars have asserted that girls are historically silenced in the classroom resulting in a “concomitant drop in self-esteem for girls in their early teens” (Morris, 2007, p 497; American Association of University Women, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Feminist discussion of educational inequality asserts that historically, gender distinctions have created “unjust limitations to [the] diverse interests and talents” of girls in contrast to their male counterparts (Sadker, Sadker, and Klein, 1986, 270). Further, Bryne (1987) states that the gender distinctions that have been established have compromised the individual human rights of women and girls to experience equality in education as well as personal and economic independence.

Sex stereotyping— “attributing abilities, motivations, behaviors, values, and roles to a person or group solely because of sex”—becomes a key focus in feminist discussions (Klein, Russo, Campbell, and Harvey, 1985, p. 6). Feminist scholars argue that the subscription to gendered stereotypes can be seen in a myriad of ways within the educational context. Specifically problematized, is the depiction of gender in

instructional material such as textbooks and literature and the subtle messages transferred to young girls through teacher interactions (Sadker, Sadker, and Klein, 1986, 1991; Byrne, 1987). Likewise, the assumption of the inherent intellectual inferiority of girls is posited as lacking adequate scientific support and justification (Sadker, Sadker, and Klein 1991). Greenberg (1985) claims that the promotion and reinforcement of prescribed gender roles and stereotypes are both limiting and damaging on the cognitive and psychological development of girls. As such, a key objective of this theoretical approach is to argue for a reconceptualization of gender roles and a promotion of equity oriented instruction (Greenberg, 1985).

Despite the fact that the feminist theoretical discussion focuses on the reality of patriarchy and sexism in education, there are significant challenges with this tradition. A critical critique of this theoretical framework is that it is “colour-blind, short sighted, and tunnel-visioned;” additionally, the experiences and accomplishments of Black women are relegated to “periphery” roles from the Eurocentric Feminist perspective (Thornhill, 1985, 55). Thornhill (1985) also points out that “there persists a dogged unwillingness to acknowledge and distinguish between varying degrees of discrimination...in addition, patronizing (or rather, ‘matronizing’) attitudes towards Black women, as well as the language [used]...effectively exclude [Black women.]” (p. 55). As such, feminist critiques of education fail to engage the significance of race, and in effect exclude the unique reality and experience of Black girls from the discussion (Amos and Parmar, 1984). Acker (1987) accurately points out that a key critique of this

theoretical tradition is associated with a clear preoccupation “with privileged Western white women’s concerns” (p. 422).

Structuralist

Scholars who utilize the structuralist theoretical tradition argue that the economic structure is the primary factor in creating disparity in educational opportunity and consequently academic achievement (Friere, 1968; McLaren, 1997, 2005; Lipman, 2004, 2011). Structuralists argue that there is an undeniable connection between the existing social stratification or socioeconomic inequality and the differences and educational attainment (Blossfeld and Shavit, 1993). Further, structuralists argue that “in a capitalist society, schools are designed to reproduce the class system by providing unequal education to children according to their class of origin” (Mickleson, 2003, 1059; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Delpit, 1995; Dillabough, 2003). Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that not only do schools reproduce the current class system, but schools were instrumental in the establishment of the existing class system (Pitre, 2014). Through their analysis, Bowles and Gintis demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between the social institution of education and the existing economic model, capitalism. This relationship is expressed by Bowles and Gintis (1976), quoted by Giroux (1980), in their assertion that:

The educational system helps integrate youth into the economic system, we believe, through a structural correspondence between its social relations and those of production. The structure of social relations in

education not only inures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self-preservation, self-image, and social class identifications which are crucial ingredients of job adequacy. Specifically, the social relationships of education—the relationships between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, students and their work—replicate the hierarchical division of labor (p. 226).

As demonstrated in the previous statement, scholars who utilize this framework take the position that “schools reinforce and sometimes exacerbate existing social inequalities” (Morris, 2007, p. 512).

In addition to the discussions of structural inequality associated with the economic system of capitalism, this theoretical tradition also addresses the structural inequality associated with resources and funding—or lack thereof—common to schools that predominantly serve students of color (Coleman et al., 1966; Greenwald, Hedges, and Laine; 1996; Wenglinsky, 1997). In both Jonathan Kozol’s texts *Savage Inequalities* (1991) and *The Shame of a Nation* (2005), Kozol explores the countless inequalities that exist between school districts and schools that primarily “serve” African American and Latino/a students and those that serve white suburban and urban students. Throughout his research and analysis, Kozol provides examples of the ways in which structural inequality manifests in the conditions of “inner city schools,” such as outdated

textbooks, damaged infrastructure, rodent infestations, overcrowding, subpar curriculum, lack of school supplies, and unsanitary conditions (Kozol, 2005).

Although this theoretical approach accurately discusses the ways in which schools maintain and perpetuate existing social and economic inequalities, structuralists fail to explore the ways that multiple intersecting sources of oppressions operate in tandem to create particular educational inequalities. Morris (2007) captures this critique when he affirms, “Reproduction does not take place according to race, class, and gender independently, but in combination. Through this combination, these factors do not just layer on top of each other, but also interact with each other in profound and sometimes unexpected ways” (p. 512).

Cultural Relativist

In direct contrast to the theoretical frameworks that reject the significance of ethnic identity to academic achievement, many contemporary scholars have placed emphasis on the significance of cultural perspective in educational outcomes. Particularly, they have asserted that through the promotion of a positive ethnic/racial identity students have experienced increased academic achievement. I call literature in this theoretical vein *cultural relativist*.

Ladson-Billings discusses the ways in which anthropologists—such as Herskovits and Boas—have conducted research in an effort to create connections between students’ culture and the educational curriculum. Although the methods and intent of

early anthropologists could be questioned due to the paternalism and essentialism inherent in their works, the trend of cultural relativity, which argues “cultures are of equal value and need to be understood from a neutral point of view... so that a particular culture can be understood at its own merits and not another culture’s” (Glazer, 1996, par. 1), has remained in contemporary discussion. Influenced by the practices of Civil Rights scholar-activists such as Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins, Ladson-Billings established the formal term of *culturally relevant pedagogy* in the early 1990s. Significant to discussions of ethnic identity and educational attainment, Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts:

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 (p. 160).

In her discussion of culturally relevant pedagogy, logic that undergirds the *cultural relativist* framework is revealed. In the same vein as Ladson-Billings’ culturally relevant pedagogy, scholars have explored an approach referred to as “identity as a promotive factor approach.” The “identity as a promotive factor approach” stresses that rather than ethnic identity and cultural association having negative effects on academic achievement—as argued by Ogbu and Fordham—a strong sense of ethnic identity serves as protection against “the negative impact of personal racial discrimination

experiences on academic attitudes and performance relative to those with less of a connection with their racial group” (Smalls, White, Chavous, & Sellers, 2007, 305; Zimmerman, et.al, 2013).

Adding to the discussion of increased cultural relativism, Afrocentric theorists have discussed the ways in which ethnocentric education or curriculum has the greatest positive effects for African American students, particularly as it relates to identity and academic achievement. Nobles (1990) argues for the development of “culturally consistent educational praxis” that not only adds African American figures into current curriculum, but includes African and African American content in all subject areas, effectively creating a new unique curriculum (p. 8). He goes on to make the claim that current curriculum is based on Europeanized American culture that does not fully represent the experience and culture of African people. With formal education, inevitably there is an exchange that effectively erases the contributions of African and African American people from the historical human exchange of ideas and inventions, specifically through acculturation and assimilation.

Similarly, Vann and Kunjufu (1993) discuss the inability for Eurocentric education to effectively prepare students for a multicultural society. The Vann and Kunjufu go on to proclaim that the only way African American students can develop a positive ethnic identity is by being introduced to historical lessons that provide them with knowledge of the contributions of African-descended people. A 1968 Report of the Workshop on Education makes the same point, stating:

Schools in the Black communities controlled by whites have failed to provide the kind of education Black children need.... the entire system of education has mitigated against Black persons.... white racist learning has produced Black persons with white minds to undermine and abet the suppression of Black people.... there is a vital need to rehabilitate the battered egos, white washed soul, spirit and culture of many of our Black citizenry (p. 1)

Asante (1991) also argues the significance of cultural centrality in education, meaning the cultural or ethnic perspective relative to the student, should be central to curriculum and instruction. The scholar introduces the Afrocentric approach to education as having three fundamental objectives:

1. [To] question the imposition of the White supremacist view as universal and/or classical (Asante, 1990).
2. [To demonstrate] the indefensibility of racist theories that assault multiculturalism and pluralism.
3. [To] project a humanistic and pluralistic viewpoint by articulating Afrocentricity as a valid, non-hegemonic perspective. (Asante, 1991, p. 173).

Murrell (2002) critically reinterprets existing educational frameworks to establish an African-centered pedagogy of teaching that centers the student's lived experience. The author begins by addressing the ways in which existing frameworks are problematic when addressing the unique social and historical position of African Americans, followed

by an introduction of the theoretical framework; which Murrell proclaims will improve African American achievement. Based on seven premises and five practices, the theory seeks to situate curriculum and instruction within the social and experiential context of the Black experience.

While the cultural relativist theoretical tradition accurately seeks to center the experiences and history of children of color as a means of encouraging greater academic success, the theories do not fully address the role of gender and gendered identity. The intersecting oppressions of race and gender—among other forms of oppression—have significant effects on the educational experience and ultimately academic achievement. Additionally, although I provide a critique of his argument due to individual reductionism, Ogbu (1985) provides a valid critique of cultural relativism asserting that theories based on what he refers to as the *difference model* “overemphasize the African origins of Black culture and competencies without a comparative perspective based on knowledge of cultural changes in Africa and, without sufficiently accounting for the persistence of the African elements among Black Americans” (p. 49).

Theoretical Framework: Decolonial Black Feminist Epistemology

The theoretical framework utilized in this study reflects my aim to engage two theoretical traditions: Black feminist epistemology and decolonial theory. In my reframing of these theoretical frameworks, it is not my position that Black feminist epistemology is not inherently decolonial or that decolonial theory does not encompass

components of Black feminist epistemology; rather, the objective of this approach is to place these frameworks in direct conversation with one another.

Decolonial Theory

Decolonial theory seeks to provide a critique of Eurocentrism from the perspective of those who have historically been marginalized and oppressed globally. Decolonial theory differs qualitatively from postcolonial theory, which does not challenge the centering of Europe and does not “alter the inherent discourse of progress and development fundamental for the myth of modernity” (Tlostanova, n.d., p. 2). Specifically, this theory seeks to situate and privilege thinkers from the subaltern³ (Grosfoguel, 2007). There are three principles: 1) the coloniality of power; 2) the coloniality of knowledge; and 3) the coloniality of being.

The coloniality of power or ‘colonial power matrix’ refers to:

An entanglement or...intersectionality of...global hierarchies of sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic and racial forms of

³ A term initially introduced by Marxist theoretician Antonio Gramsci, in his discussion of “workers and peasants who were oppressed and discriminated against by the National Fascist Party;” subaltern has come to denote “any ‘low rank’ person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation” (Louai, 2012, p.5). Additionally, the term refers to groups of people that: 1) “operate within the power structures of a dominant culture;” 2) experience cultural exclusion and devaluation; and 3) are forced—either through consent or coercion—to “[accept] the concepts and values of the dominant culture including the social and evaluative place assigned [to them]” (Ketchum, 1980, p.152).

domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversally reconfigures all the other global power structures (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 217; see Appendix _ of this document).

As stated above, oppression operates on multiple levels, simultaneously; therefore, any analysis that seeks to explore the experience or reality of marginalization must acknowledge the complexity associated with the global power structure.

The coloniality of knowledge—which proves to be among the most significant in the discussion of decolonial education—refers to the ways in which knowledge from colonized subjects has been historically invisible. Moreover, this concept seeks to address the reality that because of coloniality, epistemologies or ways of knowing have been organized hierarchically with Western knowledge classified as being superior and subaltern epistemologies as inferior (Maldonado Torres, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). It is in this vein that the coloniality of knowledge serves as a critique of classical accounts of humanity that upholds a superiority of Western civilization and an inferiority “of the pagans, the primitives, the under-developed, [and] the non-democratic,” instead or a form of “epistemic disobedience” by that “offers ‘other’ economic, political, social, subjective modalities” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 63).

Lastly, the coloniality of Being describes the ways that those deemed “other” are dehumanized and made invisible. Maldonado Torres (2007) states:

The coloniality of Being indicates those aspects that produce exception from the order of Being; it is as it were, the product of the excess of Being that in order to maintain its integrity and inhibit the interruption by what lies beyond Being produces its contrary, not nothing, but a non-human or rather an inhuman world (p. 257).

This quote speaks to the dehumanization associated with the occupation of particular spaces of oppression. Additionally, Maldonado Torres (2007) exploration of the social location of individuals in this “non-human” or “inhuman world” becomes the premise and justification for continued invisibility and oppression.

Decoloniality asserts that in the current system of oppression, the concept of Being, ontologically speaking, is exempt from those that are considered to be “others.” More explicitly, Maldonado Torres (2007) points out that, with racism and other hierarchical structures, the ontological existence of Africans, Latinos, and Asians has historically been excluded or made invisible (p. 253). As such, Maldonado Torres draws the connection between Being and knowledge, arguing that because people from the subaltern have been excluded ontologically, the logic of coloniality recognizes an inherent irrationality and an inferior “way of thinking” (Maldonado Torres, 2007, p. 258). While the product of modernity/coloniality is an ontology focus on power, exempt from all that is just and right, the decolonial project instead pursues a “trans ontology” that is committed to ethics, generosity, mutuality, and love (Maldonado Torres, 2007, p. 256-258). As such, decolonial theory privileges the experiences and unique perspectives

of those that have historically been marginalized and oppressed; asserting the need for experiences to be expressed, described, and explained through the lens or locus of annunciations.

Although decolonial theory is a relatively new framework, scholars have utilized decoloniality as a framework for discussing issues within the field of education. Decoloniality has been used to as an approach to discuss inequalities in education, particularly as it relates to providing a critique of the traditional university as well as exploring pedagogical practices that are liberating and anti-oppressive (Walsh, 2007:2007; Fernandes de Oliveira and Candau Sting, 2010; De Lissovoy, 2010; Grosfoguel, 2013; Nyoni, 2013). Further, decolonial theory recognizes the significance of education noting that no aspect of society operates in isolation, all of society is connected and interdependent upon one another; therefore, education is necessarily connected to the political, economic and social structure.

My Epistemological Standpoint: "I am where I think"

As mentioned, decolonial theory also provides a framework to situate and privilege the knowledge of those that have historically been marginalized; therefore, it is essential to discuss the way that decolonial theory undergirds the epistemological standpoint that has informed the totality of this project, from the decision to pursue this particular topic to the chosen theoretical framework to the methods and methodology. In Walter Mignolo's 2011 publication entitled "I am Where I Think: Remapping the Order of Knowing," The author provides a historical analysis of the global events that

have created what he refers to as global linear thinking or zero-point epistemology (p. 160-161). Global linear thinking is presented as a global hierarchy of knowledge and epistemologies that places European thinking at the top of the hierarchy and all non-European peoples at the bottom. Within this hierarchy, rather than “the co-existence of diverse ways of producing and transmitting knowledge...all forms of human knowledge are ordered on an epistemological scale” (Castro-Gomez as quoted by Mignolo, 2011, p. 160). Mignolo makes the claim that the scale is based on the multiple global hierarchies associated with, not only race, but also gender, religion, labor, and sexuality. From this global linear thinking, Mignolo argues that zero-point epistemology undergirds the existing hierarchy of knowledge, which:

...is grounded neither in geohistorical location nor biographical configurations of bodies. The geopolitical and biographical politics of knowledge are hidden in the transparency and universality of the zero point. (Mignolo, 2011, p. 161).

With the zero-point epistemology, any ways of knowing that do not “conform to the epistemology...[are] cast behind in time” and are dismissed as non-scientific and therefore invalid (*ibid.*). Mignolo ultimately concludes that this way of thinking is hegemonic and oppressive. As such, Mignolo (2011) notes the need for “decolonial thinking [that aims at] confronting [and disrupting] global linear thinking” (p. 166). It is in this vein that the scholar discusses the significance of acknowledging the epistemological and biographical location when conducting research, and the role that

both have on one's perspective and interpretation of occurrences within the world. Specifically, Mignolo calls for a legitimization and "epistemic affirmation" that "Being where one thinks" or proclaiming that "I am where I think" "legitimizes all ways of thinking and delegitimizes the pretense that a singular and particular epistemology, geohistorically and biographically located, is universal [or objective]" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 162). Ultimately, in accepting this epistemic principle, Mignolo affirms that all knowledge is situated and depending upon where one is situated as it relates to the global hierarchy or global power structure, certain realities are illuminated and are more visible.

Adding to this discussion, Ramon Grosfoguel (2003) posits that inhabiting multiple spaces within the global system of coloniality, resulting in intersectional identities, promotes the exploration of particular lived experiences. Grosfoguel (2003) asserts "in a situation where there is a relation of domination/oppression/exploitation, the people at the top of the hierarchy (race, class, gender, or whatever) are frequently blind to what the people at the bottom live and experience" (p. 34). The scholar adds,

when studying relations of exploitation, oppression, and inequality, we should not take the dominant, hegemonic knowledges as "correct" ones while dismissing subaltern voices...[rather] we should take seriously...[the] "point of view" of actors at the bottom of the social hierarchy. (Grosfoguel, 2003, p. 35).

From this standpoint, rather than speaking from the perspective of those in power, efforts should be made to speak from the “structural location or geopolitics of knowledge of those at the bottom” (*ibid.*). Further Grosfoguel (2003) argues “to speak from the subaltern side of the colonial difference forces us to look at the world from angles and points of view critical of the hegemonic perspectives” (p. 22).

It is in this understanding of situated knowledge and speaking from the subaltern, as explored by both Walter Mignolo and Ramon Grosfoguel, that I acquire my epistemological standpoint of “border thinking” or “border epistemology” (Mignolo, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2003). Mignolo notes that the idea and term of “border thinking” was originally introduced by Chicana Feminists scholars such as Gloria Anzaldua and Norma Alarcon; the term is primarily centered on the idea that considering we are all impacted and intrinsically connected to coloniality or the “global hegemonic colonial culture,” it is practically impossible to think completely untouched from the “complex mediations” of the current global system; despite this, scholars assert the possibility to think “in between location of subaltern knowledge [and one’s particular geopolitical location]” (Grosfoguel, 2003, p. 22; Walsh, 2007). Mignolo adds that border thinking is to “think otherwise” and to “move beyond the categories [ideals, and beliefs] created and imposed by Western epistemology” (Delgado and Romero, 2000, p. 11). As such, I utilize border thinking to provide a critique of the larger global system of coloniality and ultimately, provide a critique of the institution that I also participate in, i.e. the system of education. I utilize border thinking to allow for myself to prioritize and center my research on the narrative and reality of a population that has continuously remained

invisible in literature, as well as the larger society as a whole. Border thinking offers the opportunity for me to speak from, and in advocacy of, the perspective of young, African American, girls.

Black Feminist Epistemology

Black feminist thought focuses on the history of Black women in America from perspective of Black women. Patricia Hill-Collins (2009) notes that Black feminist thought “reflects the interest and standpoint of its creators...emphasizing the importance of intersecting oppressions in shaping the U.S. matrix of domination” (p. 269). Black Feminist Epistemology is founded on five principles: 1) lived experience as a criterion of meaning, 2) the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, 3) the ethics of caring, 4) the ethic of personal accountability, and 5) Black women as agents of knowledge. The three principles of Black feminist epistemology that inform the design of my research are lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, and Black women as agents of knowledge, all of which resonate with decolonial theory.

The “lived experience as a criterion of meaning” principle posits that there are two types of knowing, knowledge and wisdom. Whereas knowledge is learned through teaching, wisdom is gained through experience. This principle understands the relevance of knowledge, but it emphasizes the importance of experience as being “essential to the survival of subordinate [marginalized cultures]” (Collins, 2009, p. 276). The principle regarding the “the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims” refersto

the use of mutual conversation to assert humanity and “resist domination;” as well as, to encourage the development of “new knowledge claims” (Collins, 2009, p. 279). The “ethics of caring suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process...[and] individual uniqueness [is emphasized].” (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 281). The ethic of personal accountability seeks to address those who produce work on the history and experiences of African American women, and assesses the “individual’s knowledge claims,” while simultaneously evaluating the “individual’s character, values, and ethics.” (Hill-Collins, 2009, p. 284). Lastly, the final principle asserts the agency of African American women in their attempt to create work regarding Black women’s history. A majority of the existing literature utilizing Black feminist epistemology in educational research is centered on the ways in which Black women and girls experience social and intellectual development or the historical traditions of Black women educators (Mirza, 2009; Grant, 2009; Generett and Cozart, 2011; Johnson, 2013; Christian, 2014). Black feminist epistemology has also been incorporated into other theories such as endarkened feminist epistemology, another framework utilized to explore the unique perspectives and experiences of Black girls and women (Dillard, 2000: 2003: 2008).

Decolonial Black Feminist Epistemology

To provide a more cohesive discussion of the experience of African American girls, I utilize what I call a *decolonial Black feminist epistemology* (coined here).

Decolonial theory allows for a better understanding of the complex reality of African

American girls by providing a historical account of the interconnected forms of oppression they experience. Additionally, decolonial theory allows for the discussion of experiences on a macro level, recognizing the global conditions that have led to the historical marginalization and dehumanization of African-descended people. Decolonial theory also provides the basis for understanding the significance of both time and space in the consideration of the current reality. Further, decoloniality's discussion of the coloniality of knowledge provides insight into the Eurocentric logic that undergirds the institution of public education. However, decolonial theory is often geographically centered in Latin America and many of the scholars representing the theoretical framework are male and self-identify as Latin American; as such, what is missing is substantial U.S.-based analyses that properly makes visible the unique operations of structures of power and how defined structures perpetuate various forms of oppression in the U.S. context. The relative absence—although often presumed to be implicit—of the voices and experiences of African American women and girls proves to be a flaw in the decolonial project.

Black feminist epistemology situates the experience within the realm of the colonial difference and provides an imperative shift in focus. Specifically, Black feminist epistemology signifies the lens through which the experience will be discussed. Understanding that decolonial theory is primarily centered in Latin America, the supplement of Black feminist epistemology allows for the centering of the unique experience of Black women and girls in the American context. As expressed by Hill Collins (1991) “[P]lacing Black women’s experiences at the center of analysis offers

fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of the]4 world view” (p. 221). While Black feminist epistemology allows for the in-depth discussion of the experiences of Black girls within the existing “European/capitalist/military/Christian/patriarchal/ white/heterosexual/male” matrix of domination, the approach does not fully and explicitly dissect the macro structures of oppression (Grosfoguel, 2009, p. 8). It is my position that in discussions of the educational context, it is necessary to include the discussion of socio-historical factors that have created the reality of oppressive and detrimental conditions in schools.

I place the two theoretical approaches—Black Feminist Epistemology and Decolonial Theory—in direct conversation with one another as a means to provide not only a narrative description of the experience of Black girls in the middle-school setting (i.e. the micro level) but to provide a context (i.e. the macro level) of the system functioning to maintain and perpetuate the oppressive conditions experienced by girls in the educational setting.

Further, the utilization of both theories highlight the critical nature by which The Girls view and understand the world. While this realization would likely be overlooked utilizing traditional frameworks that merely seek to interpret or make deductions from the perspective of the researcher—with their own subjectivities—Decolonial Black Feminist Epistemology ensures that the perspective of Black Girls is expressed in its authenticity. The Girls’ terminology is included in its original form, as the chosen

theoretical approach acknowledges that traditional frameworks tend to marginalize the knowledge of those that do not uphold the Eurocentric standards of communication and speech. This study is undergirded by the basic assumption that Black, middle school girls, have sophisticated understandings and views about their world and the messages that they receive. Through the lens of Decolonial Black Feminist Epistemology, I provide insight on what The Girls express to be not only the most pressing obstacles and challenges, but also the strategies they have developed to cope and strive.

Black Girlhood Studies.

Acknowledging the adult centric nature of both decolonial theory and Black feminist epistemology, I situate my research within the contemporary paradigm of Black Girlhood Studies, which “aims to create complex and holistic narratives of Black femininity by expanding the stories and bodies represented within Black girl identity” (Hill, 2014, p. 20). Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) affirms that Black Girlhood Studies seeks to:

Address the issues, needs, and concerns of Black girls growing up post-9/11, consuming hip hop, experiencing increased imprisonment and lockup, being educated under supreme court- ordered consent decrees for supposedly desegregated public schools, lacking formal for youth by youth community spaces, an ever-expanding inequity of foster care and child protective services, and enduring residential segregation (p. 36).

Black Girlhood Studies is distinctly different from “Dominant girls’ studies” paradigms that “calls attention to girlhood yet ignores the ways girlhood is produced differently

given the intersection of diverse categories of identity” (Brown, 2009, p. 36). On the contrary, Black girlhood is theorized “through representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female” (Brown, 2013, p. 8). Black Girlhood Studies scholarship seeks to challenge the existing representations of Black girls and Black girlhood—often reduced to mere stereotypes and pathologies—by developing research that allows for Black girls, themselves, to serve as subject matter experts of their own reality (Brown, 2009, 2013; Love, 2012; Carroll, 2011; Winn, 2010, 2011; Evans- Winters, 2007; Morris, 2007; Gaunt, 2006; Paul, 2003; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1976). Another distinct characteristic of the paradigm is, while Black Girlhood Studies recognizes the significance of intersectional identities, it is also important to note:

Black girlhood as a discursive category is boundless and should not be thought of ... as a reductionist category or a fixed identity.... Black girlhood does not mean that for those who show up, race and gender are the most important or only significant categories of identity and difference (Brown, 2013, p. 9).

Ultimately, Black Girlhood Studies “intentionally interrogates traditional renderings of Black females as pathological and negative; creates alternative scripts of Black girls; and aims to design portraits of Black girls with more breadth. These illustrations are intended to be humanizing, intentional incongruous, and colorful.” (Hill, 2014, p. 83). In the tradition of Black Girlhood Studies, my empirical research seeks to provide a

depiction of Black girls' reality in formal educational spaces, expressed in their own words, on their terms.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

Methodology

Africology

Coined by Winston Van Horne, the term Africology refers to “the normative and empirical inquiry into the life histories and life prospects of peoples of primary African origin and their descent transgenerationally, transmillennially, and universally.” (Van Horne, 2007, p. 105). Van Horne (2007) identifies six basic purposes associated with the “subject matter discipline” of Africology

- 1) [to] educate and train scholars who will discover, recover, construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct knowledge pertaining to the subject matter of the discipline; 2) reposition Africa and its significance in the evolution and development of human life, society, and civilization; 3) open new paths in the advancement of society and civilization; 4) provide rigorous and substantively rich education, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, for those who desire to pursue careers outside of the discipline; 5) win the respect of competing disciplines through the conceptual rigor and empirical soundness of its scholarship; 6) bring distinction to the institution, and service of its scholars, the broad-gauged

value of its scholarship, as well as the work of the students that produces it (p. 106).

Further, Van Horne asserts that while remaining in service to the African and their descent globally, Africology seeks to identify, develop, and when necessary challenge methodological and theoretical frameworks in an effort to promote the interests, advancement, unique cultural worldviews, and dignity of African descended people throughout the Diaspora (Van Horne, 2007, p. 110-117, 1994; Asante, 2006). Nelson (1997) adds that Africology as a discipline of study

must also be alternative and corrective to traditional scholarship...be Afrocentric in its basis orientation...[and entail] more than just the substitution of black concepts for white concepts, it means the construction of a new epistemic based upon the unique position of African people in the world social order (p. 60).

The discipline of Africology has established itself as “fundamentally transdisciplinary” (Bobo, Hudley, and Michel, 2004, p. 3). As such, research conducted

...is grounded in a range of traditional disciplines within the social sciences, humanities research, and natural and physical sciences...

[Existing] not as a negotiation between or at the intersection of multiple coexisting disciplines (Bobo, Hudley, and Michel, 2004, p. 3).

I point out this transdisciplinary grounding as a means to assert the unique and distinct ways in which questions are not only asked, but additionally the ways in which questions are “analyzed, presented and written about” (Bobo, Hudley, and Michel, 2004, p. 3). A transdisciplinary approach requires the utilization of not only particular tools and frameworks beyond the confines of traditional disciplines. Africology provides the disciplinary grounding of this study and ultimately informs the key components of my study, specifically: 1) the overall purpose and function, 2) chosen disciplinary framework, and 3) methods and methodology.

Conducting Africological Research

The unique implementation of existing methods alone does not necessarily distinguish research Africological; rather, it is the methodological approach that sets Africological research apart from research in the traditional disciplines (Asante, 2006; Conyers, 2004). A methodology “is a ‘perspective’ or very broad theoretically informed framework” (Stanley and Wise, 2013, p. 26). Ultimately, methodologies tie the theoretical framework to the chosen method and provide a justification or rationale for not only the specific methods of data collection, but how they are implemented. It is this difference in methodological approach that allows for the utilization of methods common to traditional disciplines to result in significantly different conclusions and analyses. Although I utilized qualitative research methods—particularly focus groups, solicited diaries, and interviews—that are relatively common to the social sciences and humanities, my methodological justification—presented below—demonstrates my

commitment to conducting Africological research in that I utilize my theoretical framework and methods in a way that centers the interests and experiences of the The Girls.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the theoretical approach utilized in this study is Decolonial Black Feminist Epistemology, with an expressed focus on girlhood. This theoretical approach is utilized to highlight three key points: First, the formal educational space has historically been oppressive and detrimental to students that fail to occupy the identity of “European/capitalist/military/Christian/patriarchal/white/heterosexual/male;” thus, it is to be expected that negative messages and experiences will be expressed (Grosfoguel, 2009, p. 8). Second, considering Black girls occupy a unique intersectional identity, their experience will provide a particular—and inevitably invaluable—narrative of the obstacles and challenges plaguing formal educational spaces. Third, any analysis that seeks to discuss the experiences of Black women and girls must necessarily center their experiences, and allow for them to explain and describe the world from their perspectives—on their terms, in their words. Recognizing the key points of my chosen theoretical framework, the methods I chose for the study, as well as the way I have implemented them, fit within this approach.

Methodologically, focus groups were utilized in this research for two primary purposes: first, focus groups allowed for a broad exploration of the types of experiences and challenges The Girls share collectively, and second the focus groups allowed for The Girls to express their experience in their own words. Unlike surveys and questionnaires,

focus groups, with a series of open-ended questions, encourages participants to elaborate and thoroughly communicate their reality (Asante, 1988; Hudson Weems, 2005; Hull and Smith, 2001). Additionally, this method allowed for me, as the facilitator, to probe and ask additional follow up questions as a means of ensuring accurate interpretation and transcription (Schensul, 1999; James, 2008). Focus groups also aided in encouraging The Girls to explore similarities and differences in their experiences, as well as utilizing the aid of one another to clarify questions and uncover experiences that they may not have previously thought to be significant.

Keeping in mind the Black Feminist Epistemology component of my Decolonial Black Feminist framework, which affirms the use of dialogue as a means of asserting and unveiling the unique experiences of Black women and girls, both focus groups and diary-interviews directly engage The Girls in written and verbal dialogue (Hill Collins, 2009). Hill Collins (2009) asserts that it is through ongoing dialogue that knowledge emerges; as such, focus groups fit seamlessly with this theoretical approach because focus groups “explicitly use group interaction” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299). Focus group participants are “encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other’s’ experiences and points of view” (*ibid.*).

Similarly, solicited or structured diaries—and the dialogue that ensues—ensure that The Girls have the opportunity to discuss their reality in their own words with a level of self-prioritization, allowing for them to exercise agency—the “capacity for autonomous social action...[or] the ability of actors to operate independently of the

determining constraints of social structure” (Calhoun as quoted in Biesta and Tedder, 2005, p. 5; Hull and Smith, 2001). As the primary aim of my theoretical framework—Decolonial Black Feminist Epistemology—is to privilege the perspectives and experiences of those who are often ignored and made invisible in contemporary narratives, diaries, whether structured or unstructured, allow for the participants to prioritize events and experiences they deem to be the most significant or relevant, inevitably “highlight[ing] issues important to the participant” (Kenten, 2010; Kitzinger, 1995). Unlike observations, the diaries are from the perspective/lens of the individual experiencing the reality; researcher observations would effectively be from the perspective of the researcher (Asante, 1988; Davies and Coxon, 1990). One of the primary goals of this project is to make visible the challenges and obstacles experienced based on the self-reporting of Black girls; diaries are “considered to be one of the most reliable methods of obtaining [this]information” (Corti, 1933, p.1). Ultimately, the theoretical framework seeks to achieve the study’s goal of empowering The Girls through giving them control and agency over the narrative that is meant to represent them; as such, the interview component of the diary method is utilized to provide clarification regarding data in the diary entries and ensures an accurate narrative as communicated by the girls themselves (Jacelon and Imperio, 2005).

Methods and Data Collection

For this study, I utilize qualitative research methods as the sole means of data collection. Specifically, I utilized two methods: 1) Focus groups and 2) diary/ follow-up interview.

Focus Groups

The first research method utilized for data collection was focus groups. A focus group is a qualitative research method in which “a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research” (Powell et al. quoted in Gibbs, 1997). Distinctly different from group interviews that primarily rely on interaction between participant and interviewer, focus groups “rely on interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher” (Morgan quoted in Gibbs, 1997).

Qualitative research scholars argue that one of the primary benefits associated with the use of focus groups is the ability to receive a “multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context” (Gibbs, 1997). In comparison to observations, focus groups allow for the researcher “to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time” (Gibbs, 1997). Another benefit of the focus group and the resulting interaction between participants is the insight gained by researchers regarding particular communicational nuances shared between participants (Kitzinger, 1995; Gibbs, 1997). Kitzinger (1995) states:

Everyday forms of communication may tell us as much, if not more, about what people know or experience [than other research methods or one-on-one interviews]. In this sense focus groups reach the parts that other methods cannot reach, revealing dimensions of understanding that often remain untapped by more conventional data collection techniques (p. 299-300).

Ultimately, focus groups offer the unique benefit of uncovering group norms that provide insight regarding similarities in narrative and experience. For example, the focus groups allowed for The Girls to highlight common experiences and/or challenges with particular teachers, administration and staff. Focus groups were also beneficial in providing insight into group norms such as common colloquialisms and sayings utilized throughout all grade levels; specifically, nicknames for members of social group networks and terms utilized that were often drawn from social media and music.

Focus groups are also beneficial in promoting discussion of topics that are typically considered to be sensitive or taboo “because the less inhibited members of the group break the ice for shyer participants” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 300). Further, “group discussions can generate more critical comments” (*ibid.*). Similarly, the discussion of shared experiences and challenges has the benefit of empowering participants by demonstrating that they are not alone in their experiences; this understandably has a psychological benefit for participants involved (Kitzinger, 1995; Gibbs, 1997).

Overall, researchers have argued that focus groups have:

- encouraged more open discussion of sensitive issues—sensitive for both respondents and researchers;
- allowed us to probe for meaning where we might have been more reluctant to do so in individual interviews;
- demonstrated a greater variety of discourse than is available in other methods with the exception of observation; and
- let us experience being in a group with our respondents and hearing them talking with their peers. (Wilson, 1997, p. 221).

Throughout the process of conducting my study, I found that the focus groups did achieve the aforementioned; for example, The Girls engaged directly with one another in sharing their individual experiences. Further, considering the intent of my research study has been to explore the experiences of Black girls “as expressed in lived and told stories,” focus groups allowed for the opportunity to dialogue with The Girls as they also dialogued amongst themselves (Creswell, 2007, p. 54). The focus groups promoted an openness and comfort to discuss topics with me, partially because they were surrounded by their friends and peers. Additionally, focus groups allowed for The Girls to describe and report individual experiences, while still providing the opportunity for those narratives to be situated within a shared reality.

Wilson (1997) identifies the common components of focus groups to include:

- a small group of 4—12 people;
- meet with a trained researcher/facilitator/moderator,
- for 1-2 hours;
- discuss selected topic(s);
- in a non-threatening environment;
- explore participants' perceptions, attitudes, feelings, ideas; and
- encourage and utilise group interactions. (p. 211)

For the purpose of this study, focus groups were separated according to grade level and were comprised of four to twelve students; specifically, the sixth-grade group had eight participants, the seventh-grade group had 12 participants, and the eighth-grade group had three participants. Morgan (1997) asserts that “older and younger participants may also have difficulty communicating with each other either because they have different experiences with a topic, or because similar experiences are filtered through different generational perspectives” or levels of maturity. As such, The Girls were segmented by grade level to “ensure that the participants in each group both had something to say about the topic and feel [*felt*] comfortable saying it to each other” (p. 36). Additionally, the segmenting served a practical concern of scheduling. The segmenting by grade level ensured that class time or time in extracurricular activities was not compromised due to The Girls’ decision to participate in the study.

A total of twenty-three students contributed to the focus group portion of the study. The focus group sessions ranged from 45 minutes to an hour each session. Because sixth and seventh grade had greater participation, both grades participated in two focus group sessions, with all eight and 12 girls present –respectively—as a means to ensure that the conversations maintained cohesion and uniformity in participant group. During the sessions, I posed open-ended questions to encourage participants to explore their experiences as they relate to the general topic of the study. In addition to the open ended questions I created prior to conducting the focus groups ((see Appendix C), I was committed to maintaining a level of flexibility; as such, The Girls were also encouraged to explore other topics and themes as they arose.

“Diary-interview” method

Similar to the benefits associated with the use of social media forums and the ability to instantaneously express emotions, solicited diaries allowed for The Girls to record their feelings and experiences in the present moment. Further, the use of diaries allowed for “participants' contemporaneous records of their activities, behaviours, thoughts or feelings close to the time that they happened [which allowed for them to] overcome the vagaries of time on memory and minimise recall or memory errors” (Kenten, 2010). Whereas observations would effectively be from the perspective of the researcher—preventing firsthand recollection and necessarily relying on the participant’s “recall” when follow-up interviews were conducted, the diaries are from the perspective/lens of the individual experiencing the reality. (Davies and Coxon, 1990).

Corti (1993) explains the “diary-interview method where the diary keeping period is followed by an interview asking detailed questions about the diary entries is considered to be one of the most reliable methods of obtaining information” (p. 1). Additionally, this method allowed for participants to maintain a greater level of comfort without increased levels of censorship that is rarely achieved in either interviews or focus groups (Zimmerman and Weider, 1977; Kenten, 2010). As such, I had a greater awareness of the participants’ genuine thoughts and emotions without “observer effects” (Zimmerman and Weider, 1997, p. 480). Whereas the focus group component of the proposed research seeks to highlight similarities in experience, the diary method provides a narrative of the unique and differing ways that The Girls experience their reality, that were not necessarily revealed during the focus groups.

Based on my perception of their inclination to be self-reflexive— “[the ability to have] an ongoing conversation with your whole self about what you are experiencing as you are experiencing it” — from their comments during the focus groups, I identified and solicited three student participants from the sixth grade group, four students from the seventh grade group, and three students from the eighth grade group, for a total of ten participants (Nagata, 2004, p. 139). There were several factors that contributed to the students I selected to participate in the second phase of the study, the diary-interview portion; particularly solicited students who were very vocal demonstrating greater awareness of both their gendered and racial identity, and how these identities impact their social interactions. Additionally, selection was determined based on their active participation in the focus group discussion and both the quantity and quality of their

self-reporting, meaning I was particularly cognizant of students who freely expressed and articulated their experience dealing with discrimination and prejudice. Conversely, girls who were shy or apprehensive to share experiences with the collective, but appeared—through nonverbal cues such as nodding of the head, facial expressions, body movement, attentiveness—to have things they wished to contribute were also asked to participate. Those students were then asked to participate in the second phase of the data-collection process, solicited or structured diaries. Referred to as researcher-driven diaries or solicited diaries, this method is “a form of diary that individuals are requested to complete, often for research purposes, which may be tailored to elicit specific information” (Kenten, 2010). The process of the “diary-interview” or structured diaries method includes two significant phases: First, participant diary entry and second, follow-up interviews. The first phase of the process is the maintenance of the solicited diary by the participant. Although there are multiple definitions of *diary*, such as journals that are aimed at documenting an individual’s personal, intimate moments or events, solicited diaries differ slightly in that solicited diaries are accounts “produced specifically at the researcher’s request” (Bell, 1998, p. 72). Further, structured diaries “are written with the full knowledge that the writing process is for external consumption” (Meth, 2003, p. 196). During this phase the participant is expected to regularly—based on the agreed-upon frequency, in this study at least once a week—respond to a series of open ended questions or prompts.

Diaries were maintained for a four-week duration and were guided by a set of open-ended questions ((see Appendix D) to ensure that the participants focus their

writing on the particulars of their experiences with both their teachers and peers, as these are the groups of people with whom The Girls will have the most interaction on a daily basis (Elliot, 1997; Bell, 1998). Although there were guided questions, students were also allowed, and encouraged, to free write if they preferred. This was allowed to ensure that The Girls felt freedom to self-report and prioritize the things that they felt to be the most salient events, people, and situations. Because the diaries were interval-contingent--meaning that student participants will be required to “report their experience, at regular, predetermined intervals”—participants were provided with diaries prefilled with the required entry dates, questions, and follow up interview meeting dates (Farrelly, n.d, p. 10). While the mandatory frequency of writing was once per week, The Girls were encouraged to write as often as they liked.

The entries or logs of the diary then became the basis for the second phase of the method, which was follow-up interviewing (Zimmerman and Weider, 1977). The follow-up interviews served the purpose of allowing participants to elaborate on their recorded responses (Jacelon and Imperio, 2005). During the follow-up interviews I asked questions directly pertaining to their entries like, “what did you mean when you said...?” or “what do you think that meant?” in an effort to allow participants the opportunity to clarify information provided in diary entries. For the follow up interviews, there was no general list of questions; rather, questions were generated from each individual entry that was submitted. While reviewing the diary submission, comments were made throughout, consisting of follow-up questions to be addressed during the forthcoming interviews. Ultimately, the follow-up interviews provided a critical opportunity to “elicit

a vivid picture of the participant’s perspective” on their reported experiences and feelings (Milena, Dainora, and Alin, 2008, p. 1279). Further, the in-depth interviews were imperative for encouraging The Girls to “talk about their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences... [and] to gain insight into how people interpret and order the world” (*ibid.*). For example, some of The Girls revealed in-depth accounts of their struggles and challenges at home; while others discussed personal struggles coping with stress and insecurities.

Participants

I sought a distinct demographic of students; specifically, I recruited African American, female, middle middle-school students between the ages of 11 and 15. This participant population was selected due to the recognition that a primary function of adolescence is the development of individual identity (Akos and Ellis, 2008). Further, “the increasing involvement and intimacy of the peer group heightens focus on identity as students determine who they are” (Akos and Ellis, 2008, p. 26). Identity development scholars argue the significance of the development of positive identities for middle school students due to the period of adolescence, asserting that students who formulate and explore their identities during this time –rather than merely accepting prescribed identities—tend to have higher self-esteem and better academic performance (Erickson, 1968,1980; Josselson, 1994; Akos and Ellis, 2008). Additionally, I have selected this population, as there is very little existing literature or empirical

research that seeks to address the impact of intersecting identities and the experience of African American girls in the middle school context.

Recruitment was aided by school faculty and administration—such as teachers and counselors—who facilitated the initial introductions. Initially, administrators introduced me to several students they perceived to be more receptive to having an open discussion regarding their school experience. School administration also aided in identifying this particular population by providing me with lunch schedules. However, primarily, recruitment was done by attending 6th, 7th, and 8th grade lunches. While at the lunches—with the permission of teachers and administration—I approached all of the girls that I perceived to meet the demographic criteria. Once the students were gathered, before presenting the study, I informed the students of the population I was seeking and ensured that they identified in a manner that was in line with the desired population. I then presented the research study, and passed out parental consent/student assent forms (see Appendix G). Upon receipt of signed forms and parental verification, I informed the participants of the scheduled meeting dates and times.

Site

I conducted my research in the city of Houston, Texas. One of the reason I chose this site is my familiarity with the city as a result of my having lived there for 4 years during college, and the benefits associated with contacts and mentors in the city. Additionally, I chose the city of Houston, Texas because of the size of and ethnic diversity within the city. As one of the top five most populated cities in the United

States, with a population of 2,233,310, the city boasts relative ethnic diversity with 23.7% African Americans, 43.8% Hispanic or Latino, and 25.6% White (houstontx.gov; quickfacts.census.gov). Overall, the representation of people from subdominant cultures in Houston is above the state average. It is my position that the diversity in the city promotes a greater opportunity for accessing students from the specified racial population. Further, the diversity in the city also encourages greater diversity in the demographics of the school chosen—Westwood Academy⁵-- allowing for greater range in who the girls interact with at school. I chose a public charter school that serves roughly 800 students in grades 6-12 (2015 Annual Report, p. 9). Westwood Academy resembles the Houston Independent School District racial demographic, with an overrepresentation of African American at 24% and Hispanic or Latinos at 62% (TEA Public Education Information Management System, 2016). In the 2013-2014 report, the district notes that the school's racial demographic is 35% African American and 63% Hispanic or Latino (Jones, 2014, p.11). The site was selected after contacting fourteen schools in the district and being informed by several campus administrations that they did not necessarily have a significant population of students that met the demographic criteria; specifically, I was informed that campuses ranged from 1 to 108 students fitting the demographic. Several of the campuses directed me to other campuses that had a larger African American middle school girl population. Ultimately, the director of the Westwood Academy felt that the project could be beneficial to the campus by

⁵ Name of the school has been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

identifying areas that the administration and staff could improve in their interactions with this student population.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this research study were collected in three formats: 1) video recorded focus groups; 2) written diary entries; 3) audio recorded follow up interviews. After the recruitment process was complete, consent/assent forms were collected and parents/guardians were called to verify that students had been given permission for the students to participate. Simultaneously, I worked with school administration to secure a space to conduct the focus groups and follow up interviews and established a timeline and schedule that I would be visiting campus. During each grade levels' respective lunch/recess period I went to meet with The Girls first for the focus groups. At the first focus group session of each group The Girls were asked to complete a study screening form and a school survey (Appendices E and F). The screening survey for was utilized to identify basic demographic information regarding (racial and gendered identification; year born; grade; fluent in both verbal and written English) and to ensure that the student met the criteria and was being identified accurately. The school survey was primarily used to get a better understanding of each participant's perspective on "...the set of internal characteristics that distinguishes one school from another" (Hoy & Hannum, 1997, p. 293). As such, the survey allowed for better understanding of the context of The Girls' experiences at the school, and their perception of the overall school climate.

After the initial assent/consent process, screening, and school survey, the focus groups began. The Girls were reminded that the session would be video recorded for me to review later. I also reiterated the significance of confidentiality, as outlined in the focus group script. While The Girls ate their lunch we sat in the room and engaged in discussion guided by the prewritten questions. While the pre-established questions served as an outline for focus group sessions, I also followed up with topics as they were mentioned. In many ways, The Girls were encouraged to participate in guiding the conversation. At the conclusion of each focus group session, I thanked The Girls for their time, reminded them to “keep things in this space,” had them sign a receipt, and provided them monetary compensation. A modest incentive—ten dollars for focus group participation and 40 dollars for diary/interview participation—was offered as compensation for the student’s time and participation in the study. As The Girls freely shared their experiential knowledge, I felt a small, IRB-approved token of appreciation was appropriate.

At the final focus group session for each grade level, I held The Girls that I would be asking to participate in the second phase of the study. In order to be more discreet, I allowed those girls to be the last to receive compensation, requiring them to stay in the room longer. Once The Girls were in the room I passed out the journals—prefilled with questions and a number used to identify to whom the notebook belonged—and provided an in-depth explanation of the expectations and time commitment required for the diaries. The Girls were given the dates that I would return to retrieve the entries and they were informed of the dates that I would carry out the follow up interviews.

The follow up interviews took place during The Girl's respective lunch-recess period, and for some of the eighth-grade girls the follow up interviews took place during their workshop period. At the beginning of the interviews, The Girls were informed that the interview would be audio recorded, but I would still maintain confidentiality unless they spoke about harming themselves or others. Like the focus groups, the follow up interviews were conversational; however, The Girls were asked specific questions regarding their entries.

Upon the completion of the study, all audio and video was thoroughly transcribed through a two-step process, which included an initial transcription and a final transcription to ensure accuracy. While completing the final stage of transcription, I began to write down preliminary themes that I noticed in my researcher's notebook and set them aside for later review. Additionally, the researcher's notebook included notes taken throughout the data collection process. After each interaction with The Girls, I reflected on the some of the topics discussed, my initial thoughts/themes, perceived challenges, and my overall appraisal of the data collection process. After finalizing the transcription process, the transcripts were uploaded to data analysis software. I chose to utilize computer assisted data analysis software, specifically ATLAS.ti, for several reasons. As argued by Barry (1998), computer assisted data analysis software:

help[ed] automate and thus speed up and liven up the coding process;
provide[ed] a more complex way of looking at the relationships in the
data; provide[ed] a formal structure for writing and storing memos to

develop the analysis; and, aid[ed] more conceptual and theoretical thinking about the data. (para 2.1)

The software provided a secure and convenient way to organize and analyze the data. Further, the software allowed for the use of “algorithms to identify co-occurring codes in a range of logically overlapping or nesting possibilities, annotation of the text, or the creation and amalgamation of codes” (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000, p. 115).

I began to analyze the data inductively, coding each focus group. After completing the focus groups, I reviewed the codes and began to organize them around themes, at which point, I revisited the themes that I had initially noticed during transcription to compare. Once themes were identified for the focus groups, I began the coding process for the diaries/follow up interviews. In order to ensure that I was remaining open to uncovering new themes and codes, I tried to refrain from merely searching for the existing codes; instead opting to create new codes with the understanding that I could always go back to consolidate or merge similar codes. Once the coding was completed for the diaries/follow up interviews, I organized the codes according to themes and compared them to the themes of the focus groups. The next phase of analysis required that I consolidate like themes and review the data again to

ensure that I did not miss data that fit in the finalized list of themes. With the finalized list of themes, I began to formulate meaning.⁶

Practical Concerns and Limitations

As with all research, this study raised practical concerns and limitations. Considering focus groups inherently require the participation of multiple participants in the same setting, issues regarding group dynamics and problematic group behavior can pose a challenge (Schensul, 1999; James, 2007). Similarly, there are limitations associated with validity and accuracy of data collected in focus groups because participants may be inclined to “change their ‘stories’ as they are subjected to various influences emanating from both researchers, other participants and perceptions” (Wilson, 1997, p. 218). As is a concern with ethnographic research generally, there is the potential for logistical difficulties associated with participants, interview site, and transcription material (Schensul, 1999). Similarly, solicited or structured diaries have a primary limitation associated with the time commitment required to maintain the diaries accurately and effectively (Kenton, 2010). Finally, focus groups prompted a practical—and potentially a participant—concern of confidentiality.

⁶It is relevant to note that in the initial design of the study, The Girls were to be included in the analysis stage of the project as a means to ensure that the themes uncovered were accurate from their perspective. Unfortunately, due to administrative changes, and the resulting changes in access to the students, I was unable to involve them in the analysis stage of the study.

In order to mediate and minimize the effects of the methodological limitations, as explained above, I worked closely with teachers and administration to identify those students were interested and willing to participate in the project, noting the time commitment. Further, it remained of highest priority to ensure that the girls' consent to sharing their experiential knowledge and fully engaging in the group meetings and/or subsequent diary-interviews. I also worked to establish rapport and mentor-mentee relationships with the girls; which I posit promoted greater commitment to the study and mutual respect. I also addressed issues of potential validity and accuracy by ensuring that all students were given the opportunity to speak if they so choose. The Girls were also reminded that although some students may have differing experiences or opinions, they were not any less valid. This was done to promote comfort and encourage students to speak openly and freely. To address the concern of confidentiality, in all meetings I reiterated three points: First, at the beginning of the focus group meeting students were advised that due to the group nature, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, as such they should only share things that they would not fear being repeated. Secondly, the students were reminded that thoughts and experiences shared in this space should not be repeated or addressed outside of the discussion, and that by agreeing to participate in the study they were agreeing to the terms of confidentiality. Lastly, students were asked to refrain from using names of peers, teachers, and/or administration throughout the discussion; further, they were instructed to also avoid using any other identifiers in the discussion to minimize the potential for discussions, actions, or confrontations outside of the focus group space.

Trust and Rapport

Although I shared many aspects of my identity with The Girls that participated in the study, specifically my racial and gendered identity, that did not ensure immediate rapport and trust (Young, 2004; Dunier, 2004). While I initially believed that the age difference and the potential perception of the students regarding my class and educational status may cause the girls to have initial apprehension, as they may feel intimidated or distrustful, I found that my appearance—particularly my attire and the way I wore my hair—proved to be beneficial in establishing initial trust and rapport. Several of The Girls said that my outfit and hair were “on fleek,” (or being perfect) which surprisingly lead to an initial introduction and interaction. Although some of The Girls were initially apprehensive with how open and honest they could be, once I reassured them that the defined and agreed upon confidentiality terms of the focus group would also be upheld by me, they were more open to sharing freely. In an effort to establish common ground and a sense of commonality, I also created a shared narrative space in which I disclosed personal information about my experience in middle schools, as well as addressed questions about me The Girls posed; simultaneously encouraging the girls to share their own experience (Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Parker, 2002). As noted by Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Parker (2002), the use of creative interviewing promotes and assists in establishing rapport and trust. Additionally, my theoretical grounding in Black feminist epistemology, which asserts the principle of empathy and respect, allowed for further trust to be gained as The Girls mentioned on multiple occasions their frustration with teachers and administration that they felt did not care for them or respect them; as

such, their awareness of the fact that I respected and cared about what they had to say and how they felt promoted aided in establishing rapport (Hill-Collins, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

The probing into the lives and experiences of a group of people remains sensitive to a number of ethical considerations. With the added delicacy of research that is done with students under the legal age of consent, there are a number of considerations that must not only be recognized, but managed. In my research, I remained cognizant of and maintained the inherent rights of the participant, specifically, the right to informed assent/consent, protection of privacy and confidentiality. Particularly, I received written consent forms from the parents or guardians of the student participants, following up with the parents via phone correspondence to address any questions or concerns. Additionally, I also obtained written assent from the student participants, as to ensure the students are allotted agency and voice in the decision process. In order to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of research participants, it was imperative to refrain from using identifying information in the presentation of research data; rather, I utilized aliases and limited access to other identifying information in the discussion of particular student's experience and perspective. The students were also informed that the parents, administrators, and staff would not have access to the identifiable data and that they would be assigned different names to ensure that their identity was protected. They were also informed that the videos and audio recordings were only for my

reference and they would not be shared with others, in particular parents, administrators, teachers, and/or staff.

Furthermore, when asking students about their experiences with teachers and administration—adults who are deemed to have power—there is also the possibility that students will experience reluctance, discomfort, or psychological distress. To ensure that risks remained minimal, the students were encouraged to communicate discomfort, and I was vigilant of visible signs of emotional or physical distress. When discomfort was communicated, or made evident, interviews were concluded immediately and the aim was to ensure the emotional comfort of the student.

In addition to the emotional discomfort and distress of the student, another ethical concern was the emotional impact of the disclosures made by The Girls had on me as the researcher. While reading several of the student responses and entries, I found myself having a bit of an internal dilemma, as I was unsure of the level of intervention necessary. I found myself empathizing strongly with students that I perceived to be experiencing emotional distress, particularly associated with experiences at home, lack of support, and feelings of loneliness. The dilemma of reasonable emotional distance became an ethical consideration. The few instances that students demonstrated visible signs of discomfort or stress, such as cried, I immediately stopped the interview and attempted to address the issue; as the overall comfort and emotional wellbeing of The Girls remained top priority. Additionally, students were offered the opportunity to be put in contact with a school counselor and/or youth

anonymous helpline. There was a reportable incident of potential self-harm by one of The Girls, which per IRB protocol and assent/consent form, the incident was reported to the school counselor after the student was informed that the incident must be reported.

Limitations

The primary limitations of the study are associated with the general limitations of the methods and the lack of generalizability inherent in qualitative research. First, critics point out that the primary limitation associated with the focus group method is the impact of group dynamics on individual participation (Kitzinger, 1995; Gibbs, 1997). I did notice that for two girls in particular this was true. Both sixth grader Cassandra, and eighth grader Nevaeh spoke to me after the group interview and mentioned the desire to speak with me in an individual interview because they didn't feel particularly comfortable talking in the group. Inherent in research methods that encourage group interaction, there is the likelihood of having some participants that are more outspoken than others. While it was evident that during the beginning of the initial discussions, across grade levels, some participation from girls with larger, more outspoken personalities did result in the silencing of some of the more reserved participants (Kitzinger, 1995; Gibbs, 1997; Milena, Dainora, and Alin, 2008). In order to address this reality, I remained cognizant of participants who appeared to be less outspoken and intentionally involved those students through the use of direct questions and engagement. This was effective in encouraging the quieter girls to offer their

experiences. For example during the 7th grade focus group, Ayanna began to contribute once I posed to her a direct question.

An additional concern regarding the use of focus groups is the issue of confidentiality, considering there are other participants present (Kitzinger, 1995; Gibbs, 1997). It was a concern that some participants would be reluctant to participate in the discussion due to a lack of trust that other participants would keep their personal information confidential (Gibbs, 1997). As a means of addressing this potential challenge, at the beginning and end of each focus group I reiterated the significance of confidentiality in group discussions and participants were asked to participate in creating a “safe space” for all students involved. Acknowledging that, despite the insistence of confidentiality, the risk is still present, students were also encouraged to refrain from sharing anything with the collective that they feared being repeated. Based on the transparency and depth of disclosure, it appeared that most of The Girls felt comfortable disclosing their experience.

Regarding the diary-interview methods, one of the primary limitations is the necessary commitment of time (Kenten, 2010). Additionally, solicited diaries inherently require a degree of literacy that can be challenging for those that do not have the abilities necessary to complete the requirements associated with maintaining the diaries (Jacelon and Imperio, 2005; Kenten, 2010). In order to address the limitations associated with the time commitment, I offered a small monetary incentive as a means of compensating the participants for their time. Further, I also ensured that the prompts in

the journals were explicit and simplified to ensure that the entry could be understood and completed within a reasonable amount of time. Lastly, despite providing The Girls with the dates that the entries would be retrieved in advance, some of them occasionally forgot to bring their journals. As such, I had to allow for a certain level of flexibility in scheduling and at times, I was required to interview other girls instead.

Generalizability

Another limitation of the study is associated with the overall generalizability. As Myers (2000) points out a “criticism of qualitative methodology questions the value of its dependence on small samples which is believed to render it incapable of generalizing conclusions” (p. 5). Despite the lack of traditional generalizability – or universal application or “statistical inference”—qualitative studies provide valuable, in-depth descriptions and analysis of contemporary phenomenon (Dzakiria, 2006, 1.5; Stake, 1980; Myers, 2000; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Qi, 2009). Qualitative methods are especially effective tools to “analyze and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts and to present and represent reality” (Qi, 2009, p. 22). Ultimately, the study is reflected of a specific population—as is the case with most qualitative work (Dzakiria, 2006). However, there are implications for the duplication of this study for comparative purposes with future research to be conducted in different geographical/regional locations; varying school demographics across the city (i.e. racial, ses, gender).

Positionality

Growing up an eldest daughter and eldest grandchild I found myself constantly striving to achieve a level of success that would be acceptable to my family and inspiring to my younger siblings. Through my perusal of higher education –first through my undergraduate degree and later my doctorate—I continued to maintain a heightened sense of determination, accountability, and pressure to succeed. The aforementioned lead to a disengagement from traditional ideals of gender roles and an exploration of alternative ways of being. As I matured, I recognized that as a Black girl—and later a Black woman—my experiences with the world were distinctively different. My interactions with peers—both professionally and personally—was impacted by and mediated through my intersectionality. Growing up in a city populated largely by people of Mexican descent, San Antonio, I constantly struggled with my racialized identity and difference. I constantly sought to develop my sense of self, specifically with regards to appearance, beauty standards, voice, and values. Oftentimes, feeling like a racialized “other,” I struggled to develop a racialized and gendered identity that celebrated my uniqueness and difference. It is my position that my personal struggles and the lack of institutional support is what has driven my perusal of this particular research topic. My shared common experience with The Girls undergirds not only the choice to pursue the topic, but also my ability to relate and understand the perspectives shared throughout the project.

Further, in recognizing the reality that my knowledge is situated within my biographical reality of being a Black girl or woman – both subordinate positions within the global hierarchy of race and gender—I also recognize that being a part of an academic institution that generally is utilized as a tool to maintain the hegemonic and hierarchical organization of knowledge, my positionality is intersectional and complicated. While I occupy the status of “insider” – meaning I “have a place in the social group being studied”—particularly with regards to my race and gender; I simultaneously occupy outsider status due to my age and academic experience (Moore, 2012, p. 11). I constantly had the task of ensuring that my role as *researcher* and scholar did not cause me to merely observe and extract knowledge; rather, I maintained the goal of being active, involved, and engaging. Additionally, I did not allow my presumed *insider* status to lead me to assume that I knew precisely what The Girls experienced; instead, I focused on actively listening and ensuring that The Girls remained the experts in the dissemination of their narratives and knowledge.

Researcher Assumptions

As a result of this epistemological standpoint, several assumptions or beliefs are implicit and undergird this particular research study. The first assumption is that African American girls possess a distinct experience within the educational context that cannot merely be enveloped within discussions that fail to take into consideration the significance and impact of intersectionality. Another assumption is that based on the historical development and establishment of the institution that is public education, the

formal educational setting, i.e. schools, can be difficult, and at times traumatic, for students of differing identities. Lastly, it is my assumption that students generally, and African American girls particularly, possess their own ideals and views associated with their perceived identities; similarly, they have some sort of perception regarding how these identities impact their lived experience.

Chapter 4: “A regular day...” - Everyday Stressors

Middle school students are faced with multiple challenges and obstacles. According to Juvonen et. al. (2004) American middle school students are faced with many emotional and physical problems, including headaches, anxiety, depression, and generalized feeling of nervousness (Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine, and Constant, p. 47-56; Kazdin, 1993). In addition to emotional and physical challenges, generally, middle school students are also faced with concerns of social isolation, school climate, peer culture, teacher support, parental involvement, and perceived school pressure (Juvonen et. al., 2004). While The Girls shared some of the aforementioned common middle school challenges during focus group discussions and individual sessions, they identified their most prominent everyday stressors to be: interpersonal relationships with peers, conflict, and social media.

“Mess”

While interpersonal relationships and complex social networks serve the function of support and comradery—which will be explored in Chapter 6— the reality of conflict among adolescents is inevitable. Hazel highlights that the development and maintenance of relationships is not the only challenge or everyday stressor; she also demonstrates that those relationships fall apart resulting in conflict. In Hazel’s diary entry, she discusses an incident with someone who was “supposed to be lil juvie.” She discusses initially being upset that her “lil juvie” and a girl that her “lil juvie” was in a

conflict with were hanging out during a field trip. Hazel expresses that she was upset because she felt like her friend was being “faker than a 3-dollar bill” by hanging out with the girl, but later she became even more upset, she explains:

the person thats posed to be my lil juvie gon’ say...”Ion want them sitting by us anyway.”I found that brazy bc we was down for her when no one else was. So like I found her 2 faced in my eyes. So when we got back on the bus I asked lil juvie and ole girl did the have an issue bc ion like for people to talk about me but cant tell to my face. So he response as like oh nahh boo ion got no issue...oh noo which was brazy cus you and ole girl had dedicated y’all day to me like really. We was down fa her like 4 flats on a Camry. So she needa check herself before she wreck herself on Gawwd. She need to look both ways before she cross me. I AM Hazel
CHRISTINE MITCHELL WHO GON’ POP ME [drawing of a hand/palm]
ANYWAYS!

Laursen (1993) states “disagreements are an inevitable part of daily interaction in social relationships. With age, children increasingly recognize the important role conflict plays in the formation, maintenance, and termination of social relationships” (p.535; Hartup, 1992; Selman, 1980). As such, one of the primary everyday stressors mentioned by The Girl was what they referred to as “mess.” Made explicit from the group discussions and the individual interviews, “mess” is a term used to describe situations of conflict, disagreements, or arguments amongst peers. Kyla explains, “on a

bad day, it's like mess, and like a whole, it's like, it's like school really not fun, you have to deal with mess and try to make sure you stay outta mess." When asked to discuss some of the things experienced on a regular day both Monet and Nevaeh responded that its typically a question of "Which drama I'm finna get in today?" and that a common reality faced is "just like having the drama that goes on." Makayla mentions that since she's attended the school "there's mess, I was always, I got caught up in mess." When asked if there has been anything that has happened at school to make you feel uncomfortable, Charlene simply responds "yeah, mess." Made clear from The Girls' responses "mess" or "drama" plays a major role in their everyday experiences.

When asked about the sources of the drama or "mess," The Girls indicated that there are many. Monet shares

The he said, she said, who boyfriend is dating who girlfriend, and like who finna try to steal this boyfriend? Or who screenshotted this on Instagram or who screenshotted this messages, and who fighting and who posted this fight on instagram, and all of that. And who wrote on the restroom stall that I looked like this and I do this.

Nevaeh similarly states that much of the "drama [is about] boyfriends" or "like you said this about me." Kyla says simply "boy mess." Neveah goes on to add

what is this boy talking to my girlfriend or somebody going back and saying you said this about me or it's just like I don't like you so imma

block you and then they wanna go check and see why they can't have civil conversations? It's like they can't sit down at the table...

Jaylen mentions that "boy mess" extends beyond concerns of other people trying to date boyfriends. She states, "if a guy doesn't like you they'll be like imma get my sister on you, or my cousin. Anybody in they family that's a girl" to start drama or conflict.

Jaylen shares the some of the sources of "mess" that she's experienced

Did you try to get with my boyfriend? [Charlene "yeah"] Did you do this? Did you do that? Did you steal something from me? I don't have reasons to steal nothing from you, I don't want your ugly boyfriend, and then they just think that you want somebody and you don't.

Kyla recalls that even being quiet and reserved can be the source of "mess," she shares

Oh um when I first came here like the first week I was quiet I didn't really want no friends so I just didn't talk to nobody and some kinda way I got in mess. I got in mess some girl came up to me and was like was I talking about her I was like no and then she got all her friends to come up to me.

Several of The Girls mention that another key source of "mess" is jealousy. Ayanna shares "if they sayin that like they jealous of how you look then they be like callin you names," which leads to drama and inevitable conflict. Kyla shares this sentiment stating

“if you new and you cute, all everybody gon’ know about you. And then the girls gon’ get mad and then they gon’ try to pick on you.” Highlighted in this discussion is another source that contribute to the overall stress and volatility of the formal educational space. While the source of “mess” was initially identified as sources outside of self, for example interactions and relationships, Ayanna and Kyla now highlight the role that jealousy plays in peer conflict. In this regard, The Girls find themselves in a Catch-22 as they receive ridicule and teasing when they do not fulfill the socially acceptable appearance standards; conversely, when they do, they risk the possibility of strained interpersonal relationships and conflict. Despite the differences in the source or cause of the “mess,” the psychological and emotional effect supports the significance of understanding the role that interpersonal conflict contributes to maintaining a dysfunctional space.

“Cause a lot of drama happens.”

Social media or social network sites made their grand appearance in the late 1990’s and by the new millennium became a staple in the lives of teens and young adults (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). According to Boyd and Ellison (2007) “Since their introduction, social network sites (SNSs) such as MySpace, Facebook, Cyworld, and Bebo have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices.” (p. 210). Social network sites are defined as:

web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other

users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (*ibid.*, p. 211).

Social network sites and social media have become a major source of communication and platform for developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships; however, as expressed by many of The Girls, social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Snap Chat, Keek and Twitter have also been platforms that contribute to conflict, drama, and “mess.” Kyla communicates this sentiment making the claim that social media is “a big part of school.”

According to Xu, Jun, Zhu, and Bellmore (2012) bullying “peaks in middle school” (p. 656). In the age of modern technology, with adolescents gaining increased access to electronic devices, cyberbullying has become a significant everyday stressor. Jade communicates that “you get bullied” on social media, based on “how many followers you have.” Makayla adds that bullying is also associated with

your pictures you post, and how many likes. Like you might wear something real short they’ll judge you and be like “you a thot [“*That Hoe Over There*”]go somewhere.” They’ll call you a thot. They’ll talk about you just because of what you wearin. And like if like you wearing something pretty they’ll compliment you but if you not they’ll, just like, when you come to school they next day, they’ll just be looking at you like you stupid.

Stacy shared her personal experience with social media cyberbullying, sharing “like these people take pictures of me—my brother he tells me—and they post it on instgram...and then they talked about me. I didn’t even know.” She added that the caption and comments associated with the picture negatively discussed her appearance. Makayla adds that Stacy’s experience is common asserting, “you could be laughin at somethin your friend said, like your laugh could be extra ugly and they’ll take a picture of you off guard and they’ll post it on instgram and they’ll put something funny or put some words with it.”

Three of the 7th graders, Stacy, Makayla, and Jade, discuss the use of social media as an additional medium to degrade and insult students. They share an instance where Stacy received negative comments and insults as a result of a picture posted on social media without her knowledge or consent.

Stacy: Like these people take pictures of my brother and my like brother he tells me and they post it on instgram and like my brother’s friends go here so like they’ll tell us.

Makayla: You could be laughin at somethin your friend said, like your laugh could be extra ugly and they’ll take a picture of you off guard and they’ll post it on instgram and they’ll put something funny or put some words with it.

CE: Oh, oh so it is a form of bullying, so you said somebody had posted a picture of?

Stacy: Of me and then they talked about me [Jade: they be talkin about you] and then somebody told me that like, if it's a boy my brother will confront him because he doesn't like nobody to talk about his family.

CE: Oh okay, so somebody posted a picture of you without your [Stacy: I didn't even know] without you knowing and then they were saying ugly things? [Stacy: yes]

The utilization of social media as a tool for antagonizing students is also reflected in the discussion with a Lolita, 6th grade student. Lolita discusses a situation where a former friend utilized a picture that she removed from social media because she felt it was “ugly” and sent “the picture around as a joke.” Once confronted, the girl then escalated the insults and psychic violence by telling other students that her “mama smoke crack.” Lolita adds,

Well it don't hurt my feelings, but like when you're sending it around and I know that it's like real ugly, like someone puts a dog next to you or something, and they're saying like you look like a dog, that will make me mad. Because, like, I know I'm not a dog, and that shouldn't even be on there in the first place.

Several of The Girls mention that even when their peers compliment them on social media, they still tend to experience insults and bullying in person. Jaylen mentions “when you at school and then people they like call you ugly but then they all over your instagram liking all your pictures and stuff and they comment sayin that you pretty and all this but at school they call you ugly.” Rochelle shares a similar experience saying she felt “worthless” after a boy she was interested in “looked at her Instagram and he was like ohh I like you from your pictures,” but then in person he made fun of her because he felt that she was “too tall.”

In addition to cyberbullying in the form of insults, Jaylen adds that “there be threats” of physical altercations and violence on social media. Kyla explains “they will comment on your picture or something and talk all this stuff in your messages and then when y’all go to school it’s just like a fight.” Lolita discusses an instance where the social media app Keek caused a physical confrontation between her and another student after a verbal altercation with the student’s sister on Keek, she recounts “okay so, I was in my classroom and this girl just walked up to me and was like we gon’ fight and like it made me mad and I was just standing quiet.” In response to Lolita’s story Khadija states “yeah it’s a lot of stuff that goes on with Keek” and Destiny adds “yeah Keek can ruin your life.” Nevaeh adds that physical confrontation associated with social media also takes place when a student doesn’t like another student so they decide to “block” a student so the student that has been blocked decides to “go check and see” what the issue is, which often times leads to verbal or physical confrontations.

Although not discussed as much in focus groups and diary entries, in addition to cyberbullying on social media, five of The Girls mentioned that a major source of conflict was screenshotting social media entries and distributing them to instigate conflict and fights among students. Nevaeh shares that drama happens as a result of “who screenshotted this on Instagram or who screenshotted this message, and who fighting and who posted this fight on Instagram.” Hazel highlights that the consequences of social media extend beyond peers and interpersonal relationships, asserting that administration enforces strict consequences for those who they believe have posted fights or engaged in social media conflict. Hazel mentions “they [administration] thought she posted it [a fight] on Instagram so they got her in school suspension.”

In addition to the cyberbullying and instigation of physical altercations that were the most prominent in the discussions with The Girls, Marwick and Boyd (2011) also assert that other challenges and drama associated on social media manifest as “relationship breakups, makeups, and jealousies; and a vast array of aggressive or passive-aggressive interactions between friends, enemies, or ‘frenemies’” (p. 2). However, despite the consensus that “a lot of drama happens” and there is “mess” and bullying associated with social media, the majority of The Girls still have and are regular participants on social media platforms.

Acknowledging the emotional damage of cyberbullying and the increased probability of conflict, social media requires attention when considering the climate of formal educational spaces. Despite the fact that most social media activities take place

outside of the school, The Girls reveal the integral roles that social media plays in instigating conflict. It is this conflict—and the lack of school intervention and mediation—that serves as an inhibitor to establishing the formal educational spaces as one that promotes peace and the development of positive, healthy interpersonal relationships among peers.

Conclusion

In this chapter, The Girls highlighted several factors that contribute to challenges and obstacles of the formal educational space on a day-to-day basis. Conflict or “mess”—that at times escalates to physical confrontation— originates from complications within interpersonal relationships and the use of social media. The conflict proves to, not only be an everyday stressor, but a major contributor to the overall volatility of the formal educational space.

Chapter 5: Emotional Oppression

Throughout individual discussions, as well as group discussions, The Girls expressed a common experience of emotional oppression both amongst peers and the teachers, administration, and staff. While a consensus of emotional oppression or violence in adolescents is lacking throughout the literature (Navalata, Ashy, Teicher, 2008; O' Hajan, 1995), the general parameters of emotional oppression are oppression that involves words as opposed to physical force or actions (Eisenbraun, 2007; Garbrino, 2002). This form of oppression is categorized by not only verbal insults alone, but “a series of repeated incidents- whether intentional or not that insults, threatens, isolates, degrades, humiliates, and/or controls another person” (Munero, 2001, 2.1). Throughout this chapter, I will explore the experience of The Girls, in their own words; specifically, as it relates to their experiences of emotional oppression amongst peers, as well as from teachers, administration, and staff.

Amongst Peers

In accordance with consensus among child psychologists (Akos and Ellis, 2008; Josselson, 1994; Dusek, 1991; Ingersoll, 1989; Erikson, 1968,1980), La Greca and Lopez (1998) note “adolescents' relationships with friends and peers play a critical role in the development of social skills and feelings of personal competence; [furthermore] peer relationships appear to be instrumental in facilitating adolescents' sense of personal identity.” Considering the overall significance of interpersonal relationships amongst

adolescent peers, it is to be expected that the information communicated by fellow students is a notable aspect of the experience in educational settings. The Girls explain that the experience of emotional oppression amongst peers to manifest in two ways: psychic violence and microaggressions.

“We don’t really show that we really hurt inside.”

Wilson (1998) quotes Wrong’s (1980) definition of psychic violence as:

...a form of conduct, often described as psychic, psychological, or morals force or violence...[is] the deliberate effort to affect the adversely a person’s emotions or his feelings and ideas about himself by verbally, or in other symbolic ways, insulting or degrading him (p. 11).

While the author specifically mentions deliberate efforts only, and fails to explicitly mention gender inclusivity; I posit that psychological violence can also be unintentional and is not relegated to gender. In addition to Wong’s definition of psychic violence, psychic violence “consists of causing mental pain, distress or anxiety or a perceived intention to cause mental pain to another person by threatening or insulting” and can prove to be more challenging than the use of physical violence (Isola, Backman, Voutilainen, and Rautsiala, 2003, p. 400). During a discussion with 6th graders, over half of the girls responded in the affirmative noting that they have experienced comments that made them feel uncomfortable, insulted, and disrespected. Alexandria, Destiny, Charlene, and Khadija explore this topic:

Alexandria: Uhh, but umm, I feel like, if somebody comes up to me and is like, "What are those?" that really, I'ma really be really, really mad. Because I feel like--like I say today is a bad day for me, but I feel like I have nice shoes and I can afford nice shoes, and I just feel like if somebody say, or they be like, "Looking SpongeBob head"--they say that a lot. Just tellin you [CE: SpongeBob head? What does that mean?] [students begin laughing]

Destiny: That's the new insult [Khadija: there's an extra word added to that and its, "SpongeBob head "a[ss]"]

CE: SpongeBob head a, is if you what?

Alexandria, Khadija, Destiny: Ugly, if you ugly

Charlene: If you got a square head

Destiny: They say, [Alexandria: Or they could be like umm] "Head, head a."

Alexandria: Or they could be like simple lookin [Destiny: Wing Stop [restaurant] head a]

CE: What do those things mean?

Khadija: It's like basically tryna cap

CE: But what, what does that translate to? Like what exactly is it about your appearance that they are cappin' on?

Khadija: Like, you don't look how they think you should look.

Destiny: You don't look like the average person.

The aforementioned is merely one example of what The Girls referred to as “throwing slugs” or “cappin,” both of which indicate the use of hurtful insults and antagonizing remarks in regards to physical appearance, sexual orientation, perceived socio economic status, and more.

“What I look like”

Researchers have argued that perceived physical attractiveness, including grooming and attire, is a key factor in social status for youth including adolescents (Boyatzis, Balooof & Durieux, 1998; Alder & Alder, 1998; Boivin & Begin, 1989; Krantz, 1987). As discussed by Becker and Luthar (2007), “students considered attractive have been shown to be significantly more popular than their less attractive peers” (p. 120; LaFontana & Chillessen, 2002). Appraisal of physical appearance amongst peers is primarily predicated on physical characteristics, hairstyles, and attire. Throughout individual and group discussions with The Girls, the discussion of physical appearance and the pressures to maintain a particular appearance—in addition to the consequences of not upholding those standards—proved to be a significant aspect of their everyday experience.

“Fleek” v. “Ugly”

Throughout discussions with The Girls there continued to be a focus on the aspects of physical appearance, from hair to physical features, and how one’s appearance could be classified as either “ugly” or “fleek.” The juxtaposition of either being considered ugly, unattractive, and undesirable, versus being “fleek,” meaning cool, attractive, nearly perfect and desirable played a major role in their everyday experiences, and for many of proved to be a major source of peer insults and psychic violence. In group discussions and individual interviews, The Girls discussed the overall importance of appearance. Khadija mentions if “you don’t look how they [peers] think you should look” you will be teased and insulted.

The Girls indicate that the insults are often times associated with physical appearance including their body type:

Alexandria: Uh yesterday I said they would say, African American boys saying, "Popsicle-looking butt," "Shoes dirty, 99 cents," "SpongeBob head."

CE: What does “popsicle-lookin’ butt” mean?

Rochelle: Oh that means you don’t have no butt [Alexandria: They just make stuff up].

Khadija: A long butt [hand gestures to indicate a straight and long].

Alexandria: They'll throw out the funniest thing, to get attention, the goofiest thing.

Charlene: They be like you had a "long_____day" [implying "ass"].

[Students Khadija & Lolita reiterate what Charlene is implying: a long day]

In her follow up discussion, Stacy reveals her experience with psychic violence on the part of other students directly related to her physical appearance.

CE: What are some of the things they talk about?

Stacy: My weight. How I look. My legs. I don't get why my legs matter to them, I really don't.

CE: What about how you look, and what about your legs?

Stacy: Like sometimes, they be like, "she needs to comb her hair and stuff, she is ugly." My legs are hairy. They are always asking me do I shave, do I shave, do I shave? I don't get why it matters, to them what I do. [CE: Mhm] I mean I don't get why they're not worried about themselves.

CE: So the things you feel like people talk about as far as you're concerned is your physical appearance.

Stacy: Really, yes.

CE: And how do you feel about that?

Stacy: It makes me mad to where I escalate, and it just goes horrible.

The Girls discuss some of the other specific components of appearance that determine whether one is “ugly” or “fleek,” mentioning grooming and specifically noting that your “eyebrows” should be “on fleek.” While several aspects of physical appearance become the source of criticism and insults, hair proves to be a particularly significant topic.

Hair.

Banks (2000) highlights the significance of hair in the Black community

Hair matters in Black communities, and it matters in different ways for women and men. For Black women in this society, what is considered desirable and undesirable hair is based on one’s hair texture. What is deemed desirable is measured against white standards of beauty, which include long and straight hair (usually blonde), that is, hair that is not kinky or nappy. Consequently, Black women’s hair, in general, fits outside of what is considered desirable in mainstream society. Within Black communities, straighter variety and texture are privileged as well. Such hair is described as “good,” while nappy hair [is bad] (p. 2).

The role that hair plays in one’s overall appraisal of beauty, was pointed out by several of The Girls. Kyla explains “you come with your real hair and your hair is short or

something, they will say you ugly, or your weave is stale.” With the exception of 6th grader, Destiny, who shouted “natural” when asked about the preferred hair styles, most of The Girls demonstrated an aversion to natural hairstyles. When asked to elaborate on if this is true for girls generally or if this is something that is specific to Black girls particularly, she states that it is “really mainly for Black girls cuz white girls don’t wear weave.” Jade adds that other students will call you “bald headed.” Jaylen also responds, “they’ll say like you don’t have no edges (at times, due to poor hair maintenance, hair may begin to thin around the front and sides of the scalp) and then you lift it up [your headband] and they see your edges but then they say you aint got no edges [anyway].” Cassandra recalls when asked about her most negative memory at school, she immediately recalls it being associated with her “hair.” She explains “well, because my hair was just horrible, because it rained so bad that day and somebody said something about it.” Cassandra reveals the perception that hair texture that is closer to that typical of white girls is desired, while her natural hair texture—which returned to it tighter curls due to rain and humidity—was less acceptable and attractive.

When asked what determines if your hair is “on fleek” several of The Girls respond

Destiny: Weave! [some students respond in agreement]

Alexandria: No, no they get called out for that too

Charlene: Braids like this [points to another student]

Alexandria: Weave, sew-ins, you know just being right you know, looking right

In this exchange, Destiny, Alexandria, and Charlene all identify hairstyles that they deem to be attractive; interestingly, all of the styles mentioned involve adding extensions or hair often times unlike their natural texture.

The Girls mention that none of the Black girls at school are exempt from the overall appraisal and criticism of appearance. Kyla shares, “even if you pretty they [*peers no racial specificity*] gon’ find one thing and talk about you.” However, Alexandria proclaims that there’s a racial difference regarding physical appearance and the consequences for not meeting socially established standards. She shares “I feel like if I go to school looking ratchet they’ll cap about you, but if a white girl goes to school looking ratchet they won’t talk about you.” She continues

...Black Americans hair being short they get talked about but it’s really nobody being talked about because of white people hair being short. They’ll cut their hair and they’ll [*peers no racial specificity*] be like, ‘Why you cut your hair?’ but it’s not really like, ‘Oo that’s why your hair short, Bald Head’.... If I have short hair, if Black girls have short hair, they’ll be quick, ‘Oh you bald headed,’ but if white girls have short hair it could be all the way up here [student demonstrates a very short length] and they won’t say nothing; it’ll just be like, ‘Oh you cut your hair’ [all of the girls

respond in agreement "Yesss"]. But they'll really be like, "Oh I don't like that you look bald headed" to us. Oh oh we bald headed?

Similarly, Kyla declares "[white and Hispanic girls] really don't get talked about cuz they aint really got nothing to, they just born pretty. Like they born with good eyes..." with other girls adding "pretty hair, long hair." Alexandria and Kyla both discuss beauty standards that position the appearance of other racial groups dichotomously with that of Black girls; ultimately presenting the former as the preferred and more beautiful attributes.

As expressed by The Girls, the focus on hair and the peer subjective appropriateness of one's hair style is a significant source of contention and stress for The Girls. Largely during focus group discussions, The Girls highlight the significance of hair in one's overall appraisal of beauty. Revealed through their dialogue is the preference of hairstyles that add length and modify the texture of their hair. Further, The Girls reveal beauty standards—particularly with regards to hair—that are the antithesis to what would be considered natural to Black girls. This dilemma is common and fits with the "three oppositional binaries—the natural/unnatural Black, good/bad hair, and the authentic/inauthentic Black" that are central to most Black hair discussions (Thompson, 2009, p. 831). The constant attempt to mediate and reconcile natural appearance with perceptions of beauty is a constant challenge for The Girls; particularly, when the messages received in the formal educational setting reinforce their position as the antithesis to desirable beauty standards.

“What are those?!”

In addition to physical characteristics such as hair and appearance, The Girls also pointed out that a major determinant of physical attractiveness is attire. As the campus mandates a strict uniform policy, The Girls point out that while brands of clothing are not typically an issue, other students “really just question your shoe game.” Several of The Girls point out that if you don't “come with designer shoes” you will receive ridicule from peers. A common rhetorical question posed to point out that the shoes one is wearing are not up to par with trend is, “What are those?!” Popularized on social media, specifically Vine, the phrase is typically shouted as an insult to those who are wearing shoes that are dirty, unkempt, or an unknown brand. Ayanna points out that shoes are a key source of teasing. Ayanna mentions that if a student is wearing shoes from Payless, then the student will receive negative attention from classmates and peers. Charlene adds “like say for instance you wear some sandals or somethin and they not a name brand, they’ll talk about you;” Kyla and several of The Girls interject, “They’ll say, ‘What are those?!’” along with a pointing gesture. Kyla goes on to discuss the difference between acceptable and non-acceptable footwear:

Like, her shoes [points to Makayla’s shoes]—they Jordans so don’t nobody really say nothing to her, but like if you come in here with Sketchers or something like—it’s a big joke about like, if you don’t got the stuff that came out or like the designer stuff it’s like lame.

Alexandria adds to the discussion of popular footwear:

Yeah every time—see this what my thing is; see I know about real fashion designers. It might not just be Jordans, but yesterday I came in with some Balenciaga, but they aint know about those so they talking about, ‘What are those?!’ da da da. But um, anyways I did get a couple of compliments from them. They was like, ‘That is something that Hakeem [*an actor on the FOX show EMPIRE*] would wear.’ Everybody know I'm crazy about Hakeem.

Charlene mentions that if you have “a little dirt” on your shoes or if your peers think that you bought your shoes from the “99 cent store” you would be subject to ridicule.

Lolita describes that the times that she felt the most insulted were when she was “told about her shoes.” She explains that the running joke was that she had brought her shoes “from Family Dollar,” which she stresses is untrue. Ayanna adds that one can also be teased if classmates deem your shoes to be “fake”, “dirty,” or “messed up.”

Alexandria mentions a similar experience on a “bad day” when her “shoes [were] ratchet and chipped off,” “a whole bunch of people [were] talk[ing] about it.” She goes on to share:

I feel like if somebody comes up to me and is like, "What are those?!" that really, I'mma really be really really mad. Because I feel like, like I say today is a bad day for me but I feel like I have nice shoes and I can afford nice shoes....

A common medium for emotional violence is graffiti on bathroom stalls. Ayanna, a 6th grader discusses her experience and feelings about having insults written about her on the restroom stalls. She explains

It's like all people like to do is pick on people about their hair and face and shoes, really shoes, you wear them on your feet to protect your feet. I'm a really sensitive person so I cry a lot for no reason but it really hurts when someone is talking about or writing things on the wall about you. Just 2 or 3 weeks ago my name was written on the wall, "Ayanna look like a panda bear with her fake a** shoes." I think panda bears are cute so whatever. I try to ignore negative comments but it's hard. My stomach starts hurting than I start crying.

Ayanna expresses a similar frustration with her peers' preoccupation with shoes stating that that from her perspective, "it doesn't really matter, because they are shoes; you wear them on your feet.... It is ordinary stuff that they pick on to just get inside of you." Lolita ultimately concludes what most of The Girls voiced, that "if they not expensive, they not good shoes." Ultimately, physical appearance plays a major role in everyday experiences. Whether one's peers perceive you to be attractive and on trend, plays a major role in determining the overall day to day experience of students and their experience of psychic violence.

Alexandria responds to the emotional toll that the psychic violence takes on her and her peers revealing "They tryna make other people laugh about us, but we be

laughin it off. We don't really show that we really hurt inside." Based on the encounters and experienced revealed by The Girls, it is evident that a key component to the experience of Black girls is associated with a consistent occurrence of insults, antagonisms, and emotional violence that, whether explicitly communicated or not, has a negative impact on their emotional well-being. It is significant to note that Alexandria's dialogue uncovers the decision to maintain a tough appearance, while hiding hurt feelings; this is a topic that will be discussed further in chapter 6.

Microaggressions

The term microaggressions refers to the "everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions represent a covert form of racism or discrimination, and can be manifest in three forms: micro-assaults, micro-insults, and micro-invalidations; that seek to maintain existing systems of marginalization and oppression (Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Specifically, I will explore the ways in which The Girls recall microaggressions experienced with peers based on their gender and/or sexual orientation. In a later discussion I will explore The Girls recounts of intersectional microaggressions—meaning both gendered and raced simultaneously—that that are largely perpetuated by their teachers, administration and staff. In many cases, it becomes evident that The Girls' experiences of microaggressions are at times experienced based on one aspect of their identity, and in some instances

multiple aspects of their identity. As stated by Sue (2010) “racial, gender, and sexual orientation microaggressions are active manifestations of marginality and/or reflection of a worldview of inclusion/exclusion, superiority/inferiority, normality/abnormality, and desirability/ undesirability” (p. 5; Sue, 2007). The discussion of microaggressions and attention to understanding the ways in which Black middle school girls experience microaggressions is relevant because similar to the psychological effects of overt forms of racism and discrimination, microaggressions have serious cognitive, psychological, and physiological effects (Roberts & Molock, 2013).

In the following discussion of microaggressions perpetuated by peers, gender and sexual orientation are disaggregated for two reasons. First, intersectional microaggressions are deemed to fit within the criteria that: “(a) the participant was able to explicitly identify that they perceived the microaggression to be based on two or more identities or (b) the researchers believed that the participant provided sufficient information to interpret the experience as an intersectional microaggression” (Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, Wong, Marshall, & McKenzie, 2015, p. 152). For the instances discussed in this section, The Girls do not specifically identify the experiences to be a result of multiple identities—in fact, Hazel reveals that the gendered microaggressions to be universal to any “female” on the campus. While the microaggressions identified by Lewis and Neville (2015), for example the sexualization of black women and girls based on stereotypical physical features (i.e. thighs, butt, breast), critique of communication style (i.e. loud, aggressive), strong black woman stereotypes, and/or being silenced or marginalized, are understood as inextricably connected to both race and gendered

identity; I posit, the microaggressions included in the gendered discussion demonstrate a greater saliency of gendered identity. Similarly, the instances of microaggressions discussed in the sexual orientation section cannot be identified—by the participant or researcher—as being specifically tied to multiple identities. However, as will be explored in the discussion of microaggressions perpetuated by teachers, administration, and staff, there are instances that The Girls discuss intersectional microaggressions.

Secondly, while the instances of microaggressions perpetuated by peers—as discussed in this chapter—do not necessarily fit within the framework of intersectional microaggressions, it is my argument that the unique intersectional identity of The Girls leads to the experience of microaggressions on multiple levels; despite them not always happening simultaneously. Based on the self-reporting of The Girls, their experiences of gender and sexual orientation microaggressions among peers reflects a situational saliency of one social identity; however, I argue that the discussion of the experiences is relevant to a discussion of intersectional identities and the overall experience of Black, middle-school, girls in the formal educational setting because the experiences are a consequence of inheriting multiple social identities.

Gendered.

Throughout group discussions, diary entries/ follow up interviews, several girls recalled instances where they experienced slights based on their gendered identities. While The Girls did not utilize the terminology of microaggressions specifically, the individual accounts fit within the paradigm of gendered microaggressions. It is relevant to note

that the report and explanation of experienced microaggressions primarily took place during the focus group discussions, as such, a great deal of the data included will be extracted from those discussions. I posit that the group nature of focus groups and the covert nature of focus groups was favorable to greater revelations and self-reporting. Gendered microaggressions represent a transformation of classical overt sexism and patriarchy to a more modernized expression of the aforementioned in a more covert fashion (Sue, 2007). As noted by Sue (2007),

In today's societal climate, it is not politically correct to hold overtly sexist attitudes or engage in obvious discriminatory actions toward women because it is at odds with beliefs of equality...[as such] it has morphed into a more ambiguous, subtle, and invisible form. (p. 169; Capodilupo et al., in press; Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, in press)

There are several themes that have been classified in scholarly literature in regards to gender microaggressions such as, "assumptions of physical or intellectual inferiority, second class citizenship/invisibility, denial of reality of sexism, denial of individual sexism;" however, based on the self-reporting of The Girls, the gendered microaggressions experienced fit primarily into two categories: Sexual Objectification and Restrictive Gender Roles (Nadal, Hamit, Lyons, Weinberg, & Corman, 2013, p 194) .

"Get you Some"- Sexual Objectification.

Gendered microaggressions associated with the theme of sexual objectification is defined as

The process of perceiving the female body as an object for the pleasure and psychological ownership of others, primarily men; women are reduced to their physical appearance and/or sexuality (Sue, 2007, p. 169-170)

Sexual objectification can manifest itself through countless verbal and nonverbal acts such as

...staring at a woman's breasts while talking to her, making catcalls or whistling, prolonged staring or leering, "checking out" another woman in your partner's presence, hanging pin ups of nude women in the office, forcing unwanted attention towards a woman, touching or rubbing up against a woman without her permission, making crude remarks about women's bodies and telling sexual jokes... (*ibid.*)

Of particular importance, adolescent girls have commonly reported that they have multiple experiences "that include being called demeaning names, receiving unwanted romantic attention, and being taunted about their physical appearance" (Capodilupo, Nadal, Corman, Hamit, Lyons, and Weinberg, 2010, p. 195). One of the most common

gendered, sexually objectifying microaggression reported by The Girls is the phrase “get you some.”

Throughout group discussions many of the girls repeat Ayanna’s sentiments that she “hate[s] when people say ‘get you some.’ It’s so annoying.” The phrase “get you some” ultimately, as agreed upon by The Girls, is sexual innuendo. Several of The Girls recount instances where harmless, platonic occurrences are such as a hug—as discussed by Noel and Stacy—result in unwanted advances or sexual suggestions by their peers.

Noel: Like if somebody hug a boy or something

Stacy: When I talk to boys people always think that I always like them,
but I don’t

The Girls assert that disproportionally the phrase is applied to them. When specifically posed the question “So when they say “get you some” they mostly say that to girls?” the overwhelming majority of the group respond in the affirmative. Makayla, Ayanna, Jade, and Kyla articulate their frustration with the phrase.

Ayanna: Ahh I was gonna say like if you if you take a picture with
someone else [Makayla: even though y’all just friends] yeah

Makayla: They’ll be like “oo I see you, get you some aye”

CE: That’s the phrase, get you some, okay. Imma note that [Jade: I hate
that word] that’s gon’ be included

Kyla: They always say that to me

Charlene, Khadija, and Alexandria discuss another experience with unwanted sexual advances and the discomfort that they experience.

CE: So y'all, okay, so do boys make like inappropriate comments [girls respond in the affirmative "YES!"] about like

Khadija: Yeah he said he had a big thing, that's what he said

CE: And what are some of the other things, some of y'all have shaken y'all's head yes and said boys make inappropriate comments to you.

What are some of the other inappropriate comments they make to you?

Charlene: They be like, when you gon' have this with me and di di di.

CE: And how do y'all feel about stuff like that? Like how does that make y'all feel?

Alexandria: uncomfortable

Some of the girls take the phrase to be more of a joke, as noted by Jaylen:

Jaylen: Like I don't feel like nobody like, all these kids be like, "Get you some" and everything, they like most of the time they just be playing but like nobody really goes up to anybody and be like, "Oh, do you wanna do

this with me or nothing" I think that they like—first of all you're in seventh grade, they're gonna be like, "No, you're weird."

CE: Um hm.

Jaylen: But like I don't think people really do that. Like most of the time everybody just playing but like some people just take it to the heart and be all serious and be like "eww don't touch me and you're being inappropriate." But like everybody doing it. Even the people that be like "eww you nasty" even those quiet people they know that when they get by they friends they be doin it too.

Jaylen explains the consequences of rejecting boys' advances"

Like if a guy likes you and they will come up to you and ask you do you wanna go out and you're like no and they're like, "Why?" and you're like- -you don't know a reason so you just tell them that you're like bi or something and they get all mad and they tell the whole school cuz they couldn't pull a girl.

Jaylen's response brings attention to the pressure and perceived obligation she feels to provide a justification to a boy that she is not interested in.

Acknowledging that the consequence of communicating disinterest is undesirable, she utilizes a false claim about her sexuality to provide an acceptable response as a means to mediate the boy's potentially angry response.

This situation brings attention to the early age in which the male ego is centered and agency is compromised.

Similarly, Lolita describes an experience with a boy that was unwilling to accept her rejection of his advances. She stated that the boy would regularly ask other students to come up to her and ask her if she wanted to date him. Lolita states that he would also come up to her himself, for months, while she consistently responded “no” to his advances.

Lolita: Well he, just kept going, because I think it was about 2 months ago when he first said that to me, and it's still going around school. He keeps coming up to me, like "I like you. Do you want to go out?" it's like about twice a week. I've been like, just leave me alone. How do you feel about that?

CE: So how do you feel about that? How do you feel about the fact that you've already told him no, but that he keeps on trying to come up to you and keeps on asking you the same questions? How does that make you feel?

Lolita: Well, it makes me feel, like weird, because like, sometimes he be like, watching my every move. Like, he be stalking me. I'm just like, why are you watching me?

CE: Mmhm

Lolita: And he has nothing to say. He's just like, "I like you so I'm going to watch you."

CE: And does that make you feel uncomfortable?

Lolita: A little.

Based on the experiences expressed by The Girls, gendered microaggressions in the form of sexual objectification is common place for middle school girls and intricately connected to their overall school experience. From sexual innuendo to unwanted advances, The Girls disclose that those experiences were not only "weird" and "annoying" but also "uncomfortable".

"Thot"- Restrictive Gender Roles.

In a similar vein, the gendered microaggressions experienced by The Girls extended beyond the feeling of objectification, directly related, The Girls explained the experience of gendered microaggressions based specifically on their perceived non-conformity to the established restrictive gender roles. The gendered microaggressions associated with the restrictive gender roles were specifically associated with sexual behavior, presumed promiscuity, and overall reputation (Capodilupo, Nadal, Corman, Hamit, Lyons, and Weinberg, 2010; Sue, 2007). This stigma, referred to as "slut shaming" in recent literature (Papp, Hagerman, Gnoleba, Erchull, Liss, McLean, & Robertson, 2015; Reger, 2015; Tanenbaum, 2015; Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, &

Seeley, 2014; Ringrose, & Renold, 2012), is “the practice of maligning women [and girls] for presumed sexual activity” (Armstrong et. al, 2014, p. 100). Ultimately, the

...shaming is based on sexual double standards established and upheld by men [and boys], to women’s [and girls] disadvantage. Although young men are expected to desire and pursue sex regardless of relational and emotional context, young women are permitted sexual activity only when in committed relationships and “in love” (Armstrong et al, 2014, p. 101; Crawford and Popp, 2003; Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009; Shalet, 2011; Bell, 2013)

It is important to note that the sexual policing associated with this type of stigmatization does not necessarily have to be based on actual sexual activity or behavior; rather the mere presumption that one is behaving in a way that is contrary to the prescribed appropriate behavior is enough to garner reaction and shaming. According to The Girls, the most common means of communicating or signifying that a girl is perceived to have stepped outside of the established gender roles is the use of the term *that*. The term *that*, or “that hoe over there,” has been popularized in hip hop/rap culture to mean a woman that is deemed promiscuous, in other words a synonym for the common sexist terms like hoe, whore, and/or slut. The Girls note that this term is used frequently to describe and degrade girls around campus. As expressed so eloquently by Hazel, “if you’re a female here, to everybody, any female here you’re in danger.” When probed she explains “not danger, like of like your reputation.” Jaylen

discusses the fragility of one's reputation and the power held by boys to tarnish it stating "if you go with a guy and then you break up with them and then they gon', they gon' start to call you names and stuff." Kyla adds

Its really like if you go out with one person then you a thot cuz the whole, that's why I go, I go out with people, I do but I just choose to not have sex and all that stuff. So if you, if you umm go out with one person they gon' tell they friends that they went out with you and then everybody gon' be in your relationship. Then its like you a thot because all the girls...[student pause and starts a new sentence] Like if you go out with the popular boy in the school after you break up with him you is a thot because, well, when you go out with him you a thot because all the girls like him...

In addition to dating, The Girls also noted that if you wore something too tight or too short you would also be called a "thot." Makayla adds how even the things one wears outside of the school context are judged stating "like your pictures you post, and how many likes. Like you might wear something real short they'll judge you and be like 'you a thot go somewhere.' They'll call you a thot." In the vein of being critical of one's appearance, the stigma is not limited to clothing, some girls have received the title of "slut" because a boy thinks that they "look like they suck dick," as pointed out by Nevaeh.

Hazel, Nevaeh, and Monet acknowledge the gendered double standard noting

Hazel: I can say, okay so it's fine for boys to be like "I talk to her, and I talk to her, and I talk to her, and I talk to her" we just all talking together. But then when a female be like I chilled with him, him, him, she on she can't [Nevaeh: you a thot] yeah, or if or if you went out with this person

Nevaeh: but and you went out with this other person you a thot. Or

Monet: like they give us a name for everything [Hazel says in tandem "for everything"]

Jaylen calls out the contradictions of the double standard when she poses the rhetorical question: "how you gon' call me names when you used to go out with me?" Similarly, Monet adds that, even with the critique and stigma associated with being deemed a *thot*, boys continue to pursue those girls. However, Monet adds that although the boys may date girls that they consider to be promiscuous, the boys consistently remind the girl that they do not respect her and that her reputation is less than desirable. Rather than terms of endearment, identified by Monet to be "queen" or "wife," boys "be like 'that's my sideline [another partner other than the primary partner]' 'that's my thot' like yeah 'that's my 304 [hoe]'."

Evident in the discussion of The Girls' experiences, gendered microaggressions are commonplace. Whether in the form of sexual objectification or policing around restrictive gender roles, The Girls are subjected to emotional oppression on a consistent and daily basis. What many would deem to be minor behaviors are subjected to major

scrutiny and labeling. The simple task of walking down the hallways is met with objectification and innuendo.

Sexual Orientation.

While the discussion of sexual orientation and the microaggressions associated with this topic were less frequently discussed and explored by far, I find it significant to note the few instances—including during a focus group discussion—where several of The Girls shared their experience with microaggressions associated with sexual orientation. While overt forms of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) discrimination have received a great deal of public attention and outrage, resulting in increased governmental policy and legislation; it is important to discuss the fact that “sexual minorities also face daily subtle (and not so subtle) indignations” (Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, 2010, p. 217; Sue, 2007). Sue (2007) defines sexual orientation microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, environmental indignities, whether intentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative LGBT slights and insults to the target group or person” (p. 191; Sue and Capodilupo, 2008). While there are multiple categorizations of sexual orientation microaggressions, here I will only elaborate on particular instances as mentioned by The Girls.

The discussion of sexual orientation only arose in the group discussion with the 7th grade girls in which two of the girls self-identified as bisexual. When asked about the worst experience at school Makayla shared

Makayla: When last year, I was a sixth grader here last year there was mess, I was always, I got caught up in mess

CE: Like what kinda mess?

Makayla: like, fighting [CE interjects "over?"] over like retarded stuff

Jaylen: sexuality

CE: Over sexuality?

Noel: yeah

CE: So what do you mean over sexuality?

Makayla: Cuz I'm bisexual

Makayla, and Kyla—the other student that self-identified as bisexual—go on to share their experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions. Fitting within the category of *Assumption of Abnormality*, or “pathologiz[ing] LGBT and same sex behavior by considering it a form of mental illness, [abnormality, and/or identity crisis],” Noel discloses that people have the tendency to judge those of varying sexual orientations, based on the “Endorsement of Heteronormative Culture and Behaviors” (Sue, 2010, p. 195). Makayla notes, “And like when you're like bisexual people ask you questions like ‘how they become bisexual’ ‘why you bisexual’ like they ask you why and like how you choose;” to which she responds “like it’s just a natural attraction. If I like a girl I like a

girl.” In response, Jaylen communicates a sexual orientation microaggression associated with heteronormativity stating, “they think just because you’re a girl you have to specifically likes guys like them, but the thing is you don’t have to be like everyone else.”

The Girls also explore the sexual orientation microaggressions in the form of “Heterosexist Language/Terminology” which can be “quite obviously derogatory... or may manifest itself in more subtle everyday usage where the individuals using it are unaware of the demeaning message to the reference group” (Sue, 2007, p 193).

Charlene notes that being considered “gay or something like that” will result in being made fun of. Makayla notes “they like, throwing slugs like, they be like calling people ‘fags’ and stuff.” In her discussion, Makayla also makes visible the experience of microaggressions associated with “oversexualization” or the presumption that those who identify as LGBT are hypersexual or merely concerned with engaging in sexual activity, resulting in heterosexist preoccupation with being propositioned or desired by LGBT individuals (Sue, 2007). Makayla discusses some of the common ways she has experienced this, stating, “They be like watch out, they be like watch out. They be sliding to the side when you walk through the hallway” Jaylen adds that other students commonly ask LGBT students “Do you like me?”

The last sexual orientation discussed by The Girls took place during a group discussion and was demonstration during an exchange between Jaylen and Kyla.

Kyla: Okay so umm, not many of y’all know, and I don’t know if y’all do know, but I go both ways or however y’all say it. And I feel like that—I

didn't really tell nobody because I didn't know how people was gon' act. So my friends told me, like, [why] you not tell them [her friends]? Why didn't I do this? I really didn't tell them [her friends] because I didn't know how people was gon' feel and I hate when people judge me or I hate when people ever have somethin to say about me. So I feel like y'all shouldn't judge people about what they like because God made me this way. It's not God choice, people say it's a sin, but I don't think it's really a sin. Cause, like how you supposed to control what you like and don't like?

Jaylen: It's a sin to be gay. Uh, it's a sin to be gay because we were created to like the opposite sex so that the population will go up.

Kyla: Okay, so you said that it is a sin to not be attracted to the opposite sex...but umm --you said that--but no sin is right, so it really don't matter. No sin is greater, no sin is worsen, every sin is the same in God's eyes.

In this exchange another form of sexual orientation microaggression takes place, "sinfulness". Sue (2007) notes that this form of microaggression is based on the "viewing [of] one's anti-LGBT position as morally right and an expression of God's will, these individuals are more open about their negative sentiments toward homosexuality, actively condemn it as a sin, and engage in overt microassaults" (p. 194-195). In addition to the sexual orientation that takes place, we also see Kyla's attempt to negotiate, explain, --and in some regard--understand the complexity of her sexual orientation. While initially she attempts to explain that homosexuality is not a sin considering she

was created that way; however, she later attests that while it may be a sin, to sin is to be human, therefore distinctions between sins are inconsequential. Kyla demonstrates the confusion of sexual orientation during adolescents that stems from “lack of information, conflict over values, and ambiguity regarding the meaning and interpretation of events” (Schneider & Tremble, 1986, p. 74; Damas, Hein, Powell, & Dundon, 2013). Lastly, while it is important to note the exchange and the ways that Jaylen’s comments were a microaggression, it is also important to make explicit that in my discussion of this exchange I am not seeking to villainize or condemn her for her ideal; as she is still early in her development and immediately following this interaction this was taken as an opportunity to discuss with The Girls how that rationale can be problematic and hurtful.

While the recollection of experiences of sexual orientation microaggressions paints a daunting picture of the overall experience of self-identified LGBT adolescent girls, it is also important to note that the disclosures of sexual orientation were met with either acceptance and support or no response by from The Girls, with the exception of Jaylen who communicated disagreement as shared above. Ayanna shares in her journal “...I’m not against gay, bisexuals, or lesbians, I support it” adding that it hurts her seeing her LGBT friends “get bullied everyday by the same people.” Makayla disclosed that although she has not been able to have open communication and support from her parents or teachers, she has “friends that accepted [her].”

Teachers, Administrators, and Staff

“...the disrespect levels can be like out of control.”

Disrespect, as the antithesis of respect, suggests that one is not deserving of appropriate, fair, or humane treatment. Throughout discussions with The Girls, the most common complaint associated with teachers, administration, and staff was a feeling of disrespect. When asked to describe a typical day at school the first response given by 8th grader Neveah was “well, at this school its finna be which teachers gonna be disrespectful today.” Monet adds “its so overwhelming, disrespect on top of disrespect, on top of disrespect.” The Girls consistently asserted that they experienced a lack of “respect” when dealing with the majority of teachers, administrators, and staff throughout campus as well as their being “nasty” and “rude”. Monet explains:

Just like the disrespect level with the teachers, like some of them like—oaky say one teacher, our science teacher this year, likes to point fingers and touch us and like be like "no you can't do this [*with hand gesture*]" and be like real close, and when we do that—Or like she used to say like, say if [students say] "You need to mind your own business miss because it causes drama," and she be thinking we be talking about other stuff, but we really be talking about something different. And she always be like "you students are my business" but one girl will ask her what is this miss? And she'll be like none of your business and this is why, uhh, we don't get along with her. Because if we-- I pointed my finger back at her one time

to like show her something, but she was like "oh don't point your fingers," or something like that "that's not nice" or somethin she said.

And I be like miss you do it to me so why I can't do it back?

Like Monet and Neveah, Kyla adds that "on a bad day...you gotta worry about teachers and how they talk to you and stuff." Jaylen and Jade add

Jaylen: They be like rude to you and then when you be rude to them back they get mad, but

Jade: And then they be doing this [hand gesture] "Sit" and I be like, "I'm not your pet." [Students laugh] A teacher did that to me this morning...

They continue:

Jaylen: I feel like they're mean. Like cuz they'll have you, they'll do something evil... all the other teachers is strict.

Jade: You could be tryna tell them something and they will just start yelling at you when you try to express your feelings to them.

Hazel communicates her frustration in her journal stating

This lady has [presume the Hazel meant to put no] respect of person. And she doesn't show me any respect. That already shows you that she has to

be exact opposite of me (if you know what I mean). So when I got into her class she straight yelled allllllllllllllllllllll [drawing the word out] day.

When asked about her perception of respect and what it means to her she shares "Respect is like for a child, for a child to an adult it's like yes ma'am no ma'am, yes ma'am, I mean yes sir no sir, stuff like that." When asked how do teachers show respect to her and her peers she simply responds "they don't." Later adding that "their respect to us should be some positive stuff, like they don't, she don't never have nothing positive to say." In an extreme discussion of experience with disrespect, Stacy talks about being threatened by a teacher "the teacher came out there, she was like "I was just trying to show you where the work was I was not trying to get a attitude with you because right there you were fixing to get slapped [meaning the teacher alluded to wanting to slap a student]."

Several of The Girls express that the lack of respect on the part of the teachers is not isolated to being directed at them, they also disclose that they have witnessed their parents on the receiving end of disrespect. Hazel provides an example stating "the specific teacher that we're talkin about I'm not, mm, I'm not gon' lie to you, she's very disrespectful, she hung up in my mom's face and told her 'Oh that's all I gotta say' and she just hung up." Similarly, Lolita recalls an experience when a teacher called home and did not receive the response she wanted from her dad, Lolita explains

Lolita: So they called my dad again, and my dad was like well "what did she put down on the paper?" And she was just like, oh she just wrote

down random stuff. He just started laughing on the phone again, and she was talking about "immature A[ss]."

CE: She called your dad that?

Lolita: Yeah after she hung up, she was like "Immature A." I was just like if my daddy would have heard that he would've been mad.

CE: She said that in front of you?

Lolita: Well I was walking away, and then she was just like "Immature A." I was just like, well I just didn't say nothing.

Some of The Girls provide explanations for the teachers' lack of respect citing the cause to be anything from pregnancy—which Nevaeh believes to make teachers irritable and in turn increasingly disrespectful—to being unqualified to being immature. Nevaeh, Monet, and Hazel discuss the topic

Nevaeh: Oh my god, I'm gon' let you know now, this is why we say the teachers are disrespectful. Teachers are already coming straight out of college, straight outta college [Hazel: they young] they young [Hazel: 24] our oldest teacher is 41. And everybody else is way early 30's, 20's

Monet: Most of them are in their 20's

Hazel: I feel, I feel if you ain't got kids you can't be no teacher because you don't, you don't know how to deal with a lot of stuff.

Nevaeh: Most everybody, most all our teachers at this school

Monet: no but it depends on like you know

Hazel: it depends on the person

Nevaeh: They're straight outta college like straight out [Monet: yeah like]

[Hazel: some graduated like two months ago]

Monet: Like our social studies teachers is straight out of college

CE: So y'all don't feel like they're necessarily qualified? [students respond in the affirmative: yeah]

Nevaeh: No, because they don't wanna hear, they still on that he said she said stuff...

Hazel explains her rationale asserting that sometimes the teachers are a little "crazy" after lunch "because they haven't ate. They been in there watching us. So they be like, I haven't ate lunch so you better sit down. Or I haven't did this, they get rowdy."

Regardless of the explanations offered by students, the undeniable shared reality of The Girls is the perceived disrespect that they experience at the hands of teachers, administration, and staff. This perceived disrespect leads the students to

resent their teachers and fosters a negative relationship that is inevitably detrimental to emotional and academic well-being. While a great deal of research directs focus on the experience of teachers and the disrespect-defiance that they feel from students, (De Lucia & lasenza, 1995; Friedman, 1994; Downs, 1992; Taylor & Hoedt, 1974) based on the experiences revealed by The Girls, it is evident that greater research is needed understanding the perceptions of students and the disrespect that they feel on a consistent basis and some of the responses—which will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.

In/visibility: A student teacher binary

Throughout discussions with The Girls, they conveyed an interesting juxtaposition between what they considered to be excessive policing and monitoring – i.e. visibility—and a lack of care and acknowledgement –i.e. invisibility. In the focus groups and diaries/follow-up interviews, The Girls reveal the attention afforded to them when it comes to policing behavior and assigning punishment; conversely, The Girls also reveal that in times of need, whether it be for additional directions and explanation of assignments or a personal matter, The Girls express the belief that they are either ignored or disregarded by the teachers, administration, and staff. It is the tension between the hypervisibility for reprimand and the invisibility for support and care that establish the formal educational space a volatile environment.

“We have rules, on top of rules, on top of rules, on top of rules.”

As pointed out by Goodman (2007) a “casual observer of today’s public schools will note that classrooms [and schools] are highly regulated environments with endless rules intended to curb children’s behavior—when and how they talk, when and how they move, where and what they eat, how they dress, when they go to the bathroom—as well as their conformity to academic instruction” (p. 3). The regulation and consequences for disobeying rules—including “minor infractions [such as] defying school authority, skipping detentions and disrupting class”—results in two primary outcomes 1) “more rules and sanctions” and 2) harsher punishments and interventions for Black students (Goodman, 2007, p. 4; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Mendez and Knoff, 2003; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000). Throughout individual and group discussions The Girls expressed frustration with both outcomes.

Nevaeh and Monet share

Nevaeh: ...then like it’s like coming to school every day is like ‘what new rule is we finna have now?’ It’s like cuz this school makes you feel like you’re in military like you getting ready

Monet: Especially this one

Nevaeh: It’s like the rules it’s like a new rule every single day

Monet: Or every single week

They add,

Nevaeh: And they say our school has a reputation of being ghetto and stuff like that so they wanna like train us to be uh

Monet: more professional

Nevaeh: yeah and stuff like that

Nevaeh asserts that due to the strict rules she is constantly considering “[am] I gonna get in trouble for doing this or am I gonna get in trouble for doing this?”

The 7th grade girls point out the lack of “privileges” afforded to students as they discuss one of the teachers they have in common.

Traynesha: And she don’t give us no privileges

Kyla: I only have trouble in Ms. Howard’s class,

Ayanna: She don’t, she don’t

Makayla: She don’t give us no privileges.

Nevaeh highlights a space of great restriction noting “they're very strict on the bathrooms, like it’s something about the bathrooms,” a common sentiment shared by The Girls. Several of The Girls noted that restrictions on the restrooms were so rigid and

restrictive that at one-point bathroom passes were taken away and they only had passing period. To be expected during the passing periods the restrooms would be “packed” causing many students to be late for their classes, resulting in consequences like “marks” and “detention.” Makayla shares her experience

I came late because I was at the restrooms, and when you like our restrooms be packed during passing period, so I came and told the teacher that I was gonna be late, he said okay so that’s when I went to the restroom and I came back he was like where’s your tracker, and I was like I came to tell you that I was gonna be late. And he was like well when you find your tracker knock on the door and I was like I don’t have my tracker he was like okay you have a detention.

In an attempt to closely monitor the space, Hazel shares that the school has not only “hall monitors [that] monitor like every single thing,” but also monitors that closely monitor the restrooms. Hazel elaborates, “the restroom you went in they check it before you went in and they check it when you come out.” The Girls also stated that the increased monitoring, the removal of mirrors, as well as the hand soap, from the restrooms are all established as consequences for misconduct in the restrooms by teachers, administrators and staff; however, several of The Girls feel the punishment is excessive and “unfair.”

Another point of contention was the strict enforcement of the dress code/uniform policy. Many of The Girls revealed a frustration with the uniform policy. Nevaeh discusses the strict enforcement of the policy

At the door when we come in its like middle school through high school, 6th to 12th grade, it's before you walk in you like all our deans they check our belts, if you don't have a belt on automatic detention. No if ands buts about [Ebony: if you don't have the right shirt on automatic detention] automatic detention. If you're not in uniform automatic detention.

Monet repeats those views during the eighth grade focus group,

they stand at the door and harass us about not having on a belt, not havin on a school jacket, or it could be a school t-shirt but if it's not a school polo t that's a detention because you're out of uniform

Hazel adds "you know the polos that you saw us in the other day, you gotta buy those and you can't wear no other shirt and you gotta buy they jacket." They also add that "you gotta buy they scarfs; you can't wear no other scarfs." Further discussing the cost of the uniforms Traynesha adds that if a student can't afford to buy one of the specified shirts you have to wear a plain white shirt, which can become a source of ridicule.

Additionally, Makayla points out "like these jackets are real high and like I don't see why y'all [administration] can't just let us wear our own jackets instead of wearing these

jackets because most of these jackets aint even helping [us keep warm]. So I rather wear my grey jacket, myself, instead of wearing this.”

The Girls continued to describe the firm uniform policy:

Hazel: I can walk around her with a hoodie and that that’s like a sin like you better take off that hoodie, but they walk around her with a hoodie and a hat and [student shrugs shoulders in frustration]

Nevaeh: So this year they made jackets

Hazel: They made the jackets with no hoods, I’m serious no hood

Nevaeh: Like this with no hoodie [shows hood less jackets] So um last year we had jackets with hoods and they would like swear up and down "you can’t have your hood on you can’t have your hood on" and they would just like break their necks to give us marks all type of consequences.

Hazel, Nevaeh and Monet detail the policy:

Hazel: If you gon’ wear they sweat pant [Nevaeh: they sweat pants] if you in sports and you, I, I, I know I walk around here like yesterday I had on Adidas pants but that’s just cause I got away with it. Like if you wanna wear pants like that [Nevaeh: you gotta be smart] you gotta have you gotta buy the ones that the name going down them

CE: Are y'all allowed to wear skirts?

Hazel: Yeah

Nevaeh: Yeah but everything has to be a certain length [Monet: length, knee]

Many of The Girls tried to reconcile and answer the question posed by Destiny, which was "its a free country right? So why do we have to wear uniforms?" To which Makayla responded "I feel like people they make us wear uniforms so that everybody could look the same and they can't say nothing about nobody. That's what I feel like they make us wear uniforms." Monet adds that she believes that the uniforms were because "they wanna like, keep us looking professional." However, despite the rationale for the uniforms The Girls still believe that the uniforms are not achieving that purpose because students just find other reasons to criticize or make fun of other students.

The Girls highlighted consequences ranging from getting a "mark" to parental contact to detention to suspension. Many of The Girls express how arbitrary consequences can be. Nevaeh and Monet elaborate on this point:

Nevaeh: You can just sit here and be just like her [*referring to a student nearby sitting quietly*] and "oh you got a mark" [Monet gestures to demonstrate her agreement with what Nevaeh is saying, while nodding her head] "You talkin" just them assuming, anything [Hazel laughs and

claps her hands in agreement with what the Nevaeh and Monet are saying; "Yes") I can turn this way [*student turns*] "oh you got a mark"

Hazel shares similar sentiments when she discusses one of her teachers explaining

You standing here telling everybody be quiet. Do this do that. You got a mark. You got a detention. You got a parent phone call. You got this. You got that. She hand out consequences, but I don't see her handing out no work.

Nevaeh shares her frustration what she feels are excessive consequences noting "I got ISS [*in school suspension*] for disrespect and ever, and every handbook out there they give, it not, your, it's not right for you to get uhh ISS for disrespect." Through her remarks, Nevaeh highlights not only a frustration with the excessive consequences, but also the lack of explanation associated with the receipt of punishment. Hazel shares a similar experiences stating that her teachers skipped the order of consequences—"warning-mark-lunch detention-parent phone call-detention"—and was instead "sent straight to parent phone call" for talking. Kierra shared that she received detention and parental phone call for what she believed to be "standing up and talking during class" while trying to get a pencil; however, she expressed that she felt that teachers "exaggerate" because when her teacher called her mother the teacher said that she was "walking around the class playing and stuff like that." It is evident from the discussion with Nevaeh, Hazel, and Kierra that The Girls perceive punishment from teachers to be somewhat arbitrary leading them to be frustrated and confused.

Several of The Girls point out the role they perceive race to play in the extent and severity of consequences. Alexandria explains her view of the racial differences in how discipline is doled out:

Umm its really about the teachers, it's like I feel like the teachers really don't, like I understand because I feel like when the whites, talk they can get more out. Or, say if the whites get blamed for something, the teacher will let them speak. But if we get blamed for it, its if and but, its none of that it's like oh you're getting suspended you're gettin detention, oh gimme your chart I'm givin you a mark

She adds,

Okay I was in class when my friend gave me some Takis. When my teacher had saw the Takis in my teacher had saw the Takis in my hand then she gave me a mark. But then my neighbor had some chips too and gave two Mexicans some chips and they ate it right in front of her but she didn't give them a mark. IT WAS RIGHT INFRONT OF HER FACE. That is unfair. [*Emphasis in original.*]

Similarly Kyla shares that she feels like one of her teachers “always pick me out of the bunch to say something to like sometimes I know I be talking but everybody else do too but I’m always the only one to get my momma called or get a mark.”

While The Girls point out their perception that race is a factor in the increased visibility and policing by teachers, administrators and staff; I posit, their intersectional identities of race and gender play a key role in teachers' perception. Specifically, teachers perceive Black girls to be loud, aggressive, and ultimately a challenge to their authority, therefore requiring greater vigilance (Lei, 2003; Morris, 2007). Routinely, Black girls demonstrate a rejection of stereotypical gender norms such as being "fragile," "vulnerable," "quiet," and "passive;" as such, they experience increased policing by teachers, in an effort to modify their social behavior (Morris, 2007, p 3; Lightfoot, 1976; Grant 1984, 1992, 1994). As pointed out by Morris (2007) "perceptions of the loudness and aggressiveness of Black girls translated into discipline aimed at curbing this behavior...to mold them into exhibiting more 'acceptable,' stereotypical qualities of femininity such as being quite and more passive" (p 17). Blake et. al. (2010) adds, Black girls not only experience greater vigilance, but they also receive disproportionate discipline for "minor behavioral infractions such as gum chewing, failure to comply with a prior discipline sanction, and defiance...[also] Black girls were more likely to be referred for defiance, disruptive behavior, disrespect, profanity, and fighting" (p 92). Through discussions with The Girls it is evident that they struggle with what they perceive to be disproportionate attention for disproportionate punishment.

While only eight girls are quoted in the section, it is relevant to note that other girls communicated agreement through nonverbal cues or they refrained from commenting; no participants communicated disagreement with the themes to be discussed. It is evident from the experiences revealed by The Girls included in this

section that many of them experience frustration with the level of policing and monitoring at school. From the overall feeling of excess rules and restrictions, generally, to the policing of the restrooms and uniforms, evident throughout the discussions was the feeling of high visibility when it involved behavioral infractions, particularly in comparison to other students.

“...they don't acknowledge me like they, just don't, like they don't care.”

In contrast to the high visibility or policing that The Girls communicated receiving, through harsh enforcement of strict rules and policies, the topic of a lack of care and acknowledgement was conveyed. Cassidy and Bates (2005) point out

The positive social, emotional, and academic development of children and adolescents depends, to a considerable degree, on whether the contexts in which they develop, including schools, are reliable sources of caring relationships. Unfortunately, in today's schools, caring is rarely placed at the center of policies and practices. Instead, educators are under pressure to increase students' academic performance, as measured by high-stakes standardized tests. Finding spaces for caring is becoming increasingly difficult as administrators, teachers, and students are pushed toward preordained goals set by distant bureaucrats. (p. 66; Noddings 1984, 1992, 1995, 2002; Rauner 2000; Kohn, 2000).

Throughout individual and group discussions at least seven of The Girls revealed that on numerous occasions they felt that the teachers “don't care” about them and their peers.

They share Neveah's contention that despite their attempts to do the right things they still "just feel like the teacher just don't like me, don't like me." Neveah discusses how she feels ignored by her teachers:

like some teachers, like if I'm talking to you and you walk away that like you don't care about nothing I'm saying, I could be asking my hand like [gestures hand up] I, my biggest problem in middle school is raising my hand. Cuz it feels like, it's like every time I raise my hand they don't acknowledge me like they just, don't, like they don't care.

Jade shares a similar perspective

If somebody try to explain to the teacher they be like-- say if you one of us [Black students], or somebody, there's a whole bunch of people in the classrooms and we'll ask the teacher something and she'll ignore us and move on to the next person. And then somebody will say, miss and she'll just roll her eyes. And then shell just roll her eyes or do something smart and then it just like....

In Jade's dialogue, she highlights her perception of differential treatment and feeling unheard and blatantly ignored by her teachers. She highlights the view that in this instance she believes her race plays a role in the teacher's attitude towards her. Also revealed at the end of Jade's statement is a frustration with the teacher's behavior and,

I posit, a disengagement or apathy towards attempts to address teachers or garner their attention.

Monet expressed that this lack of concern was also reflected in the way that the teachers disregarded student concerns, noting that at times she feels “kinda scared to go to teachers”. For example, Monet recalls that she voiced her concern to her teacher about a new assigned seat stating “You try to tell her I can’t sit by this person or I can’t do this with this person because they’re a distraction to me and she’s like ‘Oh well you’re just gonna have to deal with it.’” Destiny and Lolita also share that they feel like there are more negative consequences than positive outcomes when a student does try to let a teacher know rather than assisting in resolution the teacher will tell you to “just get out.” Monet mentions that she feels that the teachers “don’t care about their success.” Nevaeh also recalls an incident with another student that they felt reinforced their perception that the teachers are not concerned with their well-being, she shares

Ooo one girl one day second period this girl she has real bad asthma and she was like, she said something, she was like miss can I get water, I can’t, breathe [student kind of mimics the girl's shortness of breath] and she was doing it like that and she was like "no you can’t get water" and she told the girl, the girl was like what if I, she say what if like die or something like that, she say if you die oh well we'll deal with it talk to me later. And how we gonna talk about it later if it happens. And I was like oh my gosh.

Jade discloses that teachers have made her feel ignored and disregarded because “you could be tryna tell them something and they will just start yelling at you when you try to express your feelings to them.” Noel also indicates that the access to help is limited because “the student support counselors, sometimes like they be dealing with other people so much.”

The Girls also disclosed that they felt like the teachers were not there to ensure the students’ success and growth, but rather to merely “get paid.” Hazel, Nevaeh, and Monet share their frustration

Hazel: I feel like [Nevaeh interjects "what is your purpose"] I feel like what is your purpose, you know?

CE: Do you feel like they care about being a teacher? Or do you feel like they

Nevaeh: Some of them like, some of them do mention I just like, "you don't have to do know work because I still get paid" [the students respond in agreement with Nevaeh 'yeah']

CE: Oh okay, okay, okay. So how does that make you feel?

Hazel: Like they don't care

Nevaeh: Like if you don't care and you're just here to get paid, then what's your whole purpose of being my teacher. Like if you're not gonna teach me nothing.

Monet: Then why you here?

Monet similarly adds, that she feels like "they just here to get paid and go back home." Interesting in both the group discussion with Hazel, Monet, and Nevaeh, as well as the follow up interview with Monet, is the perception by The Girls that teachers receive substantial pay—or at least enough to serve as incentive to work at Westwood Academy. On average, charter school teachers are paid less than public school teachers with a salary of roughly \$44,500 (Charter Schools in Perspective, n.d.). I posit that it is the aforementioned reminder and the students' perception that teachers perceive them to be poor and destitute, guides students to overestimate the salary of teachers. That perception in conjunction with the feeling of lack of care, unfortunately leads students surmise that the pay is the only thing that would keep teachers at their school.

In her written diary Hazel discloses that she felt "hurt, mad, and super hurt" by the way she is treated by teachers in general, but she expresses frustration with her teacher Ms. Williams because from her perspective the teacher

was hired and she doesn't even care to teach us. She has no experience I was told that she worked at a zoo and a jailhouse as a tutor for GED. I feel like they hired here because if you put 2 & 2 together.... *[Hazel included*

ellipses] she tames animals... [*Hazel included ellipses*] and [where] she worked/contained felons [juvenile delinquents] so that means they were already labeling us as wild bad kids.

Hazel points out a feeling that her teachers lack care for her and other students. She explains the way this lack of care from her teachers makes her upset and leads her to question the teacher's qualifications. Hazel highlights the past working experience of the teacher to imply that she believes the school and the administration hired the teacher because of her ability to "tame animals" and work with juvenile delinquents. Evident from Hazel's account is the student's perception that teachers in the formal educational space possess preconceived notions about the behavior of black students. Further, she explains that this perception is disheartening and frustrating, and ultimately detrimental to the student.

Intersectional Microaggressions: Where race and gender collide.

“Every word is like a slap to the face”

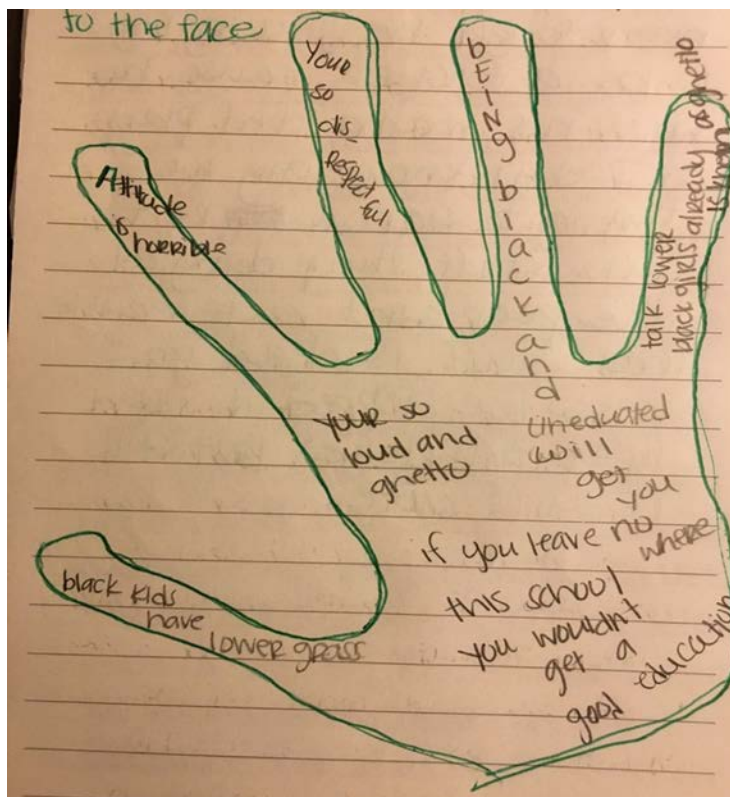


Figure 1 Image that Monet drew reflecting the messages she receives from teachers.

Monet writes those words in her journal accompanied by a powerful image of a hand filled with troubling statements she later reveals are all things communicated by her teachers. Throughout discussions with The Girls, across all grade levels, they agree that their intersectional identity, their Black girlhood, is the primary factor that impacts their overall experiences. Specifically, The Girls discussed some of the negative stereotypes or “labels” that they consistently encounter. In their remembrance, it

becomes clear, that what they were describing were instances of microaggressions that where not only racialized but also gendered.

Similar to gendered and sexual orientation microaggressions as explored in the discussion of microaggressions amongst peers, racialized microaggressions are “commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental, indignities whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to people of color” (Sue, 2007, p. 29). While there are several themes associated with this form of microaggressions, The Girls specifically speak of “Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Values” which is the “notion that the values and communication styles of people of color are abnormal” (Sue, 2007, p. 29). Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, and Huntt (2013) utilize Sue’s theory of microaggressions, in conjunction with Essed’s (1990) theory of “gendered racism”—“the simultaneous experience of both racism and sexism”—to define intersectional or “gendered racial microaggressions as subtle and everyday verbal, behavioral, and environmental expressions of oppression based on the intersection of one’s race and gender” (p. 53- 54). I argue, that based on the unique identity of The Girls, their experience of microaggressions—in relation to teachers, administration, and staff—are intersectional based on both their race and gender.

Aligned with Murphy, Acosta, and Kennedy-Lewis (2013) discussion of subjective expectations – which argues that many teachers’ perspectives are “culled from hegemonic expectations of femininity...[where girls are expected] to be quiet, pretty, and passive,” ultimately leading them to communicate adverse responses to The Girls’

behavior—I posit that the negative responses are communicated as intersectional—raced and gendered—microaggressions (p. 14). Throughout discussions The Girls expressed that they have “been reminded every day ‘don’t talk so loud in the hallway, you’re already a Black young girl and they already think that you’re so ghetto so you need ta calm down and don’t talk the way you talk’” as communicated by Nevaeh. Monet adds that they are constantly labeled as “loud and ghetto” by teachers and administrators across campus (Henry, 1998; Lei, 2003; Morris, 2007; Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; Koonce; 2012). Hazel reveals her frustration and discouragement associated with her experience noting “I wanna go to UCLA, I wanna be a criminal just lawyer, but I can’t do that because every 2 seconds I’m ghetto, every two seconds I’m loud, every two seconds I’m Black.” Destiny also communicates that she is aware that most of the people throughout campus—teachers and students alike— believe that Black girls are just “loud and ghetto.” Stacy recalls a teacher calling her “ratchet and ghetto” noting the specificity by adding that when other students “fool around in class...she don’t call them ratchet and ghetto.” Stacy’s statement highlights another way in which the educational space subtly communicates negative messages about racial and gendered identity, coded language. Van Dijk (1993) asserts, “discourse plays a prominent role in the reproduction of racism. It expresses, persuasively conveys and legitimates ethnic or racial stereotypes and prejudices” (p. 179). It is in this vein that Stacy’s teacher communicates her subscription to racialized stereotypes in her choice to refer to her student as “ratchet and ghetto,” derogatory terms that are typically used to

degrade and dehumanize Black people who do not fit society standards of appropriate behavior.

Hazel mentions an obvious difference in treatment by teachers of Black girls that are not “a typical Black person,” and the benefits to that behavior. Revealed in Hazel’s revelation is the unconscious acceptance and internalization of the stereotypes discussed above regarding the common behavior of Black people. She expresses a belief that Black people in general—and Black girls specifically—are inclined to be louder, and more outspoken. She adds that if you are “quiet” and “smile a lot” then the teachers are your “best friend.” In pointing out this difference, Hazel implies that the expectations of teachers—regarding the behavior of girls generally and Black girls specifically—to be docile, passive, and always pleasant.

The experience of intersectional microaggressions is not limited to the pathologizing –and problematizing—the communication style of Black girls; Monet, Nevaeh, and Hazel also share an experience that demonstrates microaggressions that not only police Black girls’ behavior, but also their appearance. As discussed earlier in the chapter, The Girls explain that they have to constantly be concerned about their reputation and the fragility of that reputation, and the microaggressions communicated regarding perceived promiscuity. Monet, Nevaeh, and Hazel recall an experience that reflects this behavior by teachers

Hazel: Wait let me tell her about the spring break trip [Nevaeh: full bodies] wait, wait , wait, wait, wait , let em tell her about the spring

break trip. It wasn't, it wasn't even out here we was, we was in I think we was in San Antonio okay, the spring, the trips don't get like funner or bigger to better places until you get to like in 8th grade like this year we go to like New Orleans or Atlanta so we go, I was on spring trip with a girl that is like my, uh, she's like not an associate, but like I talk to her, and I'm on the trip with my cousin they girl that was gonna join but she didn't so, my cousin walked out with some shorts and they said "oh no you can't wear them" so they made her, when we went to the mall they made her buy pants with her money, so she bought these pants, and we looked around because everybody is separated, we go in footlocker and I see all the Hispanic girls with booty shorts and they aint say nothing to them. I said, I asked her because, some of these, some of the girls here that are African American girls they don't say nothing they don't they don't take up for themselves so I say "uh miss you not gone say nothing to them about they shorts? You aint gone make them buy pants too?" "Oh uh, they um, uh,mm,uh" why you can't finish your sentence?

CE: So why yall think that the, that Black girls had to... [Hazel interjects: what you think?]

Monet: They already say we have a label. It's always a label on label on label on label

When asked why they think this happened they responded:

Monet: What I've always been told

Hazel: we [Nevaeh: we full *[figured]*] we we we we [hand gestures
towards body]

Nevaeh: We got too much

CE: Yall what?

Hazel: a h-o-e

Nevaeh: Oh cuz we gone be classified as hoes [Hazel and Monet agree:
yeah]

CE: Okay, okay

Hazel: That's what a teacher said

In this discussion Hazel, Nevaeh, and Monet point out the opinion that being full figured with curves equates to being sexual and promiscuous. The stereotype of Black women and girls has a historical context. The image of the Jezebel or hyper sexual Black women can be traced back to the beginning of enslavement. As Manning Marable (2000) points out, during enslavement, African people were regarded as chattel—a commodity—therefore, “Black girls above the age of 12... [were routinely] bought to satisfy the sexual needs of white racist males... and Black women’s vagina was his [white male’s] property” (p. 63). As is the objective of capitalist patriarchy, the sexual assault of Black

women was not only a means to please the white male sexual appetite, but it additionally served the purpose of exerting dominance and control over both enslaved African women and men (Marable, 2000). Additionally, from the sexual assault and objectification of Black women by white males, they also exploited Black women's sexuality in their common "breeding" practices in which Black women were encouraged to be sexually promiscuous in order to ensure the yield of future profit (Marable, 2000; Grier & Cobbs, 1968). Ultimately, through the myriad of exploitative methods and motives -- "economic, political, and social"-- a justification for abuse became the myth of hyper sexuality (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 44) . Black women were portrayed as "lascivious, seductive, and insatiable" (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 55). With this depiction, Black women became the antithesis of the "true Woman, who was chaste, pure, and white" (Roberts, 1997, p. 11). It is within this context that Black girls "must navigate in understanding their own sexuality, sexual development, and subsequent sexual threats, victimization, and agency" (French, 2013, p. 38).

I posit, The Girls' discussion reflect the sexualization of Black girls based on their physical development or maturity of their bodies. The Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2008) notes that sexualization occurs when:

- a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics
- a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy

- a person is sexually objectified—that is, made into a thing for others’ sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making
- sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person (p. 1)

Although not mentioned explicitly, Hazel describes her friend’s experience of sexualization, which ultimately reinforces the message that Black girls must constantly remain preoccupied and diligent of peoples’ perception that they are lascivious. In addition to reinforcing negative, oppressive stereotypes, the teacher’s behavior perpetuates an intersectional microaggression through the sexualization of Black girls’ bodies. From this experience, it becomes clear that the girls are faced with microaggressions that cannot be conflated to an either-or dichotomy. It is there gendered and racialized identity that influences the way they are treated by teachers, specifically as it concerns the microaggressions that they are subjected to. Not only are their communication styles and mannerisms policed, but their bodies are carefully monitored as to ensure that they do not display behaviors that are contrary to acceptable gender norms.

Conclusion

Overall, The Girls identify experiences of emotional oppression—primarily in the form of microaggression—from not only peers, but also teachers, administration and staff. They point out that as a result of their intersectional identity, they are faced with the experience of microaggressions from peers on multiple levels—both based on

gender and sexual orientation. The Girls also point out that while they experience of intersectional microaggression from teachers, administration and staff, they additionally face the challenge of disrespect and the juxtaposition between hyper visibility—in the form of policing—and invisibility. The emotional oppression in the formal educational space provides insight into the particular challenges of Black middle school girls; and highlights the individuals who play a role in orchestrating these challenges, as well as, the specific ways they contribute to creating negative experiences.

Chapter 6: Perceptions of Identity and Coping Strategies

Perceptions of Identity

Lei (2003) points out that “identity construction encompasses an active and dynamic process through which an individual identifies himself or herself in relation to how he or she is constituted as a subject by dominant discourses and representations” (p. 159). As such, The Girls’ interactions in educational spaces impact their perceptions and beliefs about themselves. Through group and individual discussions, The Girls reveal some of their key characteristics, unique to Black girls, based on their intersectional gendered and racialized identity. Specifically, they communicate their beliefs regarding their idea that Black girls must always display toughness and strength. Similarly, The Girls also reveal a perception that Black girls are typically aggressive, rather than weak. Lastly, The Girls reveal their perception that Black girls tend to be more independent, an ideal taught and reinforced through interactions with adults.

“Mostly they think white people are weak and Black girls are more aggressive than white girls.”

Traditional ideals of femininity assert that women should adhere to a “strict code of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity—virtues believed to be inherent in feminine nature...[such as] chastity, innocence, and weakness;” however, Black women and girls have often been presented as the antithesis of this ideal (Harris-Perry, 2010, p.

55; Lei, 2003). As such, while educational literature traditionally discusses toughness in regards to male behavior, scholars have begun to acknowledge “toughness” in girls of different racialized populations (Lei, 2003; Leitz, 2003; Letendre, Rozas, and Werkmeister, 2015). Utilizing the Judith Butler’s theory of “gender performativity” as a framework, Lei (2003) notes the teacher and peer perception of Black female students as loud; while also acknowledging the participants’ ability to utilized “loudness” to “disrupt racialized gender norms” confronting adversity when necessary (p. 163). Similarly, Leitz (2003) argues the development of an oppositional culture where fighting and toughness are utilized to establish peer respect. While discussing some of their beliefs about characteristics unique to Black girls, the 7th grade girls collectively asserted that they feel like they constantly must demonstrate that they are not weak. Noel sums up the sentiment with, “You gotta prove yourself,” to which Kyla adds, “You gotta prove everything.” Throughout the discussions –both collective and individual—the idea of a “toughness” and an aversion to perceived weakness was a key belief identified by The Girls.

The significance of appearing strong and tough is demonstrated in an exchange between Kyla and Jaylen:

Jaylen: [*Directed at Kyla*] I thought you was rude and stuff cuz you was always walkin’ around mean muggin’ [stern or strong facial expression].

Kyla: Because I did not want people to think I was weak; like, I did not want to come here and people come up to me like they did when they

thought that I was weak and they tried that [*clapping hands*]. So I had to get right and tell them, "No, I'm not what you think I am. I'm not who to play [with], don't play with me."

Hazel also discusses the need to appear strong or tough, even if that means suppressing emotions; or as Alexandria puts it, "We don't really show that we really hurt inside."

Hazel reflects on a situation that upset her sharing:

This drove me nuts and my anger made me cry. Being a Black female [at] school you have to be strong and I wasn't showing that so I had to hold it all in and suck it up. Then I had to come in this building and act like I'm just strong [and] happy dab⁷. I don't need people in my face at all.

Hazel elaborates:

Hazel: All the females in my group, you're not going to see them cry, you're not going to see them—you might see them mad. You might seem them real mad.

CE: Like pissed.

Hazel: Yeah, you might see them punching walls mad, but you're not going to see them cry. You're not going to see them like this [*makes a*

⁷The "dab" is a popular hip hop dance move in which you bend one arm and bring your head to the pit of your bent arm while simultaneously outstretching the other arm. The dance has been a celebratory dance in sports by athletes like Cam Newton.

facial expressions as if sulking] or pouting. If they gon' be mad, they gon' be mad.

CE: Like ready to fight mad?

Hazel: Yeah like ready-to-fight mad. They ain't going to be sad in front of you and they ain't going to be too happy either. You're not going to catch them like that.

Similarly, Stacy states,

...when I'm mad, sometimes I cry...because if I'm like real real mad, I'm not going to cry, I'm going to fight. If I'm like mad mad, but not that real real mad, I'm going to start crying. If I'm mad I'm going to tell you shut up and leave me alone. But when I'm real real mad, I scream.

As demonstrated above, The Girls reveal an aversion to vulnerability and showing emotion, specifically through crying. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009) elaborates on the notion that from a young age Black girls are taught –through the behavior of the adult Black women in their lives—that demonstrating outward emotion is unacceptable. Further, we learn “to talk to oneself through an insistent, unyielding language” that ensures that we appear strong and void of vulnerability (Bauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009, p. 77). While anger as an emotion is often acceptable –as it is believed to show strength—sadness, hurt, and disappointment are deemed inappropriate because they are believed

to show the opposite, weakness (Romero, 2000; Harris- Lacewell, 2001; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007, 2008, 2009; Woods-Giscombe, 2010).

The term aggressive is used by The Girls as a signifier of strength and is believed to be a key trait of Black Girls. Kyla expresses “Black girls are more aggressive than white girls.” Similarly, Alexandria states “I feel like we [Black girls] have a lot of aggressions.” Kyla goes on to explain that one must uphold the perception and belief that Black Girls are strong stating, “You gotta like really be aggressive...you cannot, you can't, you can't, you cannot lose a fight.” Kyla goes on “you gotta know how to fight, like you got to. Cuz if they see you weak they gon’ keep picking on you. You can’t show no weakness.” Neveah also expresses the significance of not showing weakness stating, “I don’t never go off based on you should treat people how you want to be treated, because my kindness can be taken for weakness...my attitude is like on one hundred. It’s like when I come to school my whole like attitude just shifts.” While Neveah does not specifically state what her attitude is like outside of school, based on the context of the conversation she alludes to a difference in her demeanor and attitude at school. She says that, at school, her “attitude is like one hundred,” meaning that it is at one hundred percent, or very obvious and intense. Based on her feedback, the school setting appears to have a negative effect leading her to be guarded and defensive.

Makayla, Charlene, and Kyla point out that one must display strength and toughness as a deterrent from being mistreated or taken advantage of.

Makayla: People who go here like they like to see like, they pick on you maybe like if you new here. Like last year sixth grade most of the sixth graders were picked on because they were new by seventh and eighth graders because we were new and we didn't know barely what was goin on. And I like they would pick on us like "ooo yeah you weak you weak go somewhere go somewhere" and then like they just talk about you talk about you talk about you.

Charlene: You scary [afraid of or intimidated by others]

Kyla: And then if you let people run over you then everybody think they can run over you...

The Girls express the constant concern and opposition to being perceived by others as weak or "scary." Additionally, they reveal the significant consequences if one does not actively display strength and toughness. Jaylen reinforces the belief pointing out that one must be strong "in order for people not to come up to you and treat you like [you're] dumb." Hazel also makes a similar point,

Hazel: I don't know, well, that's just how it is. People, well high schoolers, they take I, like when you smiling everyday [*noise that sounded like high pitched hum and giggle, presumed to indicate naiveté*], they take that as oh she friendly I can get over on her. It's not that easy.

CE: Ok, so y'all kind of maintained that particular like, attitude, [Hazel: That Look] like that look so you don't get taken advantage of.

Hazel: And then in 6th grade people was like oh she looks vulnerable, no I ain't.

CE: Oh ok, y'all have to kind of have that face. Y'all gotta kind of have that aura. Like [...]

Hazel: Like, naw I ain't playing with you.

CE: Yeah, like I'm not the one. Ok, that makes sense though. I definitely understand that. So is that common amongst[...]

Hazel: To look like that?

CE: Yes

Hazel: Or be rough. Yes, that's very common.

CE: But amongst like, Black girls?

Hazel: Black girls. You're not going to see too many Hispanic girls punching walls or cussing people out, ya know, you're not going to see that. [CE: Why? Why you think so?] I don't know. They friendly, too friendly.

In Hazel's dialogue she not only demonstrates her belief that Black girls are tough, she alludes to an aversion to weakness in her mimicking of what she perceives to be the naiveté – a presumption concluded from the context of our dialogue in which she poses “smiling every day” and “friendly” as negative behaviors. Hazel highlights that to be perceived as “weak” and unwilling or unable to defend oneself can lead to mistreatment. Further, Hazel juxtaposes the behavior of Black girls and Latina girls, arguing that they are not as tough or at least they do not display their toughness. Gathered from her portrayal, I posit, she makes this comparison to allude to her perception that Latina girls deal with greater mistreatment and wronged.

While the discussions revealed that the general perception of Black girls is that they are tough, aggressive, and strong,, the discussions with The Girls also revealed that many of them subscribe to a “non-mainstream idea of femininity that includes toughness.T.” Therefore, “by standing up for themselves, the girls do not allow others to further put them down and [they] work to establish a reputation as a ‘strong girl’” (Leitz, 2003, p. 38). The Girls support existing literature that argues the development of a “Strong Black Woman,” “Superwoman,” or “Sojourner Syndrome” (Mullings, 2002; 2005; Romero, 2000; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Hamilton-Mason, Hall, & Everette, 2009; Woods-Giscombe, 2010) resulting from,

the sociopolitical context of African American women's lives, specifically the climate of racism, race-and gender-based oppression,

disenfranchisement, and limited resources--during and after legalized slavery in the United States--forced African American women to take on the roles of mother, nurturer, and breadwinner out of economic and social necessity

Unfortunately, researchers have argued that this assertion of strength has negative health and psychological consequences such as stress, compulsive eating, weight gain, hypertension, depression, exhaustion, anxiety, and nervous break downs (Romero, 2000; Harrington, 2007; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; 2009; Harrington, Crowther, & Shipherd, 2010; Woods-Giscombe, 2010; Woods-Giscombe & Black, 2010; Donovan & West, 2015; Watson & Hunter, 2015). Despite the health and psychological consequences of the subscription to excessive strength,, according to The Girls, there are some positive outcomes. The assertion of strength allows The Girls to not only demand respect, but hold people accountable when they do not treat them well. Nevaeh emphasizes, “don’t ever let anybody talk to you any kinda way.” She goes on to add that one should always “take up for yourself.” Alexandria also expresses this in an individual interview,

Alexandria: (overlapping) and when I had said, I had took it upon myself, I said that because- said, when you're African American you have to be independent. Like, I feel like when stuff involve you, you can't, you can't tell your teacher.

CE: Why do you say that?

Alexandria: I feel like because they're not really gonna do nothing. It's like, it's like the same thing. It's like, have you ever heard of Claudette Colvin?

CE: Um hmm

Alexandria: Well, in the book I'm reading, it said- I know it's kinda different, but it said um, what it said? It said, it said when a white man rape a Black girl, it's called not guilty. But, when a Black man is accused of raping a white girl, that's guilty.

CE: Umm hmm-

Alexandria: So, what Claudette did, she took it upon herself to secure her seat and not because of that [rape] and so I feel like I- the teachers ain't gonna do nothing. Like, they won't- they not gonna help me when I really need to be done. So, I feel like I should just do it myself

CE: Um hm-

Alexandria: That's how I feel.

CE: Cause you feel like you can't get any help?

Alexandria: I can't get any help out of them.

CE: (overlapping) because, because you're Black.

Alexandria: Cause I'm Black. I feel like- they say it's- they always fuss at me because I'm African American, you keep on telling me tell a teacher, but when I tell ya'll, you're not gonna do nothing but talk to em like that. So, I'ma take it upon myself and I'ma hit that person back, or I'ma take it on myself and I'ma yell at that person back, or-

CE: Umm, so even when you get into conflicts, you don't feel like you can go to teachers and tell them-

Alexandria: I gotta do it by myself.

As mentioned previously, the development of strength arose out of necessity, resulting from the continued oppression of Black people, particularly Black women and girls (Woods- Giscombe, 2010). Alexandria demonstrates that she recognizes the historical connection and contemporary reality that Black women and girls must advocate for and protect themselves. She expresses that she does not believe that she will receive assistance or support from the teachers or administrators; therefore, she affirms the significance of self-efficacy and self-advocacy. "Black women are without tangible and intangible support" (Abrams, Maxwell, Pope, & Belgrave, 2014, p. 510). Similarly, I argue that Black girls also lack access to support; as such, like Alexandria, we develop strategies and mechanisms to protect ourselves and demand fair treatment. The ability to demonstrate strength serves as a means for The Girls to assert their agency in a space that tends to be volatile with limited protections.

The Girls voice their perception that being a Black girl requires strength, toughness, and aggressiveness. In line with research that argues that Black women and girls have been reared to have “strong, independent, self-efficacious attitudes...to manage their communities, their families, and themselves independent of outside assistance” (*ibid.*) The Girls express a subscription to this belief. Despite the potential for negative health consequences, strength, toughness, and aggressiveness serve as tools for Black girls to protect themselves and assert their agency.

“I’m very independent”

Scholars conducting research with African American girls have pointed out the overall, above average maturity and sense of responsibility of Black girls (Ladner, 1971; Baumrind, 1972; Grant, 1986; Morris, 2007). In group discussions with The Girls they articulate the significance of being independent and having “a strong mind.” While only five of The Girls explicitly discuss the topic, none of them mentioned disagreement with perception regarding Black girls when the topic was raised in group discussions. When asked about the most important characteristics to have Hazel responded “you have to have a strong mind.” Nevaeh, Monet, and Hazel continue

Nevaeh: And you have to know who ta hang around, and you have to be your own person

Hazel: mmhmm

Monet: you have to be independent

Nevaeh: It's like, and you have to be independent and you have to be a leader, and you have to do what you want to do not what nobody else cause at this school we do have a lot of people who follow behind each other, it's sad umm "oh imma do this because she did this or because he did that" like its follow the leader, follow the leader, it's like that.

Nevaeh continues, "I'm very loud, outgoing, out spoken, like I like to do like whatever like, I like to do, like I have, I'm like very independent. If I have something on my mind and I wanna get it off I guarantee you I'm determined to get it off."

Many of The Girls have been encouraged by their parents to be independent and mature. Makayla explains,

I was taught to grow up fast because my parents had to grow up fast, because my mom was, at 19 she had me, and when she was 15 she had to take care of my uncle and my other uncle and my uncle. And she would like take care of all of us, she still took care of them because my nana work all the time, she still do she didn't come home til like 10 something at night my pawpaws a truck driver and my momma had to grow up fast because she had to knew how to cook, how to wash clothes, they didn't all they played was football and my momma wasn't allowed to do extracurricular stuff because my pawpaw didn't like her like with short stuff on like cheerleading outfits dance outfits like that so he

didn't, like she wasn't really allowed so she tried to it different for me but like she still try to teach me how to grow up fast.

As Makayla points out Black girls are taught at a young age, to take responsibility for the well-being of others in their homes and in their communities. They are “encouraged to think of themselves primarily as the emotional, and financial caretakers” of others (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009, p. 82). Evident from Makayla’s story, Black girls and women are also often expected to be physical caretakers of others. Makayla discloses that she has learned this behavior from her mother who was responsible for being the caretaker of younger siblings as she grew up.

In addition to parental influence, Jaylen presents an alternative explanation for the independence and maturity often associated with Black girls noting, “because like in like racial times white people had all the money and everything so if you’re white during racial time, you had a lot of money so white people get spoiled, so they’re not even used to like having to do things on their own.” Similar to Alexandria’s prior discussion of Claudette Colvin and the historical lesson of self-advocacy, Jaylen acknowledges the history of racial oppression. Jaylen ultimately expresses the position that due racism and the resulting economic inequity, Black people –unlike White people—have had no choice but to develop independence and the ability to take care of themselves. In her discussion, Jaylen not only reiterates the idea that Black girls are more independent and mature, but that this behavior has risen out of historical necessity. Ultimately, being

independent and strong minded were traits that The Girls perceived to be a significant aspect of their identity.

Coping Strategies

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define coping as a “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141). According to Copeland and Hess (1995),

The coping process is particularly important during adolescence because it may be the first time that young people confront many different types of life stressors and they may not yet have a wide variety of coping strategies to rely upon (Patterson and McCubbin, 1987). Furthermore, the styles of coping with stress that evolve during one’s younger years undoubtedly influence how the individual will deal with new life events occurring in later adolescence and adulthood (Newcomb, Huba, and Bentler, 1986). (p. 204).

In recognizing the overall significance of early adolescence to “cognitive, social, emotional, and physical” development and acknowledging that “this period of accelerated development brings varying amounts of stress into the lives of young individuals,” it is imperative that scholars conducting work with adolescents— particularly those in marginalized populations— give attention to coping strategies

developed in response to stressors and volatile environments (Copeland and Hess, 1995, p. 203). During focus group discussions, diary entries, and individual interviews The Girls revealed several coping strategies; particularly, 1) asserting agency through the demand for reciprocity; 2) development of complex social networks, 3) apathy and general distrust; and 4) urge to self-harm or run away.

“You get what you give”: Asserting agency through the demand for reciprocity

Adolescence serves as a key “transitional phase in the life course;” partially due to the fact that it is during this time that one begins to “have to assume increasing responsibility for conduct that plays a more decisive role in fostering or foreclosing various life courses” (Bandura, 2005, p. 6). Ultimately, it is during this period that we begin to exercise personal agency more consistently and intentionally (Daddis, 2011). Pajares (2005) defines personal agency as “the ability to act intentionally and exercise a measure of control over one’s environment and social structures” (p. 361). Considering the increased “salience of self-determination rights, involving autonomous control and agency over one’s own life,” I posit that The Girls assert personal agency through demanding reciprocity, mutual respect, and accountability (Daddis, 2011, p. 1312).

While mainly discussed by eighth graders during both focus groups and diaries/follow up interviews, I posit the topic of reciprocal and mutual respect – particularly from teachers, administrators, and staff—was a central theme. As Hazel

puts it “respect is not going to be handed to you, you have to earn it.” In a discussion with Hazel she explains the overall significance of respect,

CE: So you feel like, I do want to ask though, like what does respect mean? Like what does that mean to you?

Hazel: It means everything.

CE: Give me an example of like what respect means. Because we throw around the term respect and disrespect.

Hazel: Respect is like for a child, for a child to an adult it's like yes ma'am no ma'am, yes ma'am, I mean yes sir no sir, stuff like that.

CE: But how do they show respect to you though?

Hazel: They don't.

CE: But how, if they did, what would that look like?

Hazel: Our respect to our teacher would be doing our work, being silent, doing what we are supposed to do. [CE: Mmhm] And their respect to us should be some positive stuff. Like they don't, she don't never have nothing positive to say.

CE: So saying positive things to you [Hazel: Thanks, yes]. Positive reinforcement [...]

Hazel: She told us, oh all y'all gon' fail. How you know my future Miss, i've been a straight A student since you came here.

CE: Oh so kind of like there's no encouragement. There's no "you're doing well."

Hazel: This lady ain't got no filter. She will say what she wants, and how she want it, and then she will say it in a monotone. Like, [monotone voice] oh I don't yeah, that's how she talk. Ain't no, it's no voice, it's like listening to voicemail. [CE: ok] And she tries to get sarcastic but she just don't know, I can get sarcastic too.

CE: So it's kind of like one of those things, that it's like how people treat you is how you treat them [Hazel: people]

Hazel: Like yesterday she said something to me, I forgot what she said. And I say uh, what you get is what you give. I say you gave me disrespect you're going to get it back.

In this discussion with Hazel makes several important points. First, she asserts the imperative of respect and provides an example of what she believes respect from teachers would look like, particularly positive reinforcement and approval. Hazel also mentions that the perception of respect or disrespect is not only based on *what* is said, but also *how* it is said—the tone of voice. Lastly, she mentions the expectation of mutual respect and she reveals her response to perceived disrespect, adding her

willingness to assert agency through mirroring the behavior or negative treatment she receives.

After in depth discussions about the disrespect from teachers, administrators, and staff, The Girls provide insight regarding their response or coping strategy. Hazel sums it up stating “for me, it like, when you [teachers] disrespectful, somebody else is gonna disrespect them [teachers].” She communicates a similar point in her journal “the lady was so disrespectful... [*student included ellipses*] how did she not think she was gon’ get disrespect back?” From her statements, Hazel makes clear the expectation of reciprocal respect and the consequence of disrespect.

Similarly, Nevaeh explains her frustration with a teacher who she feels continues to be disrespectful to her. SShe mentions that although she understands teachers can be moody at times, disrespect will not be taken lightly. She shares her reaction,

...yea I have a temper so sometimes I may snap back because like I don’t take, like my mom taught me don’t ever let anybody talk to you any kinda way because you need to you need to learn how to show people they need ta if you, you get what you give.

She later reiterates her perspective stating, “like if I feel like I’m disrespected I’m gon’ disrespect you back cuz that’s what imma do cuz that’s my first mind. It’s like however somebody else treats me that’s how I feel like they should be treated.” Nevaeh’s narrative demonstrates her assertion of agency and demand for reciprocity. Ultimately,

she rejects the notion that adults generally—teachers, administrators, and staff specifically—are without reproach. She makes clear that despite negative consequences—later adding that she receives in school suspension as a result of her perceived disrespect towards her teacher—she is willing to hold people accountable for upholding mutual respect.

Monet summarizes a critical desire voiced by all of the eighth grade girls stating “I just want y’all [teachers] to respect me.” Ultimately, The Girls’ demand for reciprocal respect demonstrates a key strategy utilized to assert agency and self-determination. Recognizing the power dynamics inherent in the educational setting,— specifically “the teacher’s traditional role as controller of classroom activities”—this is especially significant because it allows for The Girls to exercise some control over the interactions with others (Bizzell, 1991, p. 55). Further, the assertion of agency and the expectation of mutual, reciprocal respect provides a basis for holding others accountable for perceived mistreatment and injustice.

“...there’s no such thing as talk friends, if y’all don't call each other family y’all aint cool.”

As to be expected, interpersonal relationships between adolescent peers play a significant role in their overall experience at school and ultimately their individual development (LaGreca & Harrison, 2005; Alder & Alder, 1998; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Laursen (1996) writes:

Close relationships with peers play an increasingly important role in socialization across adolescences. As the social worlds of parents and peers grow distinct, adolescents devote greater time and energy to relationships with agemates (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). These changes coincide with a shift from parents to peers as a primary source of companionship and intimacy (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). (p. 186)

Throughout group discussions and individual interviews, The Girls discussed the complex relationship networks that greatly impact their day-to-day experiences at school, and provides a significant means of coping with challenges and obstacles through support. From those discussions it became clear that to refer to their close comrades as merely “friends,” is a major misrepresentation of those relationships. Family-like close personal relationships or fictive kinships have historically been a staple within Black communities throughout the diaspora (Patterson, 1967; Guttman, 1976; White, Bay, Martin, 2013). Fictive kinships served the purpose of “bind[ing] unrelated individuals to each other through reciprocal [relationships]” and encouraged “informal supportive networks that surpassed formal kin [or familial] obligations conventionally prescribed by blood or marriage” (Chatters, Taylor & Jayakody, 1994, p. 298). Similarly, contemporary subscriptions to and establishment of fictive kinships serve a supportive function.

Fictive kinships share some of the same relationship qualities as confidants and other close friendships. Because the obligation to assist friends is not explicit, the motivation to provide support to fictive kin

emerges from a history of reciprocal assistance (Chatters, Taylor & Jayakody, 1994, p 302-303; Taylor, 1988).

The presence of fictive kin relationships with peers was expressed by several of The Girls. Hazel points out the significance of intricate social networks stating, "Here there's no such thing as talk friends; if y'all don't call each other family, y'all ain't cool." Hazel continues,

Hazel: It's a such thang as a best friend, although ain't no friends, it's a such thang as a best friend-

CE: So, where the best friend fall in this whole mix?

Hazel: Like, if I'm mad at lil juvie-

CE: Then you go to yo best friend? Okay, so like, the lil juvie and the best friend are on the same-

Hazel: Best friend is like somebody you see at school.

CE: But not outside of school?

Hazel: Yeah.

CE: Okay, so the best friend is the lowest on the totem pole? Okay, gotcha.

Hazel: Cause family come first.

Similarly, Monet explains “like if you don’t have a title, if you don’t have a, like say if I don’t call you ‘best friend’ I don’t call you ‘diary’⁸ I don’t call you ‘twin’ I don’t call you ‘sister, brother’ it’s just like, if nobody don’t have a title for you then y’all not close.” Alexandria expresses her closeness to Khadija stating that they are “sisters.” Monet explains “me and my friends we be like brothers and sisters.”

Not only do The Girls discuss the existence of the relationships, but they also described the closeness of those relationships and the emotional connection they share. When describing a situation involving who she refers to as her “brother” Hazel admits that she “was mad and was like ‘where he at cuz I want his head’” when he was suspended and sent back to juvenile after a fight with another classmate. Additionally, she shares that she was equally upset when her “sister” received in school suspension because school administrators “thought she posted it on Instagram.” She also shares that she was sad when her “brother’s” grandma died because she “never want[s] to see anyone of my family hurt.” Monet shares an instance where she was “defensive” because teachers were talking badly about her “brother.”

⁸ Monet defines “diary” as “somebody you talk to, or like is always there. Like you can vent to like when you down or somebody like you need to get something off your chest you just tell that person and that person gives you something back. Like y’all tell each other everything.”

While “family [is] before” everything—as disclosed by Khadija—in addition to fictive kinships there are numerous other titles that represent significant relationships, extending beyond mere “friends”. As mentioned by Monet, a “diary” is

somebody you talk to, or like is always there. Like you can vent to like when you down or somebody like you need to get something off your chest you just tell that person and that person gives you something back. Like y’all tell each other everything.

Hazel mentions “lil juvie” as “a person you can count on.” She adds,

some people take it as lil juvie, lil juvie taken to as, lil juvie can be like somebody saying that's my boyfriend or that's my girlfriend. Or just like, that's my friend, that's a good person that I can trust or something.

While The Girls acknowledged the significance of close social networks, Monet shares that the process creating these relationships is challenging in the beginning because “like you don’t know who to trust yet and who not and you know people already got their cliques.” She ultimately concludes that one must “find your way.” Regardless of the types of specific relationships or the title, Kyla and Makayla points out the primary functions of the relationships are that they “push you up” and “care for you.” In other words, the primary role of quality interpersonal relationships is that they are supportive.

“I can’t do that because every two seconds I’m ghetto, every two seconds I’m loud, every two seconds I’m Black”

Emotion focused coping is particularly concerned with “managing the negative emotional reactions that accompany situations;” while “emotion focused coping does nothing directly to alter the situation causing the stress but may help the person feel better” (Ptacek and Pierce, 2003, p. 116). According to Ward (1996) the American Association of University Women study conducted in 1991 found that a decline in the positive feelings about school, resulted from the lack of positive “evaluations and validations received from school personnel” and contributed to apathy in school (p. 98). In discussions with The Girls, it became clear that a common strategy implemented to mediate the frustration and stress of the educational setting was to accept a general feeling of apathy, or “a lack of interest or emotion” (Stuss, Reekum, and Murphy, 2000, p. 340).

A couple of The Girls articulate feeling discouraged. Monet discusses this

And then sometimes it makes me feel like uhh I’m not gon’ be capable of doin nothin. And I told her I said ever since I was a kid I always was um energetic and I’m full of myself, I am very full of myself, and I’m very confident and um sometimes I’ve never felt I had low self-esteem but it’s like sometimes when I come in this school like I feel bad like I just have an automatic attitude towards this school or I just, I feel Like I can’t do nothin.

Monet expresses a feeling of discouragement as a result of her experience in the school. Earlier in the discussion she provided insight as to why her attitude towards the school is pessimistic noting “our teachers they may [say] something positive every now and then but it's mostly "y'all are so negative, y'all are so disrespectful, y'all never do this or do that," and it's barely oh you did a good job. I'm proud of you or something like that, it's never really that.” Highlighted by her elaboration, Monet describes feeling discouraged based on the lack of positive reinforcement, recognition, or encouragement. In addition to a feeling of apathy due to the lack of encouragement, Monet also expresses the feeling of being insignificant and ultimately replaceable. She shares a discussion with the school deans and recalls being told “they can kick us out this school, they can replace us.”

Lolita shares an experience that resulted in a feeling of apathy. She explains,

We had a test that same day, and I was doing my test, and I was just like, I don't understand this, and I had wrote my R wrong like capitalized. He was like, "I'm not helping you with your work because you wrote your Rs wrong." And I just said, well, why you not, well just because I wrote my R wrong doesn't mean I can't have help. So I just asked a friend, he was like "she can't help you and I'm not helping you so don't ask nobody in this class." So I was just like, well I can't do the work, if I don't understand.

Lolita communicates her frustration with the teacher's decision not to assist her by providing an additional explanation, due to what she perceived to be a minor mistake—writing her “R” incorrectly. She highlights that because of this, she detaches from the situation and concludes that she cannot do her work. This detachment ultimately serves as a coping strategy in response to her teacher's refusal to aid her.

While few of The Girls explicitly mention the feeling of apathy, none of them denied the feeling. Also, significant, the topic of apathy or feeling discouraged was discussed primarily in diaries/ follow-up interviews, not in the group discussions. As demonstrated by both Lolita and Monet, the feeling of apathy, discouragement, or disengagement was a direct response to interactions with teachers and other adults in the educational setting. The discussion of their experiences and response demonstrates the overall significance of teacher interactions.

“Sometimes when he makes me so mad I think about running away or killing myself”

In addition to generalized distrust and apathy, another avoidance based coping strategy, three of The Girls – Ayanna, Makayla, and Nevaeh—discussed a desire to permanently remove themselves from the stressful situations through running away or self-harm. While the number of girls that revealed that they had either contemplated or

attempted self-harm or running away was limited, the discussions make visible realities that are rarely interrogated.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (2016) “one in seven young people between the ages of 10 and 18 will run away...and 75 percent of [the] runaways are female.” While there are many factors that contribute to runaway behavior Miller and Eggertson-Tacon (1990) point out runaway behavior is often times linked to the “level of alienation between child and family and the degree to which the child has internalized running as a response to stressful situations” (p. 271). Makayla reflects in her journal entry the frustration with her parents and the desire to run away from home. She shares, “I got madder and madder so that’s when I came in class I was just ready to run away from home.” She goes on

I got to go home to the ~~worst~~ not so bad parents in the world. I don’t like myself and they just make it work. Some people be like you won’t do it but I’m like going to run away at 12:00am. I love them with all my heart but I need them to love me enough to let me go.

At first Makayla refers to her parents as “the worst,” but at some point she crossed out “worst” and added “not so bad,” presumably indicating either a change of mind or a desire to protect her portrayal of her parents. Makayla’s entry indicates she discussed her desire or intentions to run away with others, who did not believe she would actually run away. She writes that her parents “make it work,” though I posit from the context of her entry she meant that they

“make it worse.” From this entry, Makayla seems to express a feeling of being alone as she is faced with disbelief from her friends and parents that—rather than mediating her struggle—contribute to it, from her perspective. Despite her obvious frustration with her parents, she illustrates tension by explicitly stating that she loves her parents but also that she feels like the only solution to her unhappiness is to leave the home she shares with them.

Similarly, Ayanna reveals when discussing her stepfather, “he just makes me so angry, and I just can't take it anymore. So sometimes I just think about running away, because what's the point...There's nothing really to do to deal with it, because I live with him and I see him every day. I can't. It's hard to get over it.” Both Makayla and Ayanna communicate a desire to run away from home due to frustrating and stressful situations with their parents. As argued by Thompson and Pillai (2006), one of the primary factors that contribute to a youth’s decision to runaway is “young people’s feelings of neglect by and mistrust of their parents;” further, “lack of perceived parental responsiveness and emotional support” are also major factors that can lead to adolescent run away (p. 147). Based on the revelations of both Makayla and Ayanna, it is evident that the perceived lack of support by their parents, lead at least a few of The Girls to consider running away from home to be the most appropriate solution.

Another avoidance strategy evidenced in one diary is non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) “is generally used to cope with distressing negative affective states, especially anger and depression, and mixed emotional states” (Peterson, Freedenthal, Sheldon,

and Andersen, 2008, p. 21). NSSI as a response to stressors or volatile situations is becoming gradually more common among adolescents (Muehlenkamp and Gutierrez, 2004; Lloyd-Richardson, Perrine, Dierker, and Kelley, 2007). Peterson, et. al. (2008) reports that between “one third to one half of adolescents in the US have engaged in some type of non-suicidal self-injury” (p. 22). Self-injury as a coping strategy was discussed by Nevaeh in her diary. She writes,

One thing I could change about these last couple of weeks is trying not to let my anger get in my way and my confus[ion]. With my confus[ion] I really think I need to see someone for that because now it starting me back up with the cutting of my arms and you know kids do that a lot because of bullying and confus[ion] It hurts but I’m so confused about this boy. Really need to talk and breath[e] about the confusion it hard and upsetting.

Nevaeh reveals that she has struggled with self-injury for some time stating “last year, I've dealt with it a lot. Like, I would just do it constantly with the pencil.” She discusses the source “like you sit in a class for over two hours thinking and reading and I think a lot of stuff we were talking about last year was just really connecting to a lot of my life and I was just like, you know? And dealing with this situation that was going on in that moment.” In her follow up interview Nevaeh explains that self-injury – particularly cutting—is rather commonplace in the educational setting. She explains, “

...it is very common. Not only like, a lot of our Black people do it, but like Hispanics do it a lot too and you know, like, I don't even know what- how it started, though, but like if it goes- basically, I think it happens more in Westwood Academy community because like, stress and stuff like that. We're go to school almost 12 1/2 hours a day and then all those kids who also have after school activities, you're not getting home until 6/7 at night, then also you got homework to do, so you not going to bed until almost 10,11, or 12 in the morning. Like, that-

Nevaeh discusses stress from school, extracurricular activities, and homework that contribute to a desire to escape—in this case through the utilization of self-injury. In her discussion of the hectic schedule of Westwood Academy students, she supports scholarly literature that discusses the consequences of overscheduled youth, such as the “develop[ment] of stress symptoms including tearfulness, desire to avoid stressors, violent temper tantrums, trouble sleeping, difficulty eating, nail biting, and other behavioral symptoms” (Pollock, 2010, p. 2; Anderson & Doherty, 2005; Elkind, 2009; Rosenfeld & Wise, 2010; Brown, Nobiling, Teufel, & Birch, 2011; Facchinetti, 2016). In addition to the stress related to hectic scheduling, Nevaeh also points out her perception regarding the overall frequent occurrence of self-injury and her belief that it is more common among Black and Latinx students. According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2013) 61 percent of non-fatal, self-harm injuries between the ages of 10 and 16 were performed by white adolescents; conversely Black and Hispanic adolescents only accounted for 6 and 11 percent of cases respectively (CDC,

2013). The aforementioned statistics directly contradict Nevaeh's perception that self-injury is more common with Black and Latinx students . It is likely that her participation and awareness of other students who utilize self-harm, in conjunction with the school's racial/ethnic demographic, contribute to Nevaeh's overestimation of the commonality of the behavior.

According to the Center for Disease Control (2015) "suicide is the third leading cause of death among persons aged 10-14, and the second among persons aged 15-34" (p. 2). Additionally, Bridge, Asti, Horowitz, Greenhouse, Fontanella, Sheftall, Kelleher, and Campo (2015) note that current research indicates there is "increasing suicide rates among young Black children" (p. 677). Nevaeh shared that she has had moments where she felt "I don't belong here. I don't want to [be] on Earth." Ayanna communicated similar emotions stating "sometimes when [my stepfather] makes me so mad I think about running away or killing myself." Although later Ayanna mentioned she "would never do it," the reality that the thought of suicide serves as a coping strategy requires that serious attention be paid to the emotional and mental struggles that are facing Black ggirls. The dialogue with Makayla, Ayanna, and Nevaeh, reveal a concerning coping strategy, specifically the desire to run away from home, self-injury, and the consideration of suicide. While they mainly discuss just thinking about these actions, the mere consideration is cause for concern.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed The Girls perceptions of their identity. Revealed was the perception that key characteristics of Black girls are strength and toughness with and aversion to weakness and vulnerability, aggressiveness, and independence. Further, The Girls highlight the ways in the perceptions about their identity impact their behavior in the formal educational space, specifically their display of toughness with peers as a deterrent against disrespect or mistreatment. Recognizing the significance of establishing effective and positive coping strategies during adolescence, as the strategies will become the basis for adult functioning, the exploration of coping strategies among The Girls is deserving of attention. Through focus group discussions and diary entries/follow-up interviews, The Girls reveal the assertion of agency through the demand for reciprocity and mutual respect, the development of complex social networks, the experience of apathy and disengagement, and running away or self-harm—both contemplated and executed—as methods of coping with challenging experiences in the formal educational setting.

Chapter 7: Summary and Significance of Findings

Making Meaning: Implications of the Major Themes

Everyday Stressors

As is evident from the discussion of everyday stressors in chapter 4, African American middle school girls are subject to some of the common obstacles and challenges faced by adolescent girls generally. Interpersonal relationships, including the complexities of social networks, maintaining relationships and peer approval, and dealing with conflict or “mess,” were all factors in determining the perceived volatility of the educational space. As pointed out by Casey-Cannon, Hayward, and Gowen (2001), adolescent girls are more likely to experience these types of stressors because of

the relative importance girls place on social relationships as compared to boys. Adolescent girls tend to be more relational and invest a tremendous amount of energy into social comparisons and peer acceptance (Gilligan, 1982; Harter, 1990; Steiner-Adair, 1986). Relying more heavily on peer feedback to inform their self-worth, adolescent girls may be particularly susceptible to both the impressions of others regarding physical appearance or attractiveness and to being accepted as part of a social network. Feeling marginalized for being different or not being accepted by peers may be particularly hurtful for them. Because

they may be more aware of these relational vulnerabilities, adolescent girls may be more adept at strategies that target social relationships. (Introduction, para. 3).

In recognizing this distinct difference and the associated vulnerabilities, interventions that promote agency and an awareness of self-worth are of great importance. Conversely, in the absence of such, girls are left to manage the repercussions of their lived experience with little to no strategies for addressing the “negative effects on academic, social, and psychological functioning” (ibid., Introduction, para. 4). While the general realization that Black girls experience stress associated with peer conflict or “mess” and social media may not necessarily be a new finding, this study unveils the contemporary situations and feelings associated with these stressors. It is one thing to merely know that a phenomenon is taking place, but for the development of interventions, it is useful to have in-depth knowledge of the specific context and conditions. Discussion with The Girls is invaluable because it reveals common terms, utilized to describe and express concerns. Knowing the particularities allows for the development of programs that focus on more than broad themes like self-esteem or confidence; rather, this knowledge allows for programs that are geared towards addressing the concrete needs of the varying populations they are geared to serve.

Emotional Oppression

As mentioned in chapter 5, a major factor in contributing to the volatility of the educational space is the ever-present reality of emotional oppression in the form of psychic violence, racial/gender/sexual orientation microaggressions, and intersectional microaggressions from peers, teachers, administrators, and staff. The Girls revealed countless experiences where they felt that they were targeted, ostracized, and mistreated as a result of their gendered and racialized identity. The focus and significance of physical appearance, specifically the continued insults associated with peer criticism, proved to be a major aspect of emotional oppression. Whereas it is understood and expected that this stage of adolescence and identity development will be fraught with the common challenges of self-exploration and the development of self esteem, it became evident through focus groups and diary/interviews that The Girls have a uniquely difficult experience as a result of their intersectional identities. The occupation of the “unique” position within this oppressive system – resulting from the intersection of racial, gendered, and sexual—drastically hinders the development of a positive identity, which is necessary to the psychological wellbeing of individuals (Hull, Scott, and Smith, 1982; Penn 1996; Marable, 2000; Thornhill, 1985; Collins, 2000).

The Girls communicated frustration with the behaviors that they perceived to be only aimed at them for no other reason than their being Black girls. From peers’ insults and antagonisms to being singled out by teachers for being outspoken and shapely, emotional oppression plays a significant role in preventing the school from being a safe

and beneficial space for Black, middle school girls. While research tends to focus on either race (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Mickelson, 1990; Diamond, 2006) or gender (Hare, 1979; Damico & Scott, 1985), Black girls are still left to cope with the reality that they “are seen as Others, as nonpersons, as dehumanized beings-or sometimes not seen at all” (Thornhill, 1985, p. 155). What is clear from the revelations of *The Girls* is that there is much work to be done in mediating and eliminating the targeting of Black girls for their dichotomous location in racial and gender binaries (Grant, 1982; Scott-Jones & Clark, 1986; O’ Conner, 1997; Evans-Winters, 2005; Morris, 2007; Rollock, 2007). As such, my research speaks to the intersectionality of the challenges that face Black girls; while allowing them to prioritize the issues that they unveil. The insight from the conversations with *The Girls* allows for more informed discussions about tangible interventions, such as counseling programs aimed at providing Black girls strategies for identifying and addressing microaggressions. Recognizing “the short- and long-term detrimental consequences of chronic and perpetual microaggressive message[s]” it is important to develop programming that aids Black girls in effectively combating those messages (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008, p. 335; Bonilla-Silva, 2013).

Response and Coping

Acknowledging that the schools themselves have done little, if anything, to mediate the negative experiences and the resulting volatility of the educational space, *The Girls* indicate that they have interpreted certain messages as indicative of their identity and the general characteristics unique to Black women and girls. Specifically,

they describe toughness, strength, aggressiveness, and independence. Further they add that these characteristics are maintained in spite of urges to display vulnerability. While the ability to remain steadfast even in the face of adversity can be a healthy attribute, Black Feminist scholars have acknowledged the problematic historical representation of Black Women—and by extension Black girls—as superhuman. As pointed out by Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005) the messages received communicate an expectation to

demonstrate “gross displays of endurance and the absence of a personal agenda” (Scales, 2001, p. 31), and they [must] routinely put on the appearance of managing myriad of difficulties alone...because they are deemed fit for and unscathed by a life of “labor, suffering, and survival” (Hariss-Lacewell, 2001, p. 4). Strong Black women “do it all” and without complaint. In other words, strong Black women typically take on a social script that acknowledges them primarily when they tolerate the intolerable. (p. 106).

The internalization and expression of this form of strength is detrimental to the psychological functioning and well-being of Black women and girls (Boyd, 1998; Danquah, 1998; Schreiber, Stern, and Wilson, 2000; Martin, 2002; Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003). The direct consequence of this unrealistic standard of strength is evident in some of the coping strategies revealed by The Girls, particularly the development of apathy and the urge to self-harm or run away.

Despite the challenges and the unrealistic standards, The Girls also demonstrated a resilience and ability to assert agency in an effort towards self-determination. While the subscription to toughness and strength can be detrimental to Black girls' psychological functioning as discussed above, some "Black girls have embraced a loud and tough persona in order to be heard and not overlooked in classrooms and school buildings that tend to ignore them and marginalize them as students" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 12). In the development of coping strategies that hold others accountable and the requirement of reciprocity, The Girls actively seek to create means of mediating the spaces they are mandated to occupy. Additionally, they affirm their presence making it impossible –despite external efforts— to make them invisible and unheard. This study provides insight on how the The Girls assert their agency. It is in this same vein that I posit the necessity of programs and interventions that support and reinforce self-advocacy and self-determination.

Most Salient Themes: Differences Among Grade Levels

Although the themes discussed were generally mentioned by The Girls regardless of grade level, some themes proved to be more salient and concerning to particular groups. This saliency was made evident by how often these topics were mentioned and how much The Girls input during the discussion of the particular topics.

6th Graders.

During the focus group discussions and diary/interviews, I found that the 6th grade girls' dialogue was centered on concerns of interpersonal relationships with

peers; particularly associated with a concern that a strong social hierarchy exists, which situates 6th graders at the bottom. In line with the belief in social hierarchies, the 6th grade group also revealed emotional oppression in the form of psychic violence as a large part of their middle school experience. Lastly, 6th grade girls discussed physical appearance—including clothing, shoes, and hair—more often than any other group.

7th Graders.

The 7th grade girls proved to be an open and communicative group. In the focus groups and diary/interviews, I found that a great deal of the discourse was centered around discussions of interpersonal relationships, particularly sources of conflict (i.e. “mess”—see chapter 4) and the importance of building/maintaining friendships. The 7th grade group was also the only group in which sexuality was addressed and proved to be a source of contention amongst The Girls. Additionally, the 7th grade girls were the most outspoken regarding their perceptions and beliefs about themselves; as well as identifying responses and coping to their experiences.

8th Graders.

While the 8th grade girls spent a great deal of time outlining and discussing the complex social networks and fictive kinships that shape interpersonal relationships among peers, the most salient theme, by far, is the emotional oppression perpetuated by teachers. More than any other group, the focus group and individual discussions were centered on the experiences—predominately negative—with teachers, administrators, and staff. The 8th grade girls’ discussions demonstrated the saliency of

feelings of emotional oppression and provided majority of the instances of disrespect, abuse of authority, policing, and lack of care. Although the data did not specifically address the cause of this saliency; based on my interactions, it is my position that the overall maturity and the personalities of The Girls in this particular group led them to be more cognizant of their interactions with adults, particularly teachers, administrators, and school staff.

Behavioral Differences: Focus Groups vs. Diary/Interviews

Although an initial concern of conducting research with adolescents was how open and transparent they would be while discussing pretty invasive topics with an adult, The Girls were exceptionally unguarded and willing to share. Focus group discussions provided a great deal of conversation particularly centered on the interactions with teachers, administrators, and peers. Unique to the focus groups, The Girls shared frustrations with disrespect and differential treatment by teachers, administrators, and staff. Similarly, issues regarding challenges with their male counterparts and interracial interactions were disproportionately discussed during the focus groups. However, even with this openness, there were observable differences in the topics and vulnerability during focus groups versus the diary entries and the follow up interviews. While the focus group discussions centered on topics and challenges that were shared by at least one other student in the group, the diaries/ follow up interviews revealed obstacles that were more personal to the students. Particularly in the diaries/follow up interviews The Girls revealed: individual struggles at home ranging

from adoption to loss; personal challenges with body image and sexual identity; thoughts of running away; suicide and self-harm; and in group conflict.

Additionally, during the focus groups, although there were somber moments, the emotionality of The Girls was by and large jovial and upbeat, even while discussing topics that they found to be frustrating and saddening. In the diaries/follow up interviews however, The Girls appeared to be more willing to visibly communicate more complex and varied emotions. Makayla broke down in tears during an individual interview while discussing topics of her home life. Stacy shared her personal story of adoption, self-harm, and her inability to trust. Although Hazel was vehement about not showing emotions, she revealed in her diary that she felt like crying and in her individual interview she discussed the loss of her sister. As discussed in qualitative research literature, the diaries and individual interviews allowed for The Girls to be “more confident, more relaxed and they feel more encouraged to express the deepest thoughts... [without being] preoccupied by the image that the other participants will build up on them that to express what they really think about that subject” (Milena, Dainora, and Alin, 2008, 1279-1280).

Evident from the distinct—yet equally important—behaviors differences and the resulting insights, the combination of both methods provided a more holistic view of The Girls overall experiences in the formal educational setting. The methods provided space and opportunity for the discussion of shared experiences, as well as the unique and individual struggles.

From Theory to Praxis

Not only does Africology as a discipline provide a unique approach to conceptualizing and describing the reality of African descended people, but Africology also provides a lens through which pragmatic solutions can be formulated by understanding phenomena as products of a system (Van Horne, 2007). Inherent in Africological research and the solutions that emerge is the understanding that praxis must be transformative in the interest of African descended people; as such, a primary goal of this research study is to aid in the development of pragmatic interventions and programming that can address the obstacles and challenges faced by Black, middle school girls. I propose, teachers, administration, and staff commit to establishing liberatory educational spaces through the implementation of Black Feminist Pedagogy and the practice of an “Ethic of Caring.”

Creating Liberatory Educational Spaces.

Recognizing that current formal educational spaces prioritize Western epistemologies, histories, and identities above all others, and these spaces have historically been utilized as a means to maintain and extend the existing structures of domination and oppression (Walsh, 2007). Further, educational spaces have historically suppressed “the knowledge produced” by historically marginalized groups making “it easier for dominant groups to rule because the seeming absence of dissent suggest that subordinate groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization” (Collins, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, the goal must be to establish educational spaces that fight against

dehumanization and degradation. I argue, a primary means of mediating the negative messages, and by extension eliminating the volatility of educational spaces for Black girls, requires the commitment to fostering liberatory, anti-oppressive spaces. The establishment of liberatory spaces is achieved through in service teacher training that promotes 1) the implementation of anti-oppressive, critical pedagogies, 2) establishing relationships based on an “ethic of care,” and 3) establishing partnerships with Black girl empowerment organizations.

Due to the ever-changing socio-political climate, and the unique needs and challenges of diverse student populations, The Center for Educational Research and Innovation (1998) argues,

Pre-service training cannot, of itself, be expected to prepare teachers fully to meet these rising expectations, especially against the background of a rapidly changing social, economic and educational environment. It has to be supplemented by ongoing in-service training and professional development if the ideal of lifelong learning is to be realised for members of the teaching profession (p. 17).

As such, I posit a key focus of in-service teacher training should be the introduction of anti-oppressive, critical pedagogies such as: Black Feminist Pedagogy.

Black Feminist Pedagogy.

Pedagogy refers to “the observable act of teaching, together with its attendant discourse of educational theories, values, evidence, and justifications” (Alexander, 2009, p. 10). Grounded in Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000; 2009)—the social theory that centers the lived experiences of Black Women and girls in an effort to “resist oppression, both its practices and the ideas that justify it” (Collins, 2009, p. 25)—Black Feminist Pedagogy originates from classroom practice, curriculum, and teaching that

argues for the analyses of the social construction of race, nationality, culture, gender, sexuality, and class as important for understanding Western patriarchy, and that the constructs remain central to understanding historical and societal phenomena...[and] also show[s] us how these social and historical positions are present in the classroom and need to be addressed in our relationships with our students. (Henry, 2005, p. 95).

Black Feminist Pedagogy serves as a critique of not only the existing educational system, but also pedagogies and educational discourse that is short sighted and/or ignores the experiences and concerns of diverse populations, particularly Black women and girls; and actively uncovers covert forms of oppression (Omolade, 1991; hooks, 1994; 2003; Joseph, 1995; Henry, 2005). As argued by Omolade (1991) a central aim of Black Feminist Pedagogy is to

set forth learning strategies informed by Black women's historical experience with race/gender/class bias and the consequences of marginality and isolation...[*Additionally,*] Black Feminist Pedagogy aims [*writer's spelling*] to develop a mindset of intellectual inclusion and expansion that stands in contradiction to the Western intellectual tradition of exclusivity and chauvinism (p. 31).

Based on the experiences and challenges shared by The Girls, Black Feminist Pedagogy offers a direct means to combat the negative messages and ideas about their intersecting identity, by offering educational praxis and curricula that highlights the contributions and value of Black women and girls. Additionally, Black Feminist Pedagogy seeks to establish a liberatory educational space through the commitment to centering the voices of those that have historically been marginalized and oppressed. Ultimately, Black Feminist Pedagogy seeks to establish a community that stretches beyond borders and embraces fully the anti-oppressive, critical, decolonial project which is simultaneously political, cultural, and epistemological.

Ethic of Care.

Educational scholars have argued that formal education should serve a purpose beyond the classrooms, asserting the necessity for formal education to contribute to the moral development of the student (Noddings, 1988; 1992; 2002; 2013; 2015; Rogers & Webb, 1991; Katz, Noddings, & Strike, 1999; Owens & Ennis, 2005). They highlight the an "ethic of care" as the key to fulfilling the moral responsibility of education (Noddings,

1988; 1992; 2002; 2013). Noddings “ethic of care” centers on the development of a caring relationship between teacher and student, explaining a key characteristic of the caring relationship is “accepting student feelings and acknowledging the relevance of student experiences...[ensuring that the student feels] accepted and valued” (Owens & Ennis, 2005, p. 394; Noddings, 1992). Similar to Noddings and in the same vein of Black Feminist Epistemology and Black Feminist Pedagogy, Hill Collins (2009) discusses and “Ethic of Caring.” The scholar identifies the three interrelated components of the “Ethic of Caring” as: 1) “individual uniqueness [and] unique expression;” 2) “the appropriateness of emotion in dialogue;” and 3) the development of “the capacity for empathy” (p. 282). Recognizing a significant concern raised by The Girls was the lack of care and concern the perceived from their teachers, administrators, and staff; I propose a tangible intervention should be the subscription and practice of an “Ethic of Caring.” It is my position that through the implementation of genuine care as a means to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between students and teachers/administration/ and staff.

Black Girl Empowerment Organizations

Sears (2010) points out,

researchers suggest that during early adolescence, girls become both capable of and thus ‘vulnerable to internalizing the impossible ideals and images’ of idealized or conventional femininity (Debold, as quoted in Brown, 1998, 7). Through unmarked, idealized femininity, or what Connell (1987) would call emphasized femininity, is tied to White, middle-

class, heterosexual womanhood and constructed around notions of passivity, silence, subordination, selflessness, and purity. While already familiar with the image, adolescent girls come to understand the implications of such images for their own lives as girls and future women (p. 5).

The revelations made by The Girls supports this conclusion. The Girls discuss the receipt of negative messages from peers, teachers, and administration regarding their intersectional identity, specifically their appearance, appropriateness of behavior, and in/visibility. As such, it is evident that the formal education space must provide a means of directly challenging negative messages and promoting a positive sense of identity. I posit that through partnerships with community organizations that focus on Black girl empowerment, schools can aid in mediating negative experiences.

Black girl empowerment organizations focus on establishing safe spaces that reject dominant ideals regarding identity and instead provide spaces for Black women and girls to “construct independent self-definitions” and “freely examine issues that concern us” (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 101, p. 110). As expressed by the founders of the Girls Empowerment Organization in order to withstand the myriad of negative and oppressive messages girls must have “a safe and separate space to overcome the pervasive but unconscious sexism that perpetuate[s] girls’ low self-esteem, poor achievement, and low aspirations” (GEP 1992b, p. 13, as quoted by Sears, 2010, p. 60). It is my position that school collaborations with Black girl empowerment organizations will

aid in mediating the effect of the negative messages communicated in the formal educational setting by establishing a space for Black girls to reimagine their intersectional identities and develop tools for liberation.

Implications for Future Research

While conducting this research and analyzing the myriad of data collected, there were some themes and topics that were either mentioned by a small number of girls or only mentioned briefly without a great deal of elaboration. These topics serve as possibilities for exploration in future research. One of the topics is the interracial conflict or ethnic tension with peers. The discussion of racial distinctions—and at times tensions—took place during some of the focus groups, but was overshadowed by other topics that proved to be of greater concern of The Girls. It is possible that the theme appeared to be less salient due to the demographic of the school itself, particularly the perception of the students' that there was a relatively equal Black and Latinx population. In the same vein, the topic of interracial dating and the challenges associated with interracial dating was mentioned by Monet in her diary/interview; however, she was the only student who addressed the topic. In addition to the topics that were only briefly mentioned or not mentioned throughout my analysis, I posit the primary themes have implications for exploration in different geographical locations.

Considering the lack of scholarly research that critically investigates that experience of the intersection of racialized and gendered microaggressions by Black girls, there is great potential for future research that seeks to explore the topic. There is

little to no research that specifically explores microaggressions from an intersectional perspective, specifically with adolescent, Black students (Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, Wong, Marshall, & McKenzie, 2015; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Sterzing, Gartner, Woodford, & Fisher, 2016; Nadal, Whitman, Davis, Erazo, & Davidoff, 2016). Scholarly research that seeks to shed light on the occurrences of intersectional microaggressions, as well as develop remediation that directly combats the perpetuation of microaggressions in the educational space are much needed; I posit that this research contributes to that aim and has implications for future research to that aim.

Lastly, although this study was centered on the experience and highlighted the voices of Black girls –partially in response to the lack of scholarly research that does so— I posit that there are implications for similar research with middle-school-aged Black boys. While there is research that seeks to address the academic achievement and behavioral challenges for Black boys, there is less research that seeks to explore the day-to-day challenges that prevent the educational context from being emotionally and psychologically beneficial to overall growth and identity development (Reed, 1999; Lesko, 1999; Ferguson, 2001).

Concluding Thoughts

Through hours of interviews and discussions, it is evident that there are many factors that influence and impact the experience of middle school Black girls. From everyday stressors about physical appearance to racialized and gendered microaggressions perpetuated by both teachers and peers alike, The Girls have shed

light on the obstacles that typically go relatively unnoticed and unaddressed. While some may assert that challenges and negative middle school experiences are to be expected during adolescence— “growing pains” as they are often referred—the gendered and racialized identity of middle school Black girls present a unique and complicated reality of middle school as a volatile space. In recognizing the challenges expressed *The Girls* –in their own words, from their perspectives—it is our responsibility to make direct efforts to find permanent solutions that create spaces for positive growth. We must seek to cultivate and encourage the development of solid identities that reinforces the humanity of Black girls, rather than deny it. The only means of liberation comes from a clear and public rejection of negative images, identities, and messages; as well as, people and spaces that uphold and perpetuate them.

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APPENDIX A: FANONIAN DEFINITION OF RACE⁹

(Zone of Being)

“I”	“Other”	human rights legal rights
Bourgeoisie	Proletariat	superiority
Treaties	conflict mediated through discourse/principles of emancipation	
Human		
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Non- Human

Inferiority	subhuman
Conflict mediated through perpetual state of violence	
Racialized subject	

(Zone of non-Being)

⁹ Barganier, George. "Coloniality and Modernity in Latin America." Race Matters: Politics and Government in Latin America. Department of Africology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Wisconsin, Milwaukee. 01 Apr 2013. Lecture.

APPENDIX B: GROSFOGUEL'S GLOBAL HIEARCHIES¹⁰

A European/capitalist/military/Christian/patriarchal/white/heterosexual/male arrived in the Americas and established simultaneously in time and space several entangled global hierarchies that for purposes of clarity in this exposition I will list below as if they were separate from each other:

- 1) a particular global class formation where a diversity of forms of labor (slavery, semi-serfdom, wage labor, petty-commodity production, etc.) are going to co-exist and be organized by capital as a source of production of surplus value through the selling of commodities for a profit in the world market;
- 2) an international division of labor of core and periphery where capital organized labor in the periphery around coerced and authoritarian forms (Wallerstein 1974);
- 3) an inter-state system of politico-military organizations controlled by European males and institutionalized in colonial administrations (Wallerstein 1979);
- 4) a global racial/ethnic hierarchy that privileges European people over non-European people (Quijano 1993; 2000);
- 5) a global gender hierarchy that privileges males over females and European Judeo-Christian patriarchy over other forms of gender relations (Spivak 1988; Enloe 1990);
- 6) a sexual hierarchy that privileges heterosexuals over homosexuals and lesbians (it is important to remember that most indigenous peoples in the Americas did not consider sexuality among males a pathological behavior and had no homophobic ideology);
- 7) a spiritual hierarchy that privileges Christians over non-Christian/non-Western spiritualities institutionalized in the globalization of the Christian (Catholic and later, Protestant) church;
- 8) an epistemic hierarchy that privileges Western knowledge and cosmology over non-Western knowledge and cosmologies, and institutionalized in the global university system (Mignolo 1995, 2000; Quijano 1991);

¹⁰ Grosfoguel, R. (2011). Decolonizing Political-Economy and Post-Colonial Studies: Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality. *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1(1), 1-38. Retrieved from <http://www.dialogoglobal.com/granada/documents/Grosfoguel-Decolonizing-Pol-Econ-and-Postcolonial.pdf> p. 9-10

- 9) a linguistic hierarchy between European languages and non-European languages that privileges communication and knowledge/theoretical production in the former and subalternize the latter as sole producers of folklore or culture but not of knowledge/theory (Mignolo 2000);
- 10) an aesthetic hierarchy of high art vs. naïve or primitive art where the West is considered superior high art and the non-West is considered as producers of inferior expressions of art institutionalized in Museums, Art Galleries and global art markets;
- 11) a pedagogical hierarchy where the Cartesian western forms of pedagogy are considered superior over non-Western concepts and practices of pedagogy;
- 12) a media/informational hierarchy where the West has the control over the means of global media production and information technology while the non-West do not have the means to make their points of view enter the global media networks;
- 13) an age hierarchy where the Western conception of productive life (ages between 15 and 65 years old) making disposable people above 65 years old are considered superior over non-Western forms of age classification, where the older the person, the more authority and respect he/she receives from the community;
- 14) an ecological hierarchy where the Western conceptions of “nature” (as an object that is a means towards an end) with its destruction of life (human and non-human) is privileged and considered superior over non-Western conceptions of the “ecology” such as Pachamama, Tawhid, or Tao (ecology or cosmos as subject that is an end in itself), which considers in its rationality the reproduction of life;
- 15) a spatial hierarchy that privileges the urban over the rural with the consequent destruction of rural communities, peasants and agrarian production at the world- scale.

Focus Group Script and Questions

Pre-questions:

Hi Everyone,

Again my name is Crystal and I am doing research on the experience of African American, middle school, girls. Today, we will be talking about your experiences in school, with your teachers, classmates, administrators, and other staff. Your feedback, will be used for my dissertation research—a dissertation is a really long paper written as part of a Ph.D. degree. Before we get started though, first, I just want to thank you all for agreeing to participate. I am sure that you all will offer great insight on your individual and collective experiences. Before we get started, I want to just remind you all of a few things:

- 1) While your participation is greatly appreciated and encouraged, it is completely voluntary. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the conversation, don't want to answer a particular question, or just feel that you no longer want to participate, you are more than welcome to end your involvement, without consequence.
- 2) I also have to remind you all that we must refrain from using any first and/or last names, and school names. Instead, to refer to one another, please use what is listed on the nametags, for schools just use the first letter; I know it may seem weird or strange, but it's necessary to ensure that we try to keep this confidential and private.
- 3) Lastly, on the topic of privacy, I cannot stress enough, that what is said in this space should not be repeated outside of this space. Some of the things we discuss today may be personal to someone and we want to keep it as private as possible. With that being said, though, since this is a group setting and I can't exactly patrol every single one of you to make sure that you don't accidentally repeat something you heard here today. I encourage you all to individually decide if something is too personal, meaning if you fear that something could be too harmful if it were accidentally repeated, you should not share it in this space.

Now that I have finished with the reminders, I want us to come up with some "Discussion Guidelines." We do this to make sure that we make sure that everyone is as comfortable as possible in this space. So what are some things that you think should be the "rules" for this discussion? (Open the floor for suggestions)

[In the event that students do not immediately make suggestions I will begin by using some of the following]

So for example, what about “Be respectful.” So, 1) Don’t talk over one another, let one person finish their thought or sentence before you begin talking; 2) It is fine to disagree with one another, but make sure that we are respectful in how you express disagreement. What would respectful disagreement look like to you? How can you respectfully disagree with one another? What would a disrespectful disagreement look like? OK, so we will be careful to avoid those kinds of responses.

Also, think about “Share the discussion.” So try to make sure that you aren’t the only person talking. Give some room for everyone to have the chance to speak if they want.

“Leave it in this space.” So this goes back to what we talked about before, what is said here should stay here. We want this to be a space where everyone can feel comfortable, so we want to make sure that we don’t repeat what we hear in this room.

And finally, “Be honest.” The purpose of this research is to really let you all’s voices be heard so be honest with what you think, feel, have experienced, etc. I’d also like to add that you should “use I statements” meaning I want you to speak for yourself and tell us about your specific experiences.

Does everyone feel comfortable with the ground rules as they are written here? Does anyone want to suggest changes or clarify anything?

Questions/Discussion:

[Please note, some of these questions will not be asked verbatim rather, if the students are seeming not to grasp what I am asking them I will reword it or state them in a way that will be easier for them to understand. Additionally, as I my method of data analysis is concerned with emerging codes and themes as expressed by the participants, I would like some flexibility with regards to posing follow up questions in the event a participant mentions a topic or idea that is relevant to the research study, but not explicitly asked in the focus group questions submitted.]

Now that we have our ground rules established, we can get started with the discussion.

- 1) So, I want to begin the discussion by letting you all talk about your experiences at school. What are some of the things that come to mind when you think of a regular day at school? Take me through your typical day.
 - a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. When do you arrive? What happens before the first class? How do you move through your day? What happens between classes? What is lunch like? Are there classes everyone takes? Are you with the same group of students for parts of the day, or is every class different? Who are the people you interact with

at different points during the day? What are those interactions like? What is the end of the school day like? What happens after school?

- 4) What is your best memorable moment/event that has happened at school and why? Tell the story about the experience.
 - a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. Who was involved? (i.e. teachers, classmates, administration, staff)
- 5) What is your worst memorable moment/event that has happened at school and why? Tell the story about the experience.
 - a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. Who was involved? (i.e. teachers, classmates, administration, staff)
- 6) Have there every been any situations that have happened at school that made you feel uncomfortable? Tell the story about experience:
 - a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. What happened? Who was involved? How did it make you feel? How did you reaction outwardly? How did you react inwardly? Do you have any ideas about why this happened? If yes, why do you think this happened? Did you talk to anyone about this situation? If so, tell us about that conversation
- 7) Has anyone ever made a comment that made you feel uncomfortable, insulted, or disrespected by a comment that was made while you were at school? Tell the story about the experience.
 - a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. What happened? Who was involved? How did it make you feel? How did you reaction outwardly? How did you react inwardly? Do you have any ideas about why this happened? If yes, why do you think this happened? Did you talk to anyone about this situation? If so, tell us about that conversation.
- 8) Has anyone at your school ever made you feel “put down” or “bad” because of your cultural values, gender, or the way that you talk? Tell the story about experience:
 - a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. What happened? Who was involved? How did it make you feel? How did you reaction outwardly? How did you react inwardly? Do you have any ideas about why this happened? If yes, why do you think this happened? Did you talk to anyone about this situation? If so, tell us about that conversation.
 - ii. How did you react outwardly? How did you react inwardly?
 - iii. Did you talk to anyone about this situation? If so, tell us about that conversation
- 9) Do you think that people treat you differently than they treat others?
 - a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. If yes, can you think of any examples?
 - ii. Why do you think this happens?

- 10) Have you ever felt like someone didn't like you because of something about you? If yes, tell the story about experience:
- a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. What happened? Who was involved? How did it make you feel? How did you react outwardly? How did you react inwardly? Do you have any ideas about why this happened? If yes, why do you think this happened? Did you talk to anyone about this situation? If so, tell us about that conversation.
 - ii. Have you ever told anyone about your experience[s] of being discriminated against?
 - iii. How did they react or respond?
 - iv. How did you react outwardly? How did you react inwardly? How did you feel about it then? How do you feel about it now?
- 11) Who are some of the people that have been a part of these stories?
- a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. [Follow up, depending on whether they are getting at what you want them to get at in response to the broader question]: Like, was it from peers that you know, peers that you don't know, teachers, staff, administrators, or other people at school?
- 12) What are some of the ways that you have dealt with these experiences?
- 13) Have these experiences impacted how you feel? If so, how?'
- a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. If not, why do you think that is?
- 14) Have these experiences affected you in other ways? If so, how? (e.g. change behavior, avoid certain people or subjects, etc.)
- 15) How did you or do you respond to or deal with these experiences, either openly or inside of yourself?
- a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. Did you actively do something – like speak up about it? Did you talk to other people about it? Did you ignore it? Did you confront the perpetrator in a physical altercation (not necessarily a physical fight)?
- 16) Has anyone at your school been helpful in dealing with some of the experiences we talked about today? Like have any of your teachers, principals, or peers helped you feel proud of your proud of their cultural values, gender, or communication style? How do they do this?
- a. Possible additional probing questions:
 - i. What do you think some of the other people at your school (teachers, staff, administration, peers) could do improve some of the experiences we talked about today?

Closing:

Well, that concludes the questions that I have for you all at this time. I want to thank you all for your time and all that you have contributed to this discussion. You have

been extremely helpful with my research and I am grateful. I will be working on my dissertation throughout the upcoming months, but when I am done, I will come back to see you all and share it with you in a presentation. I will let you all know the exact date soon. Thank you all again.

Solicited Diary Script and Prompts

Initial Discussion/Invitation to participate/Assign Diary:

Hi,

As mentioned in the form that you and your parents/guardians signed for you to participate in the research, there is a second phase of the study, which is called "Solicited Diaries and Follow-up interviews." After listening to your comments and feedback in the focus group, I would like to invite you to participate in the second phase of the study.

For this phase I will give you a diary that has questions or prompts already in it. What I would like for you to do is write in the diary at least two (2) days a week, responding to the questions/prompts. Try to be as detailed as possible. At the end of the week I will come and sit with you and I will ask you to talk a little bit more about what you have written. For example, I may ask for more details or clarification, things like that. Now, this phase of the study will require a four-week time commitment, up to 3 hours per week (roughly two (2) hours weekly for completing diary entries and one (1) hour for the weekly follow-up interview), so I would have to make sure that you are up for that responsibility.

Like with the focus group, your feedback will be used for my dissertation research for my PhD. Before we begin this process, I want to just remind you of a few things:

- 17) While your participation is greatly appreciated and encouraged, it is completely voluntary. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with this process, don't want to answer a particular question, or just feel that you no longer want to participate in the study, let me know. You are more than welcome to end your involvement, at any time.
- 18) Also, try not to use any first and/or last names, and school names in your diary. Instead, feel free to use a make believe name or initials to reference others or just use the title (i.e. teacher, principal, secretary, classmate), for schools just use the first letter; I know it may seem weird or strange, but it's necessary to ensure that we try to keep this confidential and private.

Also, do not write your name on the diary. I say this because in case it is lost or stolen, none of your identifying information is in it.

- 19) Lastly, on the topic of privacy, keep your diary in a safe place. Do not let anyone else read or write in your diary.

Do you have any questions for me? [Wait for response.] If at any time you think of something or if you are unsure, feel free to contact me at the phone number or email I highlighted on my card.

Diary Questions/Prompts:

“When responding to the questions, keep in mind that the questions are about what happened in school today.”

[I will review the questions and provide clarity at the initial meeting if necessary.]

Weeks 1 and 2

[During weeks one and two I will include diary questions/prompts that are broader and not directly centered on the experience of race and gender or microaggressions. This will aid the students to becoming more comfortable with writing in the journal regularly and reflecting on/recalling their day-to-day activities, and experiences. Also, this will aid me in understanding if I need to include more questions to explicitly address their experiences as it relates to their race and gender or if they are reflecting/including these things on their own. If after reviewing the initial entries and conducting the follow-up interviews I see that the students are vague or broad, I will then include some of the questions from the list provided for Weeks 3 and 4. Also note, some of the Week 3 and 4 questions may be drawn upon during the follow-up interviews of the first two weeks. As my method of data analysis will primarily be an examination of emerging codes and/or themes, my methodological approach necessitates a degree of flexibility to modify and adapt questions/prompts based on the interaction with the student participants.]

- 1) What did you do today/this week?
- 2) What happened to you today/this week?
- 3) Tell me about one good thing that happened to you today/this week?
- 4) What did you make happen today/this week?
- 5) What were your feelings like throughout the day/week?
- 6) Why do you think that was? Like what made you feel the way you did throughout the day/week?
- 7) If you could change anything about your experience today/this week, what would you change and why?

Weeks 3 and 4

[In addition to the questions from Weeks 1 and 2, I will begin to include some of the questions listed below, as necessary. Additionally, some of the questions listed below may be drawn upon during the follow-up interviews.]

- 1) Do you remember being treated rudely or disrespectfully, today? If so, talk about what happened.
 - a. Why do you think this happened?
- 2) Do you think that what you just talked about had anything to do with your race or gender or both? Why or why not? (if you didn't have anything happen skip this question)
- 3) Do you remember being accused of something you did not do or treated like you were 'up to no good'? If so, describe the situation.
 - a. Why do you think this happened?
- 4) Do you think that what you just talked about had anything to do with your race or gender or both? Why or why not? (if you didn't have anything happen skip this question)
- 5) Did anyone act like they were afraid or intimidated by you?
 - a. If so, describe the situation. Why do you think this happened?
- 6) Do you think that what you just talked about had anything to do with your race or gender or both? Why or why not? (if you didn't have anything happen skip this question)
- 7) Did anyone treat you like you were "stupid," or "talked down to" you? Describe what happened. Why do you think this happened?
- 8) Do you think that what you just talked about had anything to do with your race or gender or both? Why or why not? (if you didn't have anything happen skip this question)
- 9) Do you remember being disrespected, called a name, or harassed? If so, describe the situation. Why do you think this happened?
- 10) Do you think that what you just talked about had anything to do with your race or gender or both? Why or why not? (if you didn't have anything happen skip this question)
- 11) If you could change anything about your experience today, what would you change and why?
 - a. Is there anything that the teachers, administration, or staff at your school could have done to improve your experience today? If yes, what could they have done? If no, why don't you think they could have changed or improved the experience?

Follow-Up Interviews:

Hi,

How is everything going with the diaries? Do you have any questions for me?

[If so I will address questions accordingly. If not I will begin with the follow-up questions as needed based on the diary entries submitted by the student.]

Well, that concludes the questions that I have for you at this time. I want to thank you for your time. You have been extremely helpful.

APPENDIX E: SCREENING FORM

Study Screening

Instructions: Please complete the following questions to the best of your knowledge. Your information will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used for study screening purposes. This form will be destroyed after study participants and selected.

First Name: _____

Gender: (check)

Female

Male

Prefer not to say

Race/Ethnicity: (check all that apply)

African American/Black

Native American/American Indian

Asian/Pacific Islander

White

Hispanic/Latino

Not Listed (please specify)

Grade Level: (check)

6th

7th

8th

Age: _____

Are you fluent in English? (circle one)

Yes

No

APPENDIX F: SCHOOL SURVEY
School Survey

What do you like about your school?

What do you wish were different at your school?

How often do you see people of different races, cultures, and gender often?

How are people who are of different races, cultures, and/or genders treated at your school?

By teachers, administration, staff?

By other students?

**UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – MILWAUKEE
PARENT CONSENT AND CHILD ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN
RESEARCH**

THIS CONSENT FORM HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE IRB FOR A ONE YEAR PERIOD

1. General Information

Study title: HER-story: African American, Middle School Girls Exploring their Intersectional Identities

Person in Charge of Study (Principal Investigator): This study is being conducted by Crystal Edwards (Student P.I.), doctoral student in the Department of Africology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. It is being supervised by Dr. Erin Winkler, Associate Professor in the Department of Africology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

2. Study Description

My name is Crystal Edwards, and I am asking you to participate in a research study I am conducting. Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to.

Study description:

The purpose of this research study is to help tell the story of the experiences of African American, middle-school-aged girls in Houston, Texas and the surrounding area of Cyprus, Texas, from their own perspectives and voices. Specifically, the girls will be asked to discuss how they experience their race and gendered identity, especially in the school environment as it relates to their interactions with teachers, peers, administration, and staff. Seven to ten female students from each of the three study locations will be asked to participate in this study, for an overall anticipated participation of up to 40 students.

The study will take part in two phases: 1) Group Discussion and 2) Individual topical Diaries with individual follow-up interviews. If you (the student) choose to participate only in the group discussion portion of the study, you will only be expected to attend one meeting lasting up to an hour and a half. If you also choose to participate in the individual diaries with individual follow-up interviews, this will require an additional four-week time commitment, up to 3 hours per week (roughly 2 hours weekly for completing diary entries and 1 hour weekly for follow-up interviews).

3. Study Procedures

What will I be asked to do if I participate in the study?

The study will take part in two phases: 1) Group Discussion and 2) Individual Topical Diaries with individual follow-up interviews. If you agree to participate in the group discussion portion of the study, you will be asked to participate in a group discussion with up to nine (9) other students, during which the group will talk about their experiences at school, especially things relating to their race and gender. The focus groups will last up to an hour and a half and will take place at the student's school or after-school program location. The focus group will be video recorded so that I can make sure to remember correctly what everyone said, and so that I can look at things like facial expressions and hand gestures, which would otherwise be difficult for me to note in a group discussion setting. If you wish to participate in this study, it will require that you also give permission for the video recording of the focus group portion of the study. I (the Student P.I.) and my faculty advisor will be the only two individuals who can view the video recordings; no one else will see them.

If you also choose to participate in the second phase of the study, you will be asked to maintain a diary, provided by the Student P.I., responding to questions/prompts about your day-to-day experiences at school, especially things that come up relating to race and gender. This phase of the study will require a four-week time commitment, up to 3 hours per week (roughly 2 hours weekly for completing diary entries and one 1 hour weekly for the follow-up interview). I will pick up these journal entries from at school or at your after school program location, and I will also conduct one-on-one follow-up interviews with you there. In our follow-up interviews, you will have a chance to explain things from your journal entries to me in more detail, to tell me about things you've thought about since writing the journal entry, or anything else you think I should know about what you wrote. The follow-up interviews will be audio recorded to ensure that I remember exactly what you told me; therefore, If you wish to participate in this part of the study, it will require that you also give permission for the audio recording of the interviews. I (the Student P.I.) and my faculty advisor will be the only two people authorized to hear audio recordings; no one else will listen to them.

4. Risks and Minimizing Risks

What risks will I face by participating in this study?

Psychological Risks

In this study, you will be asked to explore topics and recall events regarding racial identity, gendered identity, and things that happen at school. Sometimes, talking about these topics brings up positive emotions. Other times, talking about these topics can be uncomfortable, especially if you have had experiences that were emotionally charged or negative. Because of this, there is the possibility that you might feel discomfort, frustration, sadness, anger, and/or stress.

In effort to minimize this risk, the Student PI will immediately pause the focus group or interview and address the issue if you or other participants demonstrate even minor visible signs of discomfort or emotional stress. Further, you will be reminded that participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that you have the option to discontinue participation in the study at any time, without consequence. The Student PI will then ask if you still have concerns, and you will be asked whether you wish to given the choice to continue the discussion or to withdraw participation. Additionally, you are the expert on your experiences and feelings, which are exactly what my study seeks to find; therefore, everything you wish to share is important and valid, and I will make every attempt to show this throughout our time together. You will be encouraged to take your time and share only what you wish to share. I will follow- up with any student or students that have expressed discomfort throughout the discussion and assess whether they would like to be put in contact with a school counselor or anonymous helpline for young people.

Social Risks

While the anticipated social risk to participating in this study is low, there is the possibility that participants' social group peers may question why they would be interested in taking part in a study or judge their participation negatively. An additional social risk is the potential that students in the group may know one other and may be able to identify the individuals involved in stories or scenarios addressed during the discussion which affords the is the possibility that the girls from the group may act on those that they believe have wronged others from the focus group, leading to possible confrontations, escalations, or an added experiences of negative consequences. Due to the group nature of focus groups, there is an added social risk of disclosure, preventing full and completely confidentiality, in that things shared in the space of the focus group may—intentionally or unintentionally—be repeated.

In an effort to minimize this risk, the Student P.I. will make every possible effort to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of participants is upheld. All closed meetings will be held in private rooms with closed door to limit the likelihood of someone overhearing discussions and conversations. Further, all efforts will be made to limit particular information about the specifics of the study to those who are not participating in the study. In order to address the risk of disclosure, the Student P.I. will reiterate the three points, as are stated in the focus group script. First, at the beginning of the focus group meeting you will also be advised that due to the group nature, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, as such you should only share things that you would not fear being repeated. Secondly, the Student P.I. will remind you that the things shared in this space should not be repeated or addressed outside of the discussion, and that by agreeing to participate in this study you are agreeing to the terms of confidentiality. Lastly, you will be asked to refrain from using names of peers, teachers, and/or administration throughout the discussion. Further, you will be instructed to also avoid using any other identifiers in the discussion to minimize the potential for discussions, actions, or confrontations outside of the focus group space.

Physical risks

There are no known physical risks for participating in this research study.

5. Benefits

Will I receive any benefit from my participation in this study?

The benefit of participation in this study is the opportunity to explore and discuss topics and experiences that often times go unspoken. As such, the study has the potential to be of therapeutic benefit. Further, considering African American girls hold unique experiences that can be directly tied to their racial and gendered identity, the discussions and the final presentation will serve the benefit of providing a better understanding of the factors that may contribute to their experiences and techniques for coping with the negative experiences and occurrences. You may also feel positive about being a part of a study meant to help educate others about the experiences of African American girls at school and to make school experiences better for all students in the future.

6. Study Costs and Compensation

Will I be charged anything for participating in this study?

You will not be responsible for any of the costs from taking part in this research study

Are subjects paid or given anything for being in the study?

You will receive a Visa gift card for your participation in the study. Visa gift cards can be used at any location that accepts the Visa credit card. If you choose only to participate in the group discussion component of the study, you will receive a \$10 Visa gift card. If you are selected and agree to participate both in the group discussion and in the topical diaries/follow-up interview portion of the study, you will receive the initial \$10 Visa gift card and additional \$10 Visa gift cards at the conclusion of each of the four follow-up interviews, for a total of five \$10 Visa gift cards (totaling \$50) over the course of five weeks for your participation.

The gift cards for the participation in the group discussion will be given at the conclusion of the group discussion. If you are selected and agree to participate in the solicited diaries/follow-up interviews, you will receive the initial \$10 Visa gift card at the end of your participation in the focus group and an additional \$10 Visa gift card at the conclusion of each follow-up interview.

7. Confidentiality

What happens to the information collected?

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, due to the group nature of the focus group phase of the study, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed; therefore, I ask that you do not share anything during the group discussion that you fear

being repeated. I will present the information to others, an/or publish the results in scientific journals or at scientific conferences. Information that identifies you personally will not be released. Any information you share will be coded and no real names will be used in any papers or publications I write or presentations I give using the information gathered in this study. Only the Student P.I. and her faculty advisor will have access to real names and identifying information. In writing up or presenting my findings from this study, I will not share identifying information about you.

In certain cases, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review your records.

The following measures will be taken to ensure that all information is secure:

- Information will be stored in either a locked cabinet or personal storage safe
- Computers and documents will be password protected
- Memory card storage (used for both audio and video recordings) will be encrypted

All the information collected for this study will remain securely stored, as described above, until the research study is complete and the Student P.I. completes her dissertation, publications, and presentations; at which time all of the data will be destroyed. Further, results of the study will be shared with the schools in the form of an overall summary of general findings for all schools involved in the study.

Although your privacy is very important, if you describe abuse by an adult in the diary or interview, or if you talk about hurting yourself or others, the researcher or other study team member is required to and will report this to the Bureau of Child Welfare, the Texas Department of Children and Families Services, or law enforcement agency.

8. Alternatives

Are there alternatives to participating in the study?

There are no known alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this study.

9. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

What happens if I decide not to be in this study?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision to participate or not will not impact your relationship with your school, teachers, or after school program. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In the event that you choose to withdraw or are withdrawn from the study early, the information collected to that point may be used.

10. Questions

Who do I contact for questions about this study?

For more information about the study or the study procedures or treatments, or to withdraw from the study, contact:

Professor Erin Winkler
Department of Africology
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
3203 N Downer Ave # 225
Milwaukee, WI 53211
Email: winklere@uwm.edu
Telephone: (414) 229-4155

Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject?

The Institutional Review Board may ask your name, but all complaints are kept in confidence.

Institutional Review Board
Human Research Protection Program
Department of University Safety and Assurances
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
P.O. Box 413
Milwaukee, WI 53201
(414) 229-3173

11. Audio or Video recording or Photographs

Research Subject's Consent to Audio/Video/Photo Recording:

It is okay to audiotape/videotape me while I am in this study and use my audiotaped/videotaped data in the research. (Note: As audio and video recording is a necessary part of the research study, if "no" is selected, the student will be unable to participate.)

Please initial: _____ Yes _____ No

12. Signatures

Minor Research Subject's Assent to Participate in Research:

I have read, or someone has read to me, this entire consent form including the risks and benefits. I have had all of my questions answered. I understand that I may stop

participating in the study at any time. I understand that by signing on the line below I am agreeing to take part in the study.

Printed Name of Minor Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Parental/Guardian Consent:

I have read or had read to me this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits. I have had all of my questions answered. I understand that I may withdraw my child from the study at any time. I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I am signing below to give consent for my child to participate in this study. (Please check one and sign).

Discussion Group **ONLY**

Discussion Group **AND** Individual Topical Diary/Follow-up Interviews

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Principal Investigator (or Designee)

I have given this research subject information on the study that is accurate and sufficient for the subject to fully understand the nature, risks and benefits of the study.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Study Role

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Parent/Guardian Name (printed):

Home/Cell Number:

Alternate Number:

Student Participant Name (printed):

Home/Cell Number:

Alternate Number:

13. Contact

Contact information for Parent/Guardian and the student participant will be obtained for the following purposes (including, but not limited to):

Parent/ Guardian:

- *For verification of consent to participate in the study.*

Student Participant:

- *To provide any pertinent study related information, i.e. meeting times, reminders, etc.*

The contact information provided will be kept confidential and will not be included in the final study report; nor will it be released to anyone other than the persons conducting the study.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Crystal Edwards

EDUCATION

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee	Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Pursuing-Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Africology	Anticipated Graduation May 2017
Graduate Certificate in Educational Policy	December 2016
University of Houston	Houston, Texas
B.S. in Political Science -minor in African American Studies	December 2009

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTEREST

- Racial and Gender Identity Development
- Psychological and Physiological Effects of Racialized and Gendered Microaggressions
- Decoloniality
- Culturally Relevant Curriculum Development
- African American History and Culture
- African American Academic Achievement
- Educational Policy
- Black Feminist Theory

SELECTED HONORS AND AWARDS

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Community and University Partnership (CUP) Grant, 2014
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Student Association Grant, 2012-2014
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Graduate Student Travel Grant, 2013-2014
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Chancellor Graduate Student Award (CGSA), 2011-2016.
Sylvester Turner Academic Excellence Award, 2009

PUBLICATIONS

(WIP accepted for publication) Edwards, C. L., & Scott, A. J. (2015). Why Decoloniality? In J. L. Conyers & M. D. Crawford (Eds.), *Advanced Methods and Theory in Africana Studies*. TX.

RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS & INVITED LECTURES

Panelist, 39th Annual NCBS National Conference (March 2015)

Los Angeles, California

“HER-story: Black Girls Uncovering Racialized and Gendered *Microaggressions* in Middle Schools”

Invited Scholar/Panelist, UW-Milwaukee Educational Talent Search Girls Workshop (March 2014)

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

“Successful Female Professionals in Milwaukee”

Panelist, 38th Annual NCBS National Conference (March 2014)

Miami, Florida

“Prescribed Identities and the Resulting Shame: Realities of African American Women”

Invited Scholar/Guest Lecturer, AAS Distinguished Alumni Speaker Series (February 2014)

Houston, Texas

“On Becoming an Africologist”

Invited Scholar/Guest Lecturer, Truth Search Forum (December 2013)

Distance Learning Forum (Online)

“Hip-Hop Reconsidered: Visibilizing the Invisible”

Panelist, R³: Race, Religion and Representation Symposium (March 2012)

Madison, Wisconsin

“Africological Approaches to Race and Religions: Spiritual Possessions”

INTERNATIONAL STUDY AND RESEARCH

Decolonizing Knowledge and Power: Decolonial Summer School

Barcelona, Spain

African American Studies Study Abroad

Ghana, West Africa

UNIVERSITY TEACHING

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Department of Africology

Graduate Student Instructor

- Fall 2013, Spring 2014, Spring 2015
 - Afri 112: African American History from 1865 to the Present
- Spring 2015
 - Afri 100: Black Reality

Teaching Assistant

- Fall 2012, Spring 2013
 - Afri 112: African American History from 1865 to the Present
- Fall 2011, Spring 2012
 - Afri 100: Black Reality
- Fall 2014
 - Afri 111: African and African American History to 1865

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, GEAR UP

Lecturer

- Fall 2014, Spring 2015
 - *On Becoming an Africologist*

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE AND ACTIVITIES

Co-organizer, Africology NOW Youth Initiative (ANYI)

2014

Co-organizer, My Sistas KeepHer: Girls Empowerment Summit,

2014

Humanities Consultant, “One False Step: The Muhammad Ali Project”

2013-2015

UNIVERSITY AND DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

Black History and Liberation Month Planning Committee (Member), Department of Africology

University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee

2013, 2014

Africology NOW, Student Organization, Officer

University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee

2011-2015

Upward Bound, Tutor

University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee

2012-2015

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

National Council for Black Studies (NCBS)