“HERE I COME WITH ALL MY BLACK GIRL MAGIC”:
BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS’ EXPERIENCES IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INDEPENDENT PRIVATE SCHOOLS

BY

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Abstract

Within independent private schools specifically, Black women and girls endure feelings of rejection, isolation, and inadequacy all whilst trying to maintain their academic or career success and a positive self-perception. Through the lenses of Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory, this dissertation presents Black women and girls' true experiences in PWIS which defy dominant deficit beliefs. Participants detailed the racism, erasure, and trauma they endured and the detrimental effects these experiences caused in their lives. They also expressed the importance and value of their relationships with one another. These relationships provided them with the affirmation and confidence they needed to believe in and stand up for themselves. Black women and girls engage in various resistance strategies through living authentically, challenging dominant norms, and advocating for themselves and others in the school community.

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To Black women and girls striving to live authentically in a world that constantly seeks to silence and ignore your truths

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Chapter 1

Introduction

But I do feel a certain level of exhaustion because I feel, culturally exhausted is what I like to call it, because I kind of have to go through the day worried about who I am. . . . It is kind of frustrating to have to think about what you say and how much you expose of yourself because you can only say so much in that kind of space.

After graduating from undergrad, I wanted to get as far away from that institution as possible. Ironically, however, I began working at an independent private school almost identical to my private predominantly white university and also enrolled in the higher education program at my alma mater. I wanted to work in education, and here was my opportunity. During my first few months I could not understand why I was there. Why would God place me in the same situation I was trying to flee? I quickly learned that I was there to be a voice, shoulder, and advocate for the Black students, more specifically the Black girls, attending the school. Within the first few months of the school year, the sponsors of the Black Student Union (BSU) had a meeting with the Black girls to understand the issues they were enduring. As the girls began to tell us about the discrimination and racism they faced on a daily basis, the room filled with tears. I saw myself in them. The challenges I faced in college, they were facing in high school.

As the Black girls began to open up to me over time, our relationships grew deeper. We sat in my office many days discussing natural hair struggles, police brutality, homecoming dresses, or the latest episode of Empire. Serving as a sponsor of the BSU while also working full time in admission, I witnessed how Black girls struggled to transition and thrive in the school. I will never forget a prospective mother pulling me aside after a tour of the school. She had twins, a girl and a boy, that had applied for eleventh grade. She expressed concern that her daughter would not transition well because she had heard Black girls do not do well at the school. She specifically stated she was not concerned about her son; he would do fine. I was stuck. I did not

know what to say to her with my boss standing a few feet away, but the Black girl in me wanted to tell her the brutal, honest truth, just like Jordan Peele exclaimed, "GET OUT!." I was as honest as I could be but also tried to reassure her that the Black girls have support and a strong community amongst each other.

Not only were my Black girls struggling, I was struggling. I was the youngest Black woman working at the school. My students were closer to my age than the other—very few—Black women. During my first year, there were nine Black women faculty/staff members, but that number soon dwindled to six. Most of my colleagues were white, over 40, and married with kids (and the vast majority were white women). I was often on the outside of conversations, because I could not identify with many of my coworkers' life experiences. By the time I left the school, there were three Black teachers between Middle and Upper School; all were male and two were also coaches. There was one Black teacher in the Lower School (which was located on a different campus) who was a woman, but she was an instructional assistant, not a lead teacher. I knew that working in this environment was beneficial to my students, but it was taxing.

Predominantly white spaces are often emotionally and psychologically traumatic for Black people. In order to be successful, Black people must codeswitch, assimilate, and "play the game," which may mean being subjected to treatment that oppresses and dehumanizes their lived experience. Our schools are supposed to be environments that nurture and assist children in living up to their full potential. American public schools, however, possess issues and circumstances that are the least bit healthy or helpful for their students and faculty/staff. Due to the never-ending issues within the public school system, many Black parents/guardians have sought out private schools in an attempt to level the playing field and provide their children with access to the social capital that the white and wealthy possess. Black faculty/staff have turned to

private schools in hopes of curriculum autonomy instead of primarily dealing with discipline and teaching to the test.

Private schools do not receive financial assistance from the government and rely on tuition payments and/or donations from nonpublic sources. Independent private schools fall under the umbrella of private schools. These institutions are governed by a board of trustees or governors, are independent in philosophy, and financially supported by tuition and donations (About NAIS, n.d.). There are several different types of independent private schools such as all girls, all boys, Catholic Diocesan, Non-Catholic religious, among many others. Independent private schools are extremely similar to colleges and universities, more specifically private institutions, just on a smaller scale. Like colleges and universities, independent schools have a board of trustees, communications, alumni relations, development, admissions, and finance offices. Many also have a dean of students and sometimes a director of diversity or diversity coordinator. Much like private universities, independent schools spend copious amounts of time recruiting students as well as fundraising. Of the National Association of Independent Schools' (NAIS) membership of 1,541 schools, there are over 675,115 students enrolled (About NAIS, n.d.). As of 2015, the median tuition for Day Schools was $22,301 and $50,811 for Boarding Schools (About NAIS, n.d.).

Black parents seek out these institutions for a myriad of reasons, including but not limited to: (a) they perceive them to possess top tier resources, (b) access to better opportunities, (c) individualized attention, (d) enhanced nurturing, and finally, (e) shelter from drugs, danger and negative peer pressure (Herr, 1999; Torry, 1992). Although these institutions may provide an exceptional academic education, personalized attention, and possess better resources, many independent schools were established in resistance to *Brown v. Board of Education* and were

deemed segregationist academies (Clotfelter, 1976, 2004). Black parents in Horvat and Antonio's (1999) study recognized the psychological trauma their daughters endured at their elite private school and viewed codeswitching "as a stressful reality, a painful price for mobility, but also a necessary social skill" (p. 334). According to an article published by U.S. News and World Report, during the 2011-12 school year, 28% of Black students attended private schools (Camera, 2017). Sadly, however, Black children in these schools endure an entirely different set of issues and struggles. These schools were built on white supremacy and exclusion of people of color, which continues today. Black children in these schools are forced to endure experiences that serve to marginalize them while simultaneously attempting to focus on their academic and personal development.

The Context: The Emergence of Private Schools

For decades, white Americans strategically created systems, policies, and laws that kept—and still attempt to keep—Black people at the bottom. Landmark 1896 case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, instituted the separate but equal doctrine which essentially meant that separate facilities for the two races were legal as long as they were equal (Bell, 2004). In reality, however, things were far from equal. Black children attended underfunded schools in unsafe buildings without the necessary supplies for academic success. Although Black schools did not have adequate resources, many still managed to thrive in their own way and successfully graduate many Black students (Bell, 2004). Several civil rights activists and parents believed that desegregation would afford Black children an equal education. They concluded that the presence of white children would bring about the vital funding and resources Black schools lacked.

In 1954, the Supreme Court ended the segregation of public schools in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* (Bell, 1995, 2004). Activists, lawyers, and parents celebrated and

rejoiced at the notion that their children would finally receive an equal education. Though it seemed like a victory on the surface, school districts, state, and some federal officials fought tooth and nail to ensure that white children did not have to attend school with Black children. Many whites fled the inner cities to the suburbs where Blacks were actively denied access due to racial zoning restrictions sanctioned by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA; Rothstein, 2017). General counsel for the HHFA, Berchmans Fitzpatrick, declared that the nullification of "separate but equal" did not apply to housing policies which directly kept schools segregated (Rothstein, 2017). The *Brown* decision and white flight led to the closing of many Black schools, which in turn left Black teachers and principals out of work and created overcrowded schools (Bell, 1987, 1995, 2004).

> Overcrowded neighborhoods meant overcrowded schools; in Chicago, officials responded by "double-shifting" the students (half attending in the morning, half in the afternoon). Children were deprived of a full day of schooling and left to fend for themselves in the after-school hours. (Rothestein, 2017, p. 97)

Derrick Bell explains that the interest convergence of the *Brown* decision is the direct reason why Black children never obtained an equal education. When the majority decides to make a change that on the surface seems to create a better experience for marginalized people, it is necessary to take a deeper look and see how the decision makers benefit from the change. White policymakers saw the political and economic advantages both domestically and globally if they renounced segregation (Bell, 1980). Desegregation benefitted white America in the following ways: (a) validation for America's struggle with Communist countries, (b) reassurance to Black Americans that the equality and freedom announced during World War II held meaning, and finally, (c) bolstered the South's potential for industrialization (Bell, 1980). In *Silent Covenants* (2004), Bell asserts,

> First, from the nation's beginnings, policymakers have been willing to sacrifice [B]lacks' basic entitlements of freedom and justice as a kind of political catalyst that enables whites to reach compromises that resolve differing and potentially damaging economic and political differences. Second, policymakers recognize and act to remedy racial injustices when, and only when, they perceive that such action will benefit the nation's interests without significantly diminishing whites' sense of entitlement. (p. 9)

Instead of truly mixing schools, Black students were bused from their neighborhood schools to all white schools where they were usually the minority. "[D]ay after day, . . . the . . . [B]lack students came off the bus to a setting where the goal was to render them invisible" (Rist, 1978, p. 244). Black students struggled in these majority white spaces, where they were often subjected to racial hostility from peers and teachers. Black schools were then closed, leaving Black teachers and principals out of work (Bell, 2004; Fairclough, 2004; Haney, 1978). Bell (2004) recalls principals accepting janitorial positions in majority white schools just to keep their pensions. White parents found ways to keep their children separate even if the school was integrated through mechanisms such as tracking, honors and advanced placement classes, magnet schools and special education. White flight also assisted in buffering white people in the suburbs from integrated schools (Bell, 2004; Clotfelter, 1976, 2004; Rothstein, 2017). In the suburbs, whites began to create their own private schools which were not necessarily beholden to federal regulations such as the *Brown* decision (Bell, 2004; Clotfelter, 1976, 2004).

The History of Independent Private Schools

It has been 65 years since the *Brown* decision, which not only forced the desegregation of public schools but also catalyzed whites in the South to turn to private institutions so that their children would not have to engage with Black children (Clotfelter, 2004). Segregationists believed they were protecting their own rights and not denying the rights of others (Purdy, 2016). Between 1960 and 2000, the share of students attending private schools increased by four percentage points in the South versus decreasing by more than three percentage points in the

North (Clotfelter, 2004). As public schools were integrating and depleting resources from Black schools, as well as creating an unemployment crisis for Black teachers and principals, many whites were not affected because they fled to these “safe havens.” Soon, the federal government caught wind of private schools and threatened to strip them of their tax-exempt status (Purdy, 2016, 2018). The threat to public image, their tax-exempt status, as well as the push from NAIS ultimately forced independent schools in the south to desegregate. However, the community was obviously not ready to welcome Black students in with open arms.

In Atlanta, the Westminster Schools, plural in name alone, desegregated in 1967 by admitting seven Black students in fourth, fifth, and eighth grades (Purdy, 2015, 2018). Although this decision seemed like progress at the time, the students suffered a great deal throughout their time at the institution. The School was unprepared to address the racism and discrimination that Black students encountered on a daily basis, which meant these students suffered psychological and physical trauma from racist classmates. A participant in Purdy’s study (2015) describes this, “[t]hen they proceeded to humiliate, hit, push, shove, punch, and ‘haze’ me into hysterics such that I ran to the bathroom to hide and cry” (p. 610). Black students recalled the physical and verbal abuse they endured during their time at Westminster. “The white kids would put these shells in my brother’s hair, finding it funny that it would get caught up in the naps of his afro and he couldn’t get it out of his hair easily” (Purdy, 2015, p. 611). These students stuck together and persevered through these conditions because that was one of the only ways they believed they could fight the acts of oppression (Purdy, 2015). As they became more socially conscious, some students began to fight back, using various outlets such as the school newspaper. They used comic strips as well as columns to push back on the injustices they were experiencing and to question the system of power and racism within their institution (Purdy, 2015, 2018). Through

their shared racial experiences, they encouraged each other in the face of oppression. They sought refuge in one another as well as the one or two Black staff members that worked at the school (Purdy, 2015, 2018). Although these students resisted the conditions to which they were subjected, it is evident today that there has not been a significant amount of systemic change at these schools due to the issues Black students continue to encounter, such as the lack of faculty of color, racist remarks (from peers, parents, and teachers), silencing, and being singled out as the representative for their race to name a few. Black students continue to experience discrimination at independent schools, which directly and indirectly uphold white power dynamics (Brookins, 1988; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Purdy, 2016; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1991).

Although some progress has been made, there is still a long way to go in regard to equity, justice, and racism experienced by Black students at these institutions. From my experience, the transition into a predominantly white environment for Black girls is often more difficult than that of Black boys (Ispa-Landa, 2013). In her study, *Gender, Race, and Justifications for Group Exclusion* (2013), Ispa-Landa found that Black girls are viewed as “loud” and “ghetto” whereas Black boys are seen as cool and athletic. She found that boys believe Black girls are “aggressive” and therefore harder to date than white girls. Navigating the intersections of race and gender is a delicate task for Black girls. They are forced to assimilate into a world where they are often one of few and/or the token. I believe it is gravely important for Black girls to have a strong network within their peer group as well as Black women role models that they can turn to for guidance and safety. In Purdy’s (2015) study “Wanda Ward credited having another [B]lack girl, Janice Kemp, in the eighth grade with helping her to settle into Westminster” (p. 622). Similarly,

Datnow and Cooper (1997) found that Black students cited their formal and informal Black peer networks as an important factor in their success within a predominantly white environment.

Predominantly white independent schools (PWIS) are places of constant struggle for Black students—especially Black girls. Preliminary findings from a pilot study found that, not only are Black girls dealing with the stress of a new environment and academic expectations, they are also trying to overcome stereotypes and racism from peers, parents, teachers, and administrators. These emotional and psychological stressors directly affect their ability to focus on school work as well as their identity development. Black girls suffered through racism and microaggressions while attempting to find their voice, fight back as well as excel academically. The girls cited their relationships with one another as integral to their resistance and survival. One could argue that these Black girls made it; that they were successful despite the adversity they faced. On one hand, this very well may be true; however, what would their life experience and outlook entail if they had a positive experience? What if they enjoyed getting up to go to school every day? What if they didn't have to deal with the harmful encounters of their high school experience? How would they have developed as students and young women? There has been a small amount of research on the power structures at play in these schools and how they impact Black girls' experiences specifically.

The pilot study critically analyzed the structures of race and power that are enacted in this particular school environment, offering a counter narrative that debunks mainstream assumptions about Black girls' experiences in these schools. The analysis and implications of this research gives independent school leaders across the country a deeper look into this specific group of faculty/staff and students' experiences, as well as provides suggestions on how to create a more equitable and just environment for everyone. But more importantly, this work seeks to affirm

Black women and girls' stories as real and valid. This dissertation research attempts to take a deeper dive into Black women and girls' narratives and experiences through participant perspectives in order to truly understand their lived experiences through first-hand accounts. Some might ask why these schools should care about creating an equitable environment for students—specifically students of color? For one, these schools have a moral and ethical obligation to graduate children that are culturally competent and prepared to interact with diverse groups of people. Secondly, many of these schools actively recruit students of color but are ill prepared to ensure that they have a positive and equitable experience. According to French (2018), independent schools first began recruiting Black students in the 1960s and 70s but more recently have seemed to be focused on the overall enrollment of students of color which has increased by 10.9% since the 2001-02 school year. More specifically, Asian and Multiracial student populations are higher than the national average, while the Black student population is lower (French, 2018). It is telling that of the available data on the NAIS website, Black student enrollment has only increased by one percent over the past 10 years. "Somewhere along the line, though, that focus on Black Americans changed. While some racial groups are now more represented in independent schools than they once were, Black Americans remain severely underrepresented" (French, 2018). French argues that Black Americans have a distinct experience to which some students of color may not identify. This "easy diversity" absolves PWIS from seriously tackling issues of discrimination within their walls.

In her book, French also engages the complex discussion of faculty and administrators of color working in independent private schools. Most schools are lacking in this area and the disparity is even more pronounced when speaking specifically about Black faculty and staff (French, 2018). During the 2015-16 school year, only 15.4% of faculty were of color and only

14% of administrators (French, 2018). Interestingly, NAIS does not disaggregate the faculty/staff of color data therefore we do not know how many of these individuals were Black. The adult participants in this dissertation study expressed why they chose to work in independent schools but also the struggles of always having to prove themselves and the constant questioning of their credentials from colleagues and especially parents. The field of education is definitely a woman dominated industry; however, findings show that the intersectionality of Black women's identity bring about specific challenges that others do not face.

In this introductory chapter, I present the research topic through the statement of the problem, which briefly touches on Black women and girls' experiences in schools according to the available literature. I then move on to specify the purpose of this dissertation and why the topic is important for not only independent private schools but especially for the well-being of Black women and girls. The next section focuses on theoretical considerations and research design. The final section in this chapter provides readers with an outline of the dissertation.

Statement of the Problem

Within the work and school environment, Black women and girls experience gendered racial discrimination which impedes their personal, professional, and academic development. "What suffers is not only their ability to shape their identities as young scholars but also their ability to develop agency in shaping professional and personal futures where they can live with dignity, respect, and opportunity" (Morris, 2016, p. 13). Much of the literature on Black girls' school experiences employs a deficit lens which prevents schools from taking responsibility for the environments and experiences that children have and hinders Black girls from being seen, understood, and cared for holistically. Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) assert, "traditional research in education on Black girls typically concerns itself with early pregnancy and sexuality,

school dropout, drug use and abuse, and aggression" (p. 14). Further, there is a limited amount of literature that specifically explores Black girls' experiences as stand alone, meaning not in comparison to Black boys or white girls (see Grant, 1984).

Within independent private schools specifically, Black women and girls endure feelings of rejection, isolation, and inadequacy, all whilst trying to maintain their academic success and positive self-perception. Dixson (2003) asserts that Black teachers "advocate for African American students in schools that are quite often racist and hostile to not only the students but also their families and communities" (p. 218). While these Black women are fighting for their students, they are also fighting for themselves. They are overworked, constantly have to prove themselves, and oftentimes lack a community that affirms their experiences. Black women and girls engage in a number of strategies (i.e., "turning it out," talking with attitude/using their voice, and building strong relationships with each other) in order to not only survive but resist this system.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide a space, in the literature and hopefully physically within these schools, for Black women and girls to share their stories and experiences in their own words, directly debunking the master narrative, which depicts them as angry, sassy, and promiscuous (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2011; Grant, 1994, 1992; Morris, 2007; Morris, 2016). This research study seeks to illustrate the ways in which Black feminist notions are engaged through socialization, relationships, and acts of resistance. It is imperative to listen to and understand their experiences in order to better serve not only Black women and girls in PWIS, but in all schools. Examining Black women and girls' experiences within educational institutions will allow school leaders to first dismantle the current destructive system and then

develop policies and programs that better serve not only Black women and girls but all marginalized groups. Black women and girls' stories present essential information needed to understand their experiences as distinct, as well as thoughts and ideas on how to improve them. Adding to the literature on education (independent schools specifically), Black feminism, Critical Race Theory and Black girlhood, this dissertation problematizes the struggles Black women and girls face in PWIS while also celebrating the affirming communities they build for themselves, as well as how they find the courage to resist white heteronormative ways of knowing. This dissertation also contributes to the fields of psychology, as it details the journey of Black girls as they seek to find themselves and create positive self-perceptions. Practically, this work gives recommendations, directly from participants, on what both Black women and girls need in order to succeed academically and socially in this school environment. Participants share their thoughts on what these schools and their communities can do to improve the experiences of marginalized individuals on their campuses. In the next section, the overarching theoretical frameworks and methodology are briefly discussed along with the research questions in order to inform readers of how this work was conceptualized.

Theoretical Considerations

This research study is grounded in two theories that serve to center Black women and girls, as well as critically address the systemic oppression that directly impacts their experiences in this school environment. Employing Black Feminist Thought (BFT) allows me to "adopt a strength based perspective to highlight the power Black girls and women exude while challenging historical deficit approaches" (Lewis & Neville, 2015, p. 4). Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides tools by which to examine policies and procedures enacted in PWIS that continuously marginalize and oppress Black women and girls. Intersectionality, an important

concept within both theories, stresses the importance of viewing Black women and girls at the intersections of their identities as well as how white hegemonic power dynamics manifest at those same intersections.

Black Feminist Thought. A theory conceived by Black women for Black women, BFT supplies the guiding lens for this dissertation in order to bring Black women and girls and their stories to the forefront. Black feminism recognizes and values Black women in their totality as well as their lived experiences. Watson (2016) asserts that Black women's lived experiences are factual and are not subject to the "white gaze," which therefore means they are not subject to interrogation. There is ongoing debate and public discourse on whether or not BFT should be used to examine Black girls' experiences as it may be believed to contribute to their adultification. Because all of the participants in this study are over the age of 18, I have decided that BFT is the best overarching paradigm for this work. However, because this work consists of first-hand reflections on their girlhood experiences, as well as second hand observations from Black women faculty and staff, I believe that this study directly contributes to Black girlhood scholarship.

Critical Race Theory. The tenets of CRT provide different angles from which to examine the data, in order to draw conclusions regarding the impact of policies and procedures employed at PWIS. Counterstorytelling specifically provides participants with the opportunity to bring their truths to the surface. "Furthermore, in using the ethic of care, I encouraged them to tell their stories because I wanted them to walk away feeling the value placed upon their lived experiences" (Koonce, 2012, p. 35). Black women and girls' stories are often ignored and devalued; therefore, providing them with the opportunity to generate, interpret, and validate knowledge is imperative (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Phillips & McCaskill, 2006).

Methodology.

Critical Race Methodology (CRM). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) introduced the concept of CRM as an avenue to give voice and challenge white supremacy as well as dominant research paradigms. CRM centers students of color throughout the research process, from collecting to analyzing to presenting the data (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Specifically, counterstorytelling is a "method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Counternarratives champion racial reform by confronting the dominant conversation about students of color in regard to racism and sexism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I conducted interviews to gather data on Black women and girls' experiences. Interviews were conducted with Black alumnae and Black women faculty/staff in order to create a counternarrative that accurately depicts their experiences.

Research questions. Approaching this work from BFT and CRT, this research study examines the following questions:

1. What are Black women and girls' experiences in PWIS?
2. How do Black women and girls navigate, resist, and flourish in this environment?
3. How do school beliefs, policies and procedures impact Black women and girls' experiences?

It is important to gather first-hand accounts in order to truly understand how Black women and girls experience and resist PWIS. I critique how the people and systems in these schools impact their experiences. Black women faculty/staff also provide vital insight into the schools' influence on Black girls' development as well as their personal relationships.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation seeks to illuminate the experiences of Black women and girls in PWIS. Literature from various disciplines such as education, Black girlhood, Black feminism,

psychology, and child development was analyzed to theorize and draw conclusions about Black women and girls' experiences. There is a dearth in research that positions Black girls at the center in predominantly white schools. Chapter 2, the literature review, is comprised of three main parts: socialization, relationships, and listening. The first section thoroughly summarizes literature on intersectionality, stereotypes, outsider within, and socialization. Next, is the framing of mothering, othermothering, and friendships and how they inform Black women and girls' development as well as school and work experiences. This section describes Black women/girls' relationships as a means of collective survival. The third section dives into listening to Black women and girls but also actions they employ in the school environment. Finally, the conclusion explicates the importance of listening to, understanding, and appreciating Black women/girls' ways of knowing, resisting, and living.

The theoretical framework and methods, Chapter 3, details the overarching and guiding theories for this dissertation research. The first section in the chapter gives background and context of Black Feminism and CRT, as well as why these two frameworks were chosen and work best for this research. I then move on to explain the research design beginning with the methodology and research questions. Next, I dive into how and why the participants were chosen as well as the various ways data was collected. The data analysis section, which includes a data analysis matrix, explains how findings are presented and analyzed based on the frameworks chosen. In the final two sections, I briefly address reliability and validity as well as how I come to the research via positionality.

The findings from this study are split across Chapters 4 and 5, which mirror the literature review: socialization, relationships, and resistance. Chapter 4 details the experiences of Black women/girls with discrimination, colleagues and peers, and mental health. Chapter 5 is dedicated

to the intricate relationships amongst and between Black women and girls. This chapter also highlights the ways in which participants advocate for change, stand up for themselves, and what they need to succeed in PWIS. Chapter 6, the conclusion, confronts the significance, implications, limitations, and areas for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review illuminates the experiences of Black girls in predominantly white educational environments. There is a dearth in research on independent private schools, studies that truly positions Black girls at the center in education, and literature that explicates the significance of Black women and girls' friendships. There is little research specifically on Black women and girls' experiences in predominantly white independent private schools (Alexander-Snow, 1999; Cary, 1991; Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Jacobs, 2017; White, 2013). Literature from various disciplines such as Black girlhood, Black feminism, psychology, and education (both public and private school experiences) was also analyzed to theorize and draw conclusions about Black women and girls' experiences in predominantly white schools.

This chapter is comprised of three main parts: identity, relationships and listening. The first section thoroughly summarizes literature on intersectionality, stereotypes, outsider within, and socialization. Society forces stereotypes about Black women onto Black girls through the process of adultification. Therefore, Black women will also be discussed when speaking to intersectionality and stereotypes about Black girls. Next, is the framing of the distinct relationships (othermothering and friendships) amongst Black women and girls. The third section dives into listening to Black women and girls as well as actions they employ in the school and work environment. Finally, the conclusion explicates the importance of listening to, understanding, and appreciating Black women and girls' ways of knowing, resisting and living.

Black Women and Girls' Identity

Positive identity development is crucial for young children and adolescents. They are trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in society at large but also within their

schools, friend groups, churches and families. The media is constantly telling Black girls how they should feel about themselves, what they should look like, and what they should value. It can be difficult to distinguish the good from the bad when most movies, television shows, and music depict stereotypical images and show skinny, blonde white girls as the golden standard of beauty. These stereotypes about Black girls are carried into our schools by administrators, teachers, and peers. Recent research on Black girls in education has focused primarily on the negative effects of punishment. Nationally, of the students facing discipline that excludes or criminalizes, Black girls are overrepresented (Crenshaw, 2015; Crenshaw, Ocen & Nanda, 2015; Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017; Morris, 2016a, 2016b). Epstein et al. (2017) explicate the link between the pervasive stereotypes about Black women and how educators associate these with Black girls which directly ties to the theory of adultification of Black children.

> Such comments demonstrate that stereotypes of Black girls, interpreted as "loud," are imbued with adult-like aspirations, and perceived, in turn, as a threat. The same study recorded teachers' describing Black girls as exhibiting "very 'mature' behavior . . . socially (but not academically) sophisticated and 'controlling at a young age.'" This interpretation of Black girls' outspokenness may be associated with the stereotype of Black women as aggressive and dominating. (p. 5)

The intersectionality of Black girls' identity creates a unique life experience that is more often than not burdened with gendered racial microaggressions. Resisting stereotypes while also occupying outsider within status impacts their identity development. In order to combat the negative messages their daughters are inundated with, parents must employ positive racial socialization strategies to equip their children with the tools and skills necessary to protect themselves and develop a positive self-image.

Intersectionality. Within Black feminist scholarship, the concept of intersectionality emerged as a way to describe and name the unique experiences of Black women. The term intersectionality originated almost 30 years ago by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Professor of Law at the

University of California Los Angeles and Columbia Law School. Although she coined the term to describe the complexity of Black women's experiences due to their race and sex, the women of the Combahee River Collective were discussing this concept in the 1970s. "'You know we stand at the intersection where our identities are indivisible.' There is no separation. We are as Black women truly and completely intact in our paradox, and there's nothing paradoxical about oppression" (Taylor, 2017, p. 123). Intersectionality focuses on the power dynamics at play at the intersection of identities. As Black women and girls, we have always been forced to choose our Blackness over our womaness. Brittney Cooper asserts "[w]hen she found the bathroom, one door was marked 'for ladies' and the other 'for colored people.' This created a moment of cognitive and experiential dissonance for [Anna Julia] Cooper, who was left 'wondering under which head I come'" (Cooper, 2010, p. 47). America has tried to strip Black women and girls of their womaness and demand us to choose racial identity over gender identity. For a long time, I fell victim to this mentality, believing that my Blackness was more important or salient than my womaness. Black women fought for racial equality but continued to suffer through sexism from their own male counterparts. They attempted to fight for gender equality but experienced racism from white women (Ricks, 2014). Accurately addressing Black women and girls' oppression requires intersectionality to be taken into account (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). Of course, like many other ideas and inventions created by Black people, intersectionality has been taken up and watered-down by individuals who do not fully understand the depth of the concept. Individuals have lessened intersectionality to mere identity politics without acknowledging, let alone examining, the power dynamics at play at the intersections of these identities. It is vital to understand how the intersectionality of Black girls' identity impacts their experiences in predominantly white school environments.

Their racial and gender identities subject Black girls to unique challenges due to preconceived notions and historical stereotypes that continue to pigeonhole them on a daily basis. Black girls are psychologically affected by the gendered racial microaggressions they experience (Lewis & Neville, 2015). Lewis and Neville (2015) describe "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. 292). It is important to understand that identities are socially constructed and maintained through systems of power and heteronormativity. Ignoring the intersectionality of Black girls' experiences negatively impacts their identity development and hinders critical analysis necessary to fully understand their lived experiences. Crenshaw (2000) explains,

> Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. (p. 24)

Black girls navigate classrooms, dining halls, and playgrounds from a unique vantage point which creates vastly different experiences for them. Participants in Frazier, Belliston, Brower, and Knudsen's (2011) study reported that they loved being a girl and they loved being Black; however, they also asserted that they were treated unfairly because they were Black and also because they were girls. Black girls have been stereotyped as loud, aggressive, and promiscuous, which directly affects the way they are perceived in school environments. They are forced to assimilate into a world where they are often one of few and/or the token (Hall & Stevenson, 2007). Exposure to harmful stereotypes about Black femininity negatively define Black girls' experiences in schools because educators and peers view and interpret Black girls and their actions through these demeaning lenses (Morris, 2016a, 2016b).

Stereotypes. Society has attempted to force Black women and girls into stereotypical, degrading, and dehumanizing boxes that seek to limit their growth, success, and accomplishments. American society and the media goes out of their way to ensure that skinny, white women with straight hair are the standard of beauty. Black girls grow up battling these white standards whilst attempting to see themselves as valuable and beautiful. Many Black girls struggle to develop positive self-esteem and to love themselves because their hair is "too kinky" or their body is "too curvy." Stereotypes such as Mammy, Jezebel/Sapphire, loud, angry, strong and aggressive plague Black girls' path as they attempt to overcome and succeed despite the forces working against them (Taaffee, 2016). Black girls battle countless stereotypes that serve to diminish their power and undermine their intelligence, which may delay their progress in reaching their full potential. Some educators have allowed these stereotypes to directly influence how they interact with, talk to, teach, support, and view Black girls in schools. They interpret Black girls' confidence as disobedience; they misconstrue their inquisitiveness as annoyance, and they read their independence as a challenge to authority (Epstein et. al., 2017; Morris, 2007). One of the most common descriptors for Black women and girls is *strong*. Although some may embody this characteristic, it is not the sum of our identity. Instead, it hinders us from being seen as human. It also does not allow space for vulnerability or seeking out help when needed. "*Strong* is the default category for describing [B]lack women, but the myth leaves them sicker, less satisfied and more burdened than any other group" (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 207). The strong Black woman characteristic is synonymous with the "superwoman" label. It is assumed that Black women have no feelings and do not need the emotional or material necessities that others do (Smith, 1983).

> These suprahuman women have been denied the luxuries of failure, nervous breakdowns, leisured existences, or anything else that would suggest that they are complex,

> multidimensional characters. They must swallow their pain, gird their loins against trouble . . . and persist in spite of adversity. (Harris, 2001, p. 12)

However, Nunn (2018) is redefining what it means to be Super-Girl. In Nunn's definition of the term, she allows Black girls to be strong but simultaneously they're allowed to acknowledge the pain and sadness in their lives.

> Super-Girl presents a new phenomenon about balancing both strength and sadness due to regular social battles. Super-Girl's strength describes a self-defined feminine power that fosters resilience and on-going decision-making in the face of gendered racism. (Nunn, 2018, p. 241)

Nunn's Super-Girl concept takes up a term that is meant to relegate girls to a box that depicts them as supernatural and unworthy of empathy. Stereotypes thrust Black girls to the margins of predominantly white communities where they rarely feel like insiders.

Outsider within. Although Black girls are technically members of their respective school communities, they are oftentimes never fully accepted into certain social groups or aspects of the community. Their social location as outsiders within creates tension in their experiences with peers, staff, and faculty. The term outsider within, coined by Patricia Hill Collins (1986), describes Black students' membership in institutions but their incomplete acceptance in the minds of community members (Datnow & Cooper, 1997). Collins (1986) believed that there was some benefit to being an outsider within because these individuals could "reveal aspects of reality obscured by more orthodox approaches" (p. S15). Students use these skills to navigate spaces which were not built for them in order to garner social mobility (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). The concept of outsider within status is similar to W. E. B. DuBois' idea of double consciousness. hooks (1984) asserted "living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out . . . we understood both" (as cited in Collins, 1986, p. S15).

Horvat and Antonio (1999) conducted research on Black girls' experiences at a predominantly white, elite, independent high school. From their data they gathered, "while the [B]lack middle-class students were formally members of the school community (they wore the uniforms, participated in activities, and attended classes), their status remained peripheral to the historical owners of the school—the white and wealthy" (Horvat & Antonio, 1999, p. 333). Feeling like an outsider in an environment that doesn't truly value your life experience is emotionally exhausting. Participants expressed trauma and hurt behind the othering they experienced and attempted to combat these feelings through assimilating, which included altering their speech patterns (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). Although Horvat and Antonio's (1999) study provided insight into their experiences, it failed to directly address intersectionality because the school was all girls, which I found to be a major limitation. The authors failed to acknowledge the fact that their participants' experiences were not just different because they were Black but because they were Black girls. Participants in Datnow and Cooper's (1997) research on independent private schools cite affinity groups as pertinent to negotiating outsider within status. Their formal and informal peer networks provided necessary emotional support when attempting to navigate such intricate educational dynamics (Datnow & Cooper, 1997).

Socialization. Due to the social construction of identities, children are taught who they are, how they should act, how they should feel about certain things or people, and how they should view themselves. Socialization messages are picked up from various places such as school, extracurricular activities, adults in the child's life, friends, television, movies, video games, books, and music. In American society, Black children are constantly exposed to negative images of Black people which can leave them feeling confused and inadequate. "Families and educators prepare [B]lack children to meet racial hostility through a process of

socialization meant to negate harmful images of [B]lackness and replace them with role models of courage, resilience, and achievement" (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 102). It is extremely important for families and schools to foster positive identity development; however, this is not always the case in predominantly white educational environments.

School as a site of racial socialization. School personnel play a vital role in the development of students not only academically but also emotionally and psychologically. These interactions can have lasting impacts on a student's outlook and self-perception. Children spend up to eight hours or more per day in school environments; therefore, much of their identity is shaped at school. This is important to realize and understand because interactions with students have long lasting effects on their identity development and how they perceive themselves. In their 2013 study, *Contextual Influences on Gendered Racial Identity Development of African American Young Women*, Jones Thomas, Hoxha, and Hacker sought to identify the most salient factors of influence for Black girls. They assert, "the participants in the study often felt assaulted by teachers and school personnel. Facing nonsupportive teachers and unsafe classroom environments may make it a challenge for girls to develop a positive self-concept" (Jones Thomas et al., 2013, p. 97). Although students enter institutions with pre-existing notions regarding racial and gender identity, schools also serve as sites of social construction.

> The school environment reflects the fact that the society values [boys] over [girls] and whites over [people of color]. Thus, students who are members of [marginalized] groups must adjust to teachers and peers as well as to schoolwork; in other words, they must live a bicultural existence. (Scott-Jones & Clark, 1986, p. 534)

Stereotypes affect the way teachers, administrators and peers engage with Black girls.

Black girls navigate classrooms, dining halls, and playgrounds from a unique position. They experience these spaces differently because they are both Black and a girl. Black girls have been stereotyped as loud, aggressive and promiscuous, which directly affects the way they are

perceived in school environments. They are forced to assimilate into a world where they are often one of few and/or the token (Hall & Stevenson, 2007).

> For Black girls, this stress can be related to independent and interdependent combinations of racism, sexism, and/or classism in addition to the normal stressors that students contend with, such as peer pressures and social acceptance, gender identity, racial identity, and overall perception of self (self-esteem and self-concept development). (Evans-Winters, 2014, p. 23)

Black girls recognize that there are a different set of rules to which they must abide. They are reprimanded for wearing certain clothing that white or Asian girls wear and get away with (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2011; Evans-Winters, 2005; Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Morris, 2007). Colleagues constantly insisted that I admonish the Black girls at my school about the length of their skirts, when I observed countless white girls with the same or shorter skirt lengths who never got in trouble. I eventually ceased speaking to my girls about their skirts because I refused to participate in a system that was blatantly unfair. No child should have to suffer through the blatantly disrespectful and demeaning antics that Black girls endure, and especially not in their schools.

Teacher engagement with Black girls. Morris (2007) found that teachers attempted to alter Black girls' speech and dress in order to foster more "stereotypical qualities of femininity" (p. 16). One teacher informed a student that she was being unladylike because she was screaming. The woman told the girl to "speak in a normal tone" (Morris, 2007, p. 15). This school went further to create two student clubs with the aims of instilling "proper manners" in its members, which consisted mostly of Black girls. One of the clubs held a week where members could not speak in classrooms unless spoken to first. These types of actions tell Black girls that their ways of knowing and their culture are abnormal and unacceptable. These students may

begin to suppress their voices and opinions when, in actuality, they should be encouraged to speak their truth and share their thoughts in and out of the classroom.

Pointing to the dearth of education literature that centers Black girls, Linda Grants' research does, however, provide some telling insight into teacher and peer perceptions of Black girls in the classroom. Grant's 1984 study, *Black Females "Place" in Desegregated Classrooms*, found that educators often emphasized Black girls' social skills instead of their academic skills. "Teachers did not see [B]lack girls as cognitively mature rather as socially mature" (Grant, 1984, p. 102). According to teachers, their social maturity was detrimental to their academic potential. This belief dismisses the valuable life experiences that Black girls bring to the classroom, which might serve to be beneficial for other students to learn from. Although teachers frowned upon Black girls' sociability, they ironically encouraged the behavior (Grant, 1992). One might presume that teachers do not hold high academic expectations for Black girls, which is why they do not spend time encouraging them in that area. Similar to her earlier work, Grant (1992) focused on Black and white girls' elementary school experiences. "Todd characterized Meredith as a 'busybody,' noting that Meredith's academic performance would improve if she concentrated on her work rather than monitoring others" (Grant, 1992, p. 100). Although a young Black girl was reprimanded for interrupting the teacher to seek help for another student, the teacher also smiled and told her she was sweet, and peers responded with, "Way to go, Millie" (Grant, 1992).

When probed about student academic performance, teachers most often described Black girls' social or personal qualities and rarely mentioned anything in regard to their academic abilities (Grant, 1992). Teachers made comments such as; "she always picks things up, helps out other students" or "she is a pleasure to have in the classroom." Whether positive or negative,

these descriptions occurred most often when discussing Black girls than any other group of students. At the same time, noteworthy praise seemed to be reserved exclusively for white girls who were also given high-responsibility tasks (Grant, 1984). This behavior did not go unnoticed by other students in the classroom who then viewed these chosen students as smart, competent and good. Black girls face stereotypical expectations on all fronts: from teachers, administrators, and peers (Grant, 1984).

Similar yet different from Grants' work, which is now over 30 years old, Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2011) researched high-achieving Black girls' secondary school experiences. Teachers' perceptions and expectations of and for Black girls are extremely low and negative mirroring society's perceptions (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2011). "They asserted that these perceptions seemingly were conceived prior to their entering the class and were deeply entrenched in the interactions that they had with several teachers" (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2011, p. 210). A participant recalled a teacher telling them that they would get pregnant before the semester was over (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2011). Incidents such as these create hostile learning environments with the balance of power set to make Black girls feel unintelligent and incapable of success.

> If you are constantly told that you are a problem, you eventually feel that you are a problem; and the more you feel like a problem, the more you notice negative feedback. It is harder to concentrate because you are working to manage the psychological effects of feeling ashamed. In this way, social rejection shapes experiences of the self and the world. (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 110)

In Grant's (1984) study, participants often rated Black girls as average or below average in regard to their academic skills and performance compared to their classmates. In regard to academic work, teachers gave Black girls less feedback compared to other students (Grant, 1992). Black girls are in a crucial stage of development where they are in need of adults and

environments that support and encourage positive growth, but they are "often trapped in environments that do not fully support their personal and academic development" (Nunn, 2018, p. 244). Social interactions with peers also play a vital role in the identity development of Black girls.

Peer interactions with Black girls. Black students attempt to foster a higher number of cross-racial friendships more often than their white counterparts and are often left unreciprocated (DeVries & Edwards, 1974; Patchen, 1982; Hallinan, 1982). However, these relationships are usually weak and one sided. One might presume that Black students seek friendships across racial lines as a means to fit in or feel accepted by their peers. The fact that these relationships are not reciprocated illustrates how Black girls are perceived and characterized by their white peers. As noted earlier, Black girls provided more caregiving and also gave academic assistance to peers (Grant, 1984). Black girls were asked by peers more often than other students to provide aid and care (Grant, 1984). Their peers also supported their role as the "go-between" by looking to Black girls to relay messages to the teacher. On one hand, these relationships with their peers may seem positive, but on the other hand, they enhance Black girls' social skills, which are frowned upon by teachers, while also allegedly hindering their academic success. "Children undoubtedly enter schools with prior socialization experiences varying by race-gender status" (Grant, 1984, p. 99). With the advances in technology over the years, the consumption of negative stereotypes by school-aged children is more than expected. A student in Morris' (2007) study recalled, "they immediately assume that you know how to shake your butt and like you know like you can do all the dances you see in the video" (p. 94). Societal norms regarding race and gender most definitely filter into the classroom environment.

Offensive remarks often go unaddressed by teachers in classrooms, which leave Black girls unprotected and vulnerable to continuous gendered racial microaggressions from peers (Jones Thomas et. al., 2013). Black girls not only experience negative remarks from white peers but also from Black boy peers as well. For one student in Grant's (1992) study, she experienced remarks such as "white face" from Black boys regarding her relationship with two white girls. Black girls in this study also experienced racist and sexist remarks, mostly from white boys. "You're a dark [B]lack pig," one white boy exclaimed after a Black girl answered a challenging question correctly. These comments emerged more often after Black girls were recognized for achievement and served as self-enhancement intended to emphasize the lower status of Black girls. In order to make themselves feel better about their incompetence, white boys felt the need to assert their whiteness and maleness. Unlike their white girl counterparts, Black girls were more likely to stand up for themselves verbally or physically when attacked by another student (Grant, 1984). Though dated, the findings from Grants' work are, unfortunately, still relevant today.

There are individuals who believe that assimilation is the best way to improve the experiences and success of Black girls in education (Fordham, 1993, 1996). However, several scholars note that positive identity and self-image is vital to Black students' academic success (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Henry, 1998; Nunn, 2018; O'Connor, 1997). Black girls learn various coping strategies through connections with their cultural communities, which equips them to achieve educational goals (Evans-Winters, 2014). "[T]hose students who were most resilient were those young women whose families not only taught them about race, class and gender oppression, but also participated in family conversations that explained to them how to combat racist, classist and sexist forces" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 13). Therefore,

parent socialization is critical to Black girls' identity development, which can be difficult when schools view Black parental school involvement negatively (Elliot & Reid, 2016).

Black Women and Girls' Relationships

Black women's relationships and connections to one another have been integral throughout history. Various music, books, and television shows highlight the intricate dimensions of these relationships. Black women in community with one another is a relationship unlike any other. Sharing a life experience often plagued with trauma, they are able to relate to one another's struggles and inspire each other to continue being the inherently amazing women that they have always been. Assata Shakur recalls her hometown and the women that surrounded her during her childhood,

> and I remember the women of my grandmother's generation: strong, fierce women who could stop you with a look out of the corners of their eyes. Women who walked with majesty. . . . They called each other sister because of feeling rather than as a result of the movement. They supported each other through the lean times, sharing the little they had. (as cited in Smith, 1983, pg. xxiii)

This generational excellence is imparted on Black girls from birth; it's in their DNA. On her song, Black Girl Soldier, Jamila Woods declares,

> Rosa was a freedom fighter, And she taught us how to fight, Ella was a freedom fighter, And she taught us how to fight, Audre was a freedom fighter, And she taught us how to fight, Angela was a freedom fighter, And she taught us how to fight, Sojourner was a freedom fighter, And she taught us how to fight, Assata was a freedom fighter, And she taught us how to fight.

Black girls possess, observe, and experience firsthand what they need to not only survive but to resist and thrive in this world.

Mothering. The right to mother their biological children was stripped away from Black women during slavery. The only value slave masters saw in Black women was to breed more slaves (Evans-Winters, 2010; Spillers, 2000). Children were either auctioned off or Black

mothers were forced to care for white babies which left very little for their own. Though difficult, many Black women mothered by any means necessary. "While many mothers were forced to leave their infants lying on the ground near the area where they worked, some refused to leave them unattended and tried to work at the normal pace with their babies on their backs" (Davis, 1981, p. 8). Mothering for Black women looked drastically different than that of the Victorian norm (Roberts, 1994). During this time, Black women began honing the ingenuity they needed in order to not just survive but resist the traumatic, dehumanizing conditions they were forced to endure. Even after slavery, Black women were forced to work outside the home due to political and economic conditions which directly impacted how they mothered their children (Roberts, 1994) and especially their daughters.

Mainstream media enjoys depicting stereotypical images of Black women as unfit, welfare queens (Roberts, 1994). Cooper (2010) speaks to how Michelle Obama resisted these stereotypical assumptions about Black motherhood by "embracing and celebrating her roles as mother and wife and refashioning herself into the role of 'Mom-in-Chief'" focusing "on her dreams and hopes for her daughters, her experiences as a mother, and her strategies for helping her daughters adjust to life in the White House" (Cooper, 2010, p. 50; Harris-Perry, 2011). Conversely, Obama enacted respectability politics which pigeonhole Black women into middle-class values, modesty, and Christianity (Cooper, 2010). Though controversial, Obama's actions are still a form of resistance to dominant stereotypes about Black women and motherhood.

Although the bond between Black mothers and daughters is extremely special, it is oftentimes complicated because Black mothers are "suffocatingly protective and domineering precisely because they are determined to mold their daughters into whole and self-actualizing persons in a society that devalues Black women" (Collins, 1987, p. 7). Black mothers know and

understand first-hand the obstacles their daughters will face as they attempt to navigate a world that deems them unworthy. Coates (1987) found that Black girls relied on their mothers for assistance with issues or problems they encountered in their lives. Directly linked to parent socialization, this mother-daughter relationship in predominantly white environments is critical for self-esteem, self-confidence, and learning how to delicately navigate this environment as a Black girl. Mothers want their daughters to be self-reliant, resourceful, tenacious, strong, and confident (Collins, 1987; Davis, 1981). "Black daughters must learn how to survive in interlocking structures of race, class and gender oppression while rejecting and transcending those very same structures" (Collins, 1987, p. 7). Frazier et al. (2011) found that 52.3% of the Black girls in their study cited their mothers as the biggest influence in their lives.

> In my case it was my grandmother and my great-grandmother. How my great-great-grandmother was a slave. Learning from them and sitting as a child at their knee and hearing them tell stories about how you should want more out of life. Even if life kicks you to the curb just keep fighting. (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 222)

Black girls' development is directly impacted by the intergenerational communication of coping skills and values from mothers, grandmothers and othermothers (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Collins, 2000; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015: Phillips, 2006).

Parents play a crucial role in how their child develops and performs their identity and they understand that they must advocate for their daughters in ways that other parents do not (Elliot & Reid, 2016). Due to the drastic inequities in schools across the country, Black parents have found themselves torn between more diverse schools and predominantly white schools that have more resources and opportunities to offer their children (Williams, Banerjee, Lozada-Smith, Lambouths, & Rowley, 2017).

> From a historical perspective, she is raising her children to enter, perform, and gain success within systems that have been designed to destroy them psychologically, intellectually, economically, and physically. (Sankofa Waters, 2016, p. 1227)

Black parents recognize and understand the psychological trauma that comes with attending predominantly white schools but feel that the academic benefits and social mobility outweigh the cost (Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Koonce, 2012).

Students' familial relationships often aid them in dealing with the stressors they encounter in and out of school. Jones Thomas et al. (2013) found that parents were instrumental in cultivating their daughters' self-esteem and positive gendered racial identity. Mothers stressed the importance of self-determination, rising above stereotypes, and being self-reliant and independent (Jones Thomas et al., 2013). "You are a woman and you are [B]lack. So you, that's just a double whammy made against you. So you really have to go against the grain" (Jones Thomas et al., 2013, p. 96). Here we see the intergenerational relationship between Black women and girls at play and how important this relationship is in regard to Black girls' identity development. Similarly, Williams et al. (2017) theorize, "this mother used language of 'arming' her child with positive affirmations, suggesting her desire to protect her daughter against potential negative race-related experiences in the school" (p. 934). Black parents also ensure that their daughters have the ability to codeswitch. Black girls have a public self and a private self which they alternate between depending on the environment in which they're located (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Evans-Winters, 2014). Harris-Perry (2011) also found that higher self-esteem and better mental health was present in individuals with a stronger sense of Black identity. Gendered racial identity socialization serves as a coping mechanism taught to Black girls from parents and extended family (Jones Thomas et al., 2013).

Othermothering and Black women teachers. Due to the separation of children from their biological mothers on plantations, other Black women, sometimes blood relatives and sometimes not, often stepped in to act as a mother figure for these children (White, 1999). As

stated earlier, even after slavery, economic conditions forced Black women to work outside the home, which made childcare a necessity. In order to combat this issue, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, and/or cousins typically stepped in to watch and/or raise these children as their own. A participant in Sankofa Waters' (2016) study recalled,

> I helped my sister raise her kids. I always had kids before I got pregnant. My sister's three kids. And then their friends, when we lived in the high-rise, their moms were single moms too. Before Mursi, um—there were probably eight, nine, 10, kids somewhere. The oldest is 24 now. They can [still] come over and crawl up in my bed. (p. 1229)

The "fictive kinship" provided by nonrelative othermothers is "an early identification with a much wider range of models of Black womanhood which can lead to a greater sense of empowerment in young Black girls" (Collins, 1987, p. 7). Oftentimes Black girls turn to their aunts, cousins, or mentors for guidance on matters they feel they cannot discuss with their mothers (Collins, 1987).

There is a lack of research specifically focused on Black women teachers' relationships with Black girls. However, there is a small body of literature that discusses Black women teachers, othermothering, and their pedagogy (Case, 1997; Dixson, 2003; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Foster, 1993; Nyachae, 2016). Since the dawn of time, Black women teachers have been othermothers to the children in their classrooms. Dixson and Dingus (2008) found that Black women teachers credited their mothers and othermothers as key influences in their pursuit as educators. There is a level of care and nurturing that Black women teachers bring to their practice in regard to Black students (Dixson & Dingus, 2008) presumably because they know and understand first-hand the struggles they endure.

> The ways in which othermothering manifests in [Black] women teachers' pedagogy is through their sense of connectedness to the community, use of kinship terms when referencing their students (more specifically, their Black students), and a subversion of the school curriculum. (Dixson, 2003, p. 230).

In hostile environments, Black women teachers choose to advocate for Black children and their families (Dixson, 2003). "These teachers work to make school a place where African American children not only feel safe and affirmed, but also one that prepares them to be active and productive citizens" (Dixson, 2003, p. 225). Nyachae (2016) argues that Black women teachers' backgrounds and training impact the curriculum they create for Black girls in complex ways. She insists that Black women teachers must be exposed to Black feminism, Black feminist pedagogy, and Black women scholars in order to construct curriculum for Black girls that truly centers and empowers them.

Black Women and Girls' Friendships

Scholarly research on Black women and girls' friendships is scant. The available literature on children's friendships in general is heavily concentrated in the field of psychology, mostly focused on white students and/or gender differences. It is not necessarily solely focused on the meaning and importance of Black girls' friendships amongst themselves. Much of this literature is also focused on elementary or middle school students' play patterns (Scott, 2015). Clark (1991) asserts that Black adolescents' friendships prove to be an integral part of their development and support network. As children progress to middle and high school, they begin to prefer same race friendships (Clark, 1991). Black students in predominantly white school environments create more cross race friendships than their white counterparts (Clark, 1991; Hallinan & Kubitschek, 1990). These relationships are rarely reciprocated from white peers if the Black student population is less than 38% (Clark, 1991; Clark & Ayers, 1988; Hallinan, 1982). Finding friends of the same race and gender in an emotionally and psychologically toxic environment is vital to Black girls' success.

Throughout their schooling Black girls tap into this source for encouragement, power, healing, empathy, and happiness. Their friendships cross age and grade levels, creating a larger, stronger network that provides emotional and psychological comradery that they cannot tap with anyone else. These friendships function as a site of empowerment and resistance from oppression in predominantly white school settings. It is extremely important for Black girls at these institutions to have a support system of other Black girls, as well as faculty and staff with whom they can identify. A participant in Purdy's study, *African American Students at an Elite Private School in the South* (2015), affirmed, "the consensus was to recommend it to a group of [B]lacks and not to send a [B]lack student here by [their]self. A [B]lack student should be able to depend on other [B]lacks here" (p. 628). Creating affinity groups where Black girls can escape to for "affirmation, understanding, and solidarity" (Jacobs, 2017, p. 10) and be themselves "without apology or fear of punishment" (Taaffee, 2016, p. 56), is crucial for their mental health and positive identity development. Black girls' experiences are complex and unique to which only other Black girls can understand and empathize.

We may also look to the available literature on Black women's friendships (Denton, 1990; Collins, 2000, 2004; Harris-Perry, 2011; Niles, 2007; Smith, 1983) to infer upon Black girls' friendships. A site of empowerment and resistance, these friendships provide Black women with support, affirmation, and encouragement (Denton, 1990; Collins, 2000; Niles, 2007). "In the comfort of daily conversations, through serious conversations and humor, [Black] women as sisters and friends affirm one another's humanity, specialness, and right to exist" (Collins, 2000, p. 102). We can also look to television, movies, music, and novels (i.e. *Moesha*, *Girlfriends*, *Waiting to Exhale*, and *Set It Off* to name a few), that explicate the significance of these relationships. Moesha, Kim, and Niecy are inseparable throughout their secondary school

experience. As viewers, we watched the trio grow up together, overcoming typical adolescent struggles and arguments while still holding fast to their friendship. One of the iconic songs from the *Waiting to Exhale* soundtrack, "Count On Me" by Whitney Houston and CeCe Winans, discusses what friendship is and how friends will always be there for one another.

> Count on me through thick and thin, A friendship that will never end, When you are weak I will be strong, Helping you to carry on, Call on me, I will be there, Don't be afraid, Please believe me when I say, Count on me.

There are several other songs by Black women artists such as "Best Friend" by Aaliyah featuring Missy Elliot, "Girl" by Destiny's Child, and "Best Friend" by Brandy that detail the prominence of Black women and girls' friendships.

Black women and girls' bond is particular, therefore only they can understand each other's experiences. In the opening credits of *The Color Purple*, Celie and Nettie can be seen frolicking and smiling as they laugh and play with one another. Their relationship is what aids them in surviving such a painful environment. When they are separated, the scene is visibly devastating, and viewers can almost feel the pain they are experiencing in that moment. As she walks away Nettie states, "nothing but death can keep me from her." "[T]hese [girls] heal the wounds of misrecognition by learning to see themselves reflected through the empathetic eyes of other [B]lack [girls] who share their experiences" (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 52). During times when they wanted to give up they sought support from each other to push through. Through various television shows and media outlets, Black women and girls are depicted as catty and jealous. This stereotyping may stem from the fear of the innate power that is created when Black women and girls come together and form positive relationships.

Listening to Black Women and Girls

Many Black girls possess an inherent commitment to resist situations and experiences that demean them and their life experience, although, their resistance may not always be overt or traditional (Harris-Perry, 2011). This natural tendency is directly linked to how Black parents socialize their children through intentional conversations about resisting stereotypes about Black girls (Jacobs, 2017; Ward, 1996).

> This "truth telling" has also been described by some girls as having a particular "attitude," which is "a way of forcefully expressing themselves. While it may be considered inappropriate, ineffective, or rude at times, such confident articulations force people to listen and take their thoughts and feelings seriously." (Jacobs, 2017, p. 45; Way, 1998, p. 89)

Black girls enact skills such as talking with attitude (TWA; Henry, 1998; Koonce, 2012) and/or silence (Henry, 1998) in attempts to reclaim power and authority over their bodies and experiences. "Even our Black women's style of talking/testifying in Black language about what we have experienced has a resonance that is both cultural and political" (Taylor, 2017, p. 20). Cis-heteronormative white patriarchy suppresses Black girls' freedom to live and be their true selves. The laughter of Black girls in the hallway and cafeteria is distinct and consuming; however, outsiders often label them as loud and posit that they are segregating themselves from everyone else (Brown, 2013). When Black girls express concern or disappointment in something, they are told they are being too sensitive or it's not that serious. Brown (2013) asserts that we must "embrace and begin to name a wider repertoire of how Black girls sound as a potentially creative source of knowledge" (p. 188). There were many instances where my students sought my assistance because they knew I would give them the space to voice their frustrations or opinions however they saw fit. Through those interactions, I advised and coached them through speaking up for themselves in the moment. We talked through various scenarios and responses in

order to prepare them for the confrontation. In instances where they informed me of racist acts after the fact, we discussed why they chose not to report the incident, and I asked how they wanted to proceed. It is important to foster agency within Black girls in this environment because they are not encouraged to challenge the status quo; it is viewed as disruptive and negative. Despite these expectations to conform, Black girls should be nurtured and encouraged to be themselves and speak their minds at all times.

When entering a new space or environment, it's common to feel isolated and alone for a little while. It takes time to learn the ropes and find your new group of friends, but eventually you settle into a new routine and friend group. For Black girls, however, in predominantly white schools they often feel isolated and alone for quite some time. Due to their small number, they are usually the only one or one of a couple in their classes. Before and after school, lunch and other breaks are the only times they can congregate together and shed their masks. It is as if they are both invisible and hypervisible at the same time (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Durham, Cooper & Morris, 2013). Dealing with racism as an adult can be difficult and traumatic, let alone a young person struggling to figure out who they are and where they fit in this world.

How They Use Their Voice

Some Black girls have been successful academically because they suppress their Black woman identity by being silent and taking on the gender attributes valued by their school settings (Fordham, 1993). Sexism has caused women to be silenced and ignored when expressing their opinions, thoughts, or ideas. In Morris' (2007) study, he found that educators interpreted and responded to Black girls' participation in the classroom negatively. One student was scolded for asking a question and immediately disengaged by putting her head on her desk (Morris, 2007). Black girls are often perceived as older than they actually are, which leads administrators to

engage with them in a different and oftentimes negative manner. This adultification of Black girls leads teachers to interpret their behavior as defiant or disrespectful toward authority figures (Epstein et al., 2017). “Adultification contributes to a false narrative that Black youths’ transgressions are intentional and malicious, instead of the result of immature decision-making—a key characteristic of childhood” (Epstein et al., 2017, p. 6). Due to known or unknown biases toward Black girls, their assertiveness and curiosity is hindered. Morris (2007) observed a teacher informing a student, “You are a young lady. You shouldn’t be screaming—speak in normal tone” (p. 15). Women have been told how to think, act, and present themselves since the beginning of time. Although it may seem that Black girls are silenced and therefore powerless in their pursuit for a just educational experience, this is far from the truth.

Although these institutions make it their business to silence Black girls, these students have taken up this concept and repurposed it as an act of resistance (Fordham, 1993). Black girls receive contradictory messages; on one hand, they are told they are too loud and aggressive, and yet, American society relishes individuals who speak their mind. Black girls are expected to express themselves only if it is executed in a way deemed acceptable by the mainstream (Collins, 2000). Therefore, Black girls have begun to use their silence as a tool of empowerment. They choose to speak when *they* feel it’s warranted or necessary. This is frustrating for adults who care only about asserting their dominance and making students comply with their every demand. Fordham (1993) contends that although silence is an act of defiance, it also makes girls “active participants in their own exclusion” (p. 10). I completely disagree with this notion because they choose where and when they enter (Giddings, 1996). Silence allows Black girls to not only challenge the status quo but protect themselves from unnecessary trauma that inevitably follows their question or comment. Teachers that insist on singling out girls that they know do not wish

to speak in that moment, only feed white power dynamics that ignore multiple ways of learning and participating. Adults in schools can assist Black girls in their identity development "by respecting their ways of knowing and educating teachers about their literacies" (Koonce, 2012, p. 34).

Another skill Black girls employ to stand up for themselves is TWA (Koonce, 2012). Koonce (2012) describes TWA as a speech practice employed in oppressive situations by Black women and girls as a form of resistance. They choose to use their voice to challenge oppressive power dynamics that negate their experiences as real and valid. From boardrooms to classrooms, Black women and girls are constantly ignored and overlooked when attempting to share ideas or thoughts. Our comments aren't valid until someone else says it, usually a white male. Koonce's (2012) participants employed TWA when they felt their teachers were disrespecting them and within a school environment in which they felt white adults abused their authority and oppressed Blacks.

> These teachers were frustrated because they felt that their authority was undermined by skillful speakers who knew how to speak their mind and rebel against what they perceived as unfair uses of the teachers' authority. Again, this use of TWA is positive, in that the girls used it to maintain their cultural integrity. (Koonce, 2012, p. 32)

In instances such as these, teachers often escalated the issue, which in turn signals to Black girls that they must protect themselves and resist the disrespectful attacks (Koonce, 2012). At the same time that TWA is used as a form of resistance, oftentimes Black women and girls are falsely accused of having an attitude or being aggressive due to others' implicit biases or beliefs in stereotypes about them. Confident and assertive Black women/girls are viewed as angry and aggressive, unlike their white counterparts. In 2018, on CBC, Jeanne Beker accused Jully Black of attacking her when Jully was simply stating facts. To which Jully declared, "So, whatever you're feeling, take it to the altar, because I'm not the one that's responsible for your feelings."

These types of situations are omnipresent for Black women and girls who are just trying to live their life authentically.

Conclusion

This literature review brings to light not only the negative experiences that Black girls endure in predominantly white school environments but also the importance of intergenerational relationships amongst Black women and girls, as well as how they resist and combat the white power dynamics that seek to pigeonhole them into stereotypical boxes. Many of the concepts discussed in this chapter overlap or connect in various ways. For example, Black girls learn resistance strategies from their mothers/othermothers/parent socialization. These examples emphasize the need to recognize Black girls' unabridged encounters. There are several gaps in the literature including: independent private schools, Black girls in independent private schools, education research that places Black girls at the center, and Black women and girls' relationships/friendships. A good portion of the available literature on Black girls' school experiences and independent schools specifically is dated. This dissertation attempts to fill these gaps by creating space in the scholarship that brings Black women and girls voices and experiences to the forefront. Jacobs (2017) asserts that much of the available scholarship is focused on independent schools' impact "*on* Black girls rather than exploring how Black girls *actively craft and construct* their own identities within the independent school context that is suggestive of agency, awareness, and confidence instead of victimhood" (p. 74). It is this specific gap that this dissertation also attempts to fill.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

The first section of this chapter focuses on the theoretical frameworks that direct this research study. It opens with a discussion of why I chose Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as the guiding lens and then I move on to give insight into the origin and explanation of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its role in this dissertation. It is important for readers to understand the background and purpose of all of these theories in order to grasp not only the research design but also the analysis of the findings.

Black Feminist Thought

The guiding epistemological framework for this study is BFT, which situates Black women and girls at the forefront and seeks to assess how they take control of their experiences. BFT centers, values, and normalizes Black women's standpoint, offers an outlook of society from their perspective, while also giving them "the tools to resist their own subordination" (Collins, 2000, p. 198). The intersectionality of being Black and a woman/girl creates a distinct lens from which Black women and girls experience the world, and their stories must be told from a paradigm that was created specifically for and about them. Approaching this study from BFT challenges the stereotypical and deficit oriented narrative that has been passed along regarding Black women and girls (Collins, 2000; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). It serves as a critical lens to understand how Black women and girls interpret their experience in independent schools while also illuminating how they empower and encourage one another in the struggle. BFT seeks to enhance Black women and girls' self-perception in an environment that does not typically acknowledge or value their perspective. There is debate on whether or not BFT should be used to examine Black girls' experiences, as it is believed to contribute to their adultification. However,

because all of the participants in this study are over the age of 18 I have decided that BFT is the best overarching paradigm for this work.

Black Girlhood

Although it was not chosen as a guiding lens for this study, the findings and analysis of this work may be used to inform Black girlhood studies, since half of the participants are reflecting on their past experiences as Black girls and the other half are sharing their observations of Black girls. Additionally, Taaffee (2016) describes a fluidity between Black girlhood and Black womanhood (Ladner, 1971; Brown, 2009; Jordan, 2000; hooks, 1996) asserting, "[t]his fluidity manifests from our experiences as marginalized girls and women. Specifically, Black girls are girls who must act grown and Black women are women who never had the chance to be girls" (p. 17). Black girlhood as a theoretical framework can be used as an "organizing framework in order to encourage and move Black girls towards the collective action of critiquing their status in U.S. society" (Brown, 2013; Jacobs, 2017, p. 72). Instead of being viewed as passionate and powerful, Black girls are labeled loud, radical, and disruptive (Taaffee, 2016). Black girlhood works against these designations, providing space for Black girls to be heard. From my work experience in this school environment, Black girls have been more vocal in their dissatisfaction with circumstances in these institutions, as well as the primary participants within affinity groups. It is my belief that this research directly advances the field of Black girlhood studies through first and second-hand evidence and analysis.

Critical Race Theory

CRT was born in the 1970s out of the legal scholarship of dynamic lawyers who saw the shortcomings of Critical Legal Studies which failed to tackle the issue of race (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Therefore, race is at the core of CRT, which explores the relationship between race,

racism, and power (Bell, 1992). Derrick Bell is credited as the father of CRT, because many of his writings served as the inspiration and foundation. Iverson (2007) asserts that "CRT illuminates how whiteness is used as a standard in policy against which to measure the progress and success of people of color and exposes the inherent racism in diversity policies" (as cited in Coleman & Stevenson, 2013, p. 587). CRT is interdisciplinary in that critical, feminist, and queer studies inform the work, and it also draws on scholarship from history, literary theory, philosophy, and sociology (Dixson, 2017). CRT upholds "indigenous ways of knowing and understanding the world" and also "draws on 'post' perspectives" (Dixson, 2017, p. 3). Scholars typically employ one or more of the eight tenets to critically interrogate cis heteronormative systems that continuously marginalize underrepresented populations. These eight tenets include: intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1995a), whiteness as property (Harris, 1995), interest-convergence (Bell, 1995), voice/counterstory (Matsuda, 1995), racial realism (Bell, 1995), social change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), critique of liberalism and colorblindness (Gotanda, 1995; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), and finally, restrictive v. expansive view of equality (Crenshaw, 1995b; Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Intersectionality. The term intersectionality originated almost 30 years ago by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of California Los Angeles. Intersectionality focuses on how multiple identities intersect to create varying social experiences and examines their relationship to society's power dynamics. Accurately addressing Black women's oppression requires intersectionality to be taken into account (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007). "A key insight of intersectional theory holds that modes of inequality such as race, class, and gender can combine in ways that alter the meaning and effects of one another" (Morris, 2007, p. 1). Over the years, many individuals have co-opted intersectionality without

giving proper acknowledgement and have also watered down the significance through merely viewing it as identity politics. Intersectionality focuses on how multiple identities intersect to create varying social experiences and examines their relationship to society's power dynamics. Not only will intersectionality be used as a lens through which to view participants' lived experiences (i.e. Black Feminist Thought), it will also be used as an analytic tool of critical inquiry. It serves as: "(1) an approach to understanding human life and behavior rooted in the experiences and struggles of disenfranchised people; and (2) an important tool linking theory with practice that can aid in the empowerment of communities and individuals" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 36). The merging of theory with practice brings Black women and girls' experiences to the center and at the same time creates understanding and environments that affirm them. Intersectionality is action oriented and focused on creating community between groups in order to change the status quo (Gillborn, 2015).

It is vital to understand the intersectionality of Black girls' experiences in school environments. Their race and gender identity subjects Black girls to unique challenges, due to preconceived notions and historical stereotypes that continue to pigeonhole them on a daily basis. Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010), Evans-Winters (2014, 2017) as well as Nunn (2018) employ and/or discuss the importance of engaging intersectionality when researching Black girls and girls of color. It is important to understand that identities are socially constructed and maintained through systems of power and heteronormativity. "Too often, negative perceptions, stereotypes, and structurally reinforced conditions for Black girls and women calls for a targeted focus and a united understanding towards liberating Black girls from a commonly inequitable existence" (Nunn, 2018, p. 253). Ignoring the intersectionality of Black girls' experiences renders them powerless in the pursuit to challenge inequalities in their school experiences. This

dissertation directly heeds Evans-Winters' (2014) call for scholars to "move toward intersectional frameworks to achieve gender and racial equity" (p. 28). Black girlhood is not monolithic, rather it encompasses numerous stories, ways of knowing and being that create various joys and challenges (Nunn, 2018). Policy-oriented scholars use intersectionality to shape public practice explaining the close proximity intersectionality shares with CRT (Collins & Bilge, 2016) which will be detailed further in the next section.

Whiteness as property. Cheryl Harris established whiteness as property as a way to interrogate the complex relationship between race and property. "Whiteness as property is derived from the deep historical roots of systematic white supremacy which have given rise to definitions of group identity predicated on the racial subordination of the Other, and have reified expectations of continued white privilege" (Harris, 1995 p. 288). Whiteness as property operates mostly at the institutional level (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017).

Interest convergence. Interest convergence materialized in 1980 from legal scholar Derrick Bell as a means to critically examine the shortcomings of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Bell (1995) asserts, "[t]he interest of [B]lacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 22). Interest convergence essentially guarantees that true equality—let alone equity—will not be obtained. Gillborn (2013) argues that interest convergence is often misunderstood, even though it is the most cited concept within CRT. Not only does interest convergence involve conflict rather than harmonious negotiation, it also considers class dynamics (Gillborn, 2013). Interest convergence is only part of the system (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017) in which scholars must also understand reform and retrenchment and how interest divergence plays an important role here (Guiner, 2008; Gillborn, 2013).

Voice/Counterstory. Moving to the fourth tenet, Delgado and Stefanic (2001) describe counterstory or counternarrative as a method of storytelling that challenges widely held majoritarian beliefs and histories that typically misrepresented marginalized groups. "Stories help to build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and a more vital ethics" (Tate, 1997, p. 220). Counterstorytelling empowers marginalized groups, giving them voice to explore alternate realities (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). Since its inception, CRT scholars have used counterstories in many ways including, as first-hand accounts, as composite stories, and as analytic tools (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017).

Racial realism. Racial realism or the permanence of racism is the "acknowledge[ment] that our actions are not likely to lead to transcendent change and, despite our best efforts, may be of more help to the system we despise than to the victims of that system we are trying to help" (Bell, 1995, p. 308). In other words, it is the belief that racism is here to stay; however, scholars and activists cannot get stuck in this hopeless revelation but must continue to work toward dismantling the system.

Critique of liberalism, colorblindness and social change. Incremental change, the neutrality of law, and colorblindness, which have been embraced by liberal legal ideology, are all widely criticized in CRT scholarship (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Each of these concepts in their own way hinder the goal of dismantling institutionalized racism. Tate (1997) contends that race consciousness is necessary for one to be colorblind. In other words, one must first notice race in order to ignore it. On the surface, colorblindness and neutrality of law are acceptable targets because they put everyone on a seemingly equal playing field (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). However, both are unattainable because American society was built as a system that excludes and/or includes individuals based on race. The notions of meritocracy and colorblindness serve

to justify racial discrimination and class hierarchies as well as ignore racial differences, which relieves whites of acknowledging the reality of race in America (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). This is evident in that there has been push back from school communities in regard to diversity activities and affinity groups for marginalized students (Patel, 2015). For example, Datnow and Cooper (1997) discovered administration and faculty chose the name “Black Awareness Club” instead of “Black Student Union” because they felt it was too “threatening” and “united.” School administrators emphasized that the club is open to everyone (Datnow & Cooper, 1997). From my experience, the larger white community views these events and organizations as divisive and doing more harm than good (French, 2018). The reality is that this particular group does not want to acknowledge or deal with the unique differences in their communities. The notion of colorblindness serves to ignore and devalue the lived experiences of people of color.

Restrictive v. expansive view of equality. Equality of access does not reconcile numerous years of institutional subordination imparted on marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 1995b). “Restrictive equality looks solely at equality of access while expansive equality looks both at access and outcomes” (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 1288). Due to the extensive permanence of racism in our society, remedies for past discriminatory and racist laws and policies must be enacted in order to provide marginalized groups with even a small chance of success.

This dissertation will examine how oppression is enacted and maintained in the school environment through admission policies, financial aid procedures, social justice, and equity programs/training, as well as peer-to-peer relationships. Specifically, these policies and procedures will be analyzed to understand how they directly or indirectly impact Black women and girls’ experiences. The use of BFT and CRT ensures that dynamic perspectives and intersections are considered and critically analyzed in order to provide a thorough and holistic

story of Black girls' experiences in independent schools. Analysis through the tenets of intersectionality, whiteness as property, interest convergence, and permanence of racism will be focused on in the final chapter. Investigating the lived experiences of participants from a gendered-racial point of view is necessary in appreciating and recognizing the depth of their encounters. Studying marginalized groups calls for paradigms that were created with these particular individuals in mind.

Research Design

In this section, I detail how I designed this study, beginning with the research questions and the methodology behind the research structure. From there, I describe participant criteria and my rationale behind these choices. The data collection section outlines how I gathered data from various sources, and the data analysis portion explains how the findings are presented as well as how CRT will be employed. The data collection matrix provided depicts how each data source undertakes each research question. Brief attention is given to reliability and validity. Finally, I present contributions to the field.

Research questions. This study is grounded in the following research questions:

1. What are Black women and girls' experiences in PWIS?
2. How do Black women and girls navigate, resist, and flourish in this environment?
3. How do school beliefs, policies and procedures impact Black women and girls' experiences?

The first two questions are largely focused on and from the standpoint of BFT. It is important to gather first-hand accounts in order to truly understand how Black women and girls experience and resist PWIS. CRT comes through in all three questions, as I will be critiquing how the people and systems in these schools' impact Black women and girls' experiences. Black women faculty/staff perspectives are important through all three questions because they provide

vital insight into the schools' influence on Black girls' development, as well as their own experiences and personal relationships.

Critical race methodology: Counterstorytelling. Historically, traditional methodology and epistemology have failed to judiciously address and represent marginalized groups (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) introduced the concept of critical race methodology (CRM) as an avenue to give voice and challenge white supremacy, as well as dominant research paradigms. CRM centers students of color throughout the research process from collecting to analyzing to presenting the data (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). There are five defining tenets of CRM: (a) intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of subordination, (b) challenge to dominant ideology, (c) commitment to social justice, (d) centrality of experiential knowledge, and lastly, (e) transdisciplinary perspective (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Malagon, Huber, & Velez, 2009). CRM informs research questions, methodologies, and data analysis as well as the purpose of research (Malagon, Huber, & Velez, 2009). Critical race scholars are committed to social justice and equity as well as empowering underrepresented groups (Liu, 2009; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz, & Gildersleeve, 2012; Taylor, 1998).

> By blending the ethnographic conventions of participant-observation, semi-structured interviews, artifacts, and document analysis, these scholars draw on multiple data points to craft their analyses that are specifically focused on how race and racism are reified through education policy and practice as well as informal discourses and institutional politics. (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017, p. 46)

Specifically, this dissertation research employed counternarrative which champions racial reform by confronting the dominant conversation about students of color in regard to racism and sexism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

In *And We Are Still Not Saved*, Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2017) detail the ways (i.e., first-hand account, composite stories, and analytic tool) in which counterstorytelling has been used within education scholarship. First-hand accounts have been used as a "means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes" (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 27). Some scholars have used composite stories in order to create a single story from multiple participant accounts, field notes, and artifacts (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017). Finally, counterystoytelling as an analytic tool offers researchers an avenue to directly negate majoritarian narratives (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2017). Many scholars (Alemán & Alemán, 2010; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007) have used counterstorytelling as a tool to illuminate the voices of those cast to the margins with their truths often silenced amidst the dominant narrative. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) used counternarrative to examine two students' first-hand accounts of their experiences at a predominantly white independent private school, Wells Academy. Through the students' stories, the authors were able to provide concrete examples of several other tenets within CRT bringing the students' truths to the forefront. Going more in depth in her 2007 article, DeCuir-Gunby shares greater insight into the study at Wells Academy, giving more details of students' experiences through their counternarratives. Similarly, Alemán and Alemán (2010) engaged counterstorytelling as a means to explain the detriment of interest-convergence on Latinx communities. Their participants' stories offered rich evidence as to how "interest-convergences as a political strategy divorces activism from the foundational tenets of critical race theory, preventing discussions that center race and racism" (Alemán & Alemán, 2010, p. 1). These are only a few examples of marginalized groups' realities being brought to light through the critical use of counternarrative.

Participants. In this study, there are two different groups of participants: Black women faculty/staff members at PWIS and Black alumnae of PWIS. It is imperative to understand Black women's experiences, why they choose to work in this school environment despite the psychological and emotional consequences, discuss observations and interactions that they have or had with Black girls, and how they view their respective institutions' impact on Black girls' experiences. Examining Black girls' experiences and how they navigate and resist these institutions is vital.

Based on prior professional relationships, I reached out to former students, and colleagues via phone and email to garner interest and participation in the study. I also contacted Black women faculty/staff through a Facebook group for members of historically Black fraternities and sororities working in PWIS. Snowball sampling was used by asking each interview participant if they knew anyone else that might be interested in the study. This method proved to work extremely well for the adult participants. Participants must be a Black woman faculty/staff member at a PWIS or be a Black alumna of a PWIS. Graduates were chosen because they have had time to reflect on their experiences and examine the impact it had on their development and identity. Additionally, in preliminary focus groups, the researcher found that parents of elementary aged children felt that they could not answer particular questions or that their daughter had not experienced certain things due to their young age.

Nine students and 11 faculty/staff members were interviewed. Participants were located all over the United States, including but not limited to California, Michigan, Texas, North Carolina, Illinois, and Maryland. Adult participants ranged from faculty members, admission directors, assistants, directors of diversity and division heads. The students were either a freshman, sophomore, or junior in college. The faculty and students' schools do not overlap;

however, there are some students from the same school, as well as some adults from the same school. Table 1 below includes general information about the adult participants' schools along with pseudonyms for each participant. Due to the small number of students, Table 2 is a composite of the schools represented by the student participants along with pseudonyms.

Table 1

Adult Participant Information

Name	Job function	Age/ Grade level	Enrollment	Demographics	Base tuition & fees	% on tuition assistance	$ tuition assistance
Sonya	Diversity director	6 mos—8th grade	580	Asian & Biracial: 21.1% Black & Biracial: 11.2% Hispanic/Latino & Biracial: 16.1% Multi-racial & other: 5.8% White: 46%	$4,790—$20,865	15%	$800,000
Renee	Assistant teacher	6 mos—8th grade	580	See above	$4,790—$20,865	15%	$800,000
Tabetha	Administrative assistant	6 mos—8th grade	580	See above	$4,790—$20,865	15%	$800,000
Dorothy	Admission director	PK—4th grade	455	26% students of color	$14,336—$25,756	Not disclosed	Not disclosed
Diane	Lower school director	PK—12th grade	585	33% students of color	$4,600—$28,800	43%	$1.5 million
Debra	Lower school teacher	K—12th grade	1,170	Lower school: 35% students of color; Middle & Upper 34% students of color	$35,840—$42,390	Not disclosed	$4.0 million
Lolita	Admission director	7th—12th grade	750	Not disclosed	$42,900	Not disclosed	Not disclosed
Jacqueline	Upper school director	K—12th grade	678	Not disclosed	$26,990—$33,350	Not disclosed	Not disclosed
Faith	Teacher/diversity director	PK—12th grade	1,075	Not disclosed	$35,946—$41,651	24%	$6.5 million
Mariam	Former admission director	PK—8th grade	520	50% students of color	$25,900—$36,145	Not disclosed	$2.2 million
Danyelle	Middle school teacher	6th—12th grade	771	43% students of color	$23,800	Not disclosed	$1.5 million

Table 2

Student Participant Information

Name	Age/Grade level	Enrollment	Demographics	Base tuition & fees	% on tuition assistance	$ tuition assistance
Nakiya	3yrs—12th grade	650—1,416	Unavailable—43% students of color	$16,790—$45,270	Not disclosed—20%	Not disclosed—$4.4 million
Dakota	3yrs—12th grade	650—1,416	Unavailable—43% students of color	$16,790—$45,270	Not disclosed—20%	Not disclosed—$4.4 million
Jordan	3yrs—12th grade	650—1,416	Unavailable—43% students of color	$16,790—$45,270	Not disclosed—20%	Not disclosed—$4.4 million
Natahlia	3yrs—12th grade	650—1,416	Unavailable—43% students of color	$16,790—$45,270	Not disclosed—20%	Not disclosed—$4.4 million
Camille	3yrs—12th grade	650—1,416	Unavailable—43% students of color	$16,790—$45,270	Not disclosed—20%	Not disclosed—$4.4 million
Ceslee	3yrs—12th grade	650—1,416	Unavailable—43% students of color	$16,790—$45,270	Not disclosed—20%	Not disclosed—$4.4 million
Arielle	3yrs—12th grade	650—1,416	Unavailable—43% students of color	$16,790—$45,270	Not disclosed—20%	Not disclosed—$4.4 million
Tauni	3yrs—12th grade	650—1,416	Unavailable—43% students of color	$16,790—$45,270	Not disclosed—20%	Not disclosed—$4.4 million
Caroline	3yrs—12th grade	650—1,416	Unavailable—43% students of color	$16,790—$45,270	Not disclosed—20%	Not disclosed—$4.4 million

Data collection. In-person and/or virtual individual in-depth interviews of approximately 45 to 60 minutes were conducted with participants in order to gain insight into their lived

experiences within this school context. Interviews were via telephone and audio recorded with the consent of the participants. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to hone in on specific topics and was followed by probing questions to garner deeper information. In-depth personal interviews allow for deeper investigation into the specifics of Black women and girls' experiences by gathering first-hand anecdotal evidence.

Data analysis. The Temi transcription platform was used for initial transcription. Next, I verified the transcriptions while simultaneously conducting memo notation. Memo notation included highlighting key quotations, making note of common threads, and also connecting transcripts to the literature. Transcripts were then uploaded to the Dedoose research platform, where thematic coding was executed. Through both the BFT and CRT lenses, the data was analyzed to determine common themes, significant findings, and implications regarding participants' experiences, possible methods to improve their experiences, as well as recommendations for future research. Themes were grouped together by common threads, and the data was then exported into an excel spreadsheet for the beginning stages of writing. The Venn diagram below shows the overarching themes and main subthemes that emerged and there were also numerous subthemes.

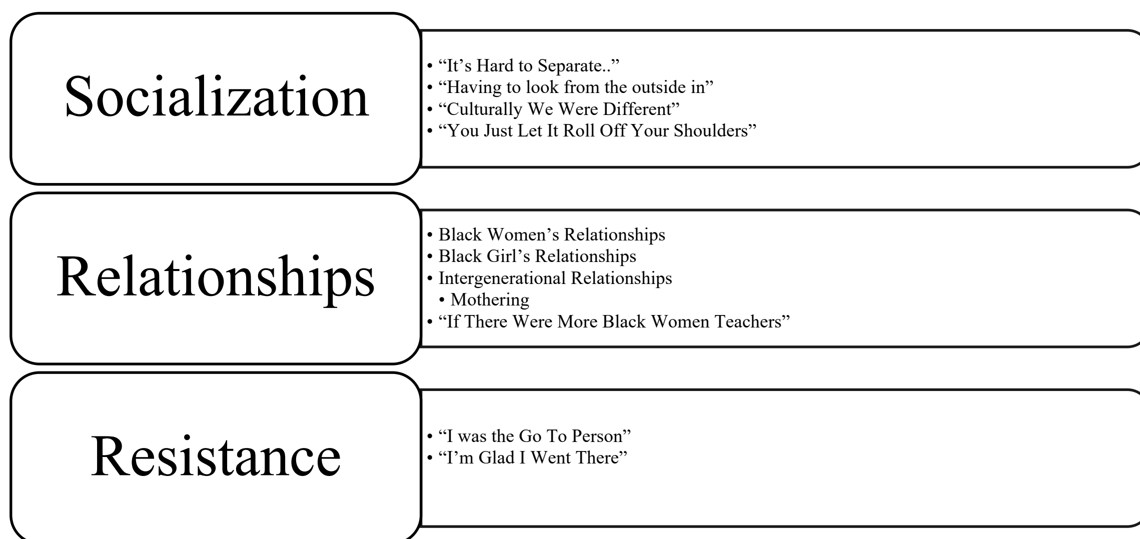

Figure 1. Themes and main subthemes from findings.

The first theme, socialization, answers the first and third research questions by thoroughly detailing participants' experiences with administration, parents, teachers, peers, and the institution itself. Secondly, the relationships section details the significance of Black women and girls' friendships with one another, answering the second research question. Lastly, the resistance section answers the second and third research questions by describing how participants advocate and fight for themselves and others.

Findings are discussed and organized thematically, similar to the literature review. In the final chapter, I analyze the data using intersectionality, whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the permanence of racism to examine the power structures that continue to marginalize and oppress Black women and girls. Participants' counterstories provide vital insight into their unique work and school experience. Their anecdotes present examples for critical analysis of the white power structures at work in independent private schools and also how Black girls are empowered and/or enable one another to resist this school experience.

Similar to chapters one and two, the researchers' personal experiences as a Black woman/girl, as well as professional experiences as a staff member in a PWIS, may be mentioned

throughout the findings, discussion, and conclusion. Data collected was only seen by the investigator and the Principle Investigator on this study. Interview recordings/notes do not have any distinguishable information and were transferred from Dedoose to a password protected Illinois Box folder.

Table 3

Data Analysis Matrix

Research questions	Data collection sources	How did I access the data?
What are Black women and girls' experiences in PWIS?	• Interviews	• I accessed data via in-depth interviews with a purposive and snowball sample of independent private school Black women faculty/staff and Black alumnae. • I accessed data via the NAIS and individual school websites.
How do Black women and girls navigate, resist, and flourish in this environment?	• Interviews	• I accessed data via in-depth interviews with a purposive and snowball sample of independent private school Black women faculty/staff and Black alumnae. • I accessed data via the NAIS and individual school websites.
How do school beliefs, policies and procedures impact Black women and girls' experiences?	• Interviews	• I accessed data via in-depth interviews with a purposive and snowball sample of independent private school Black women faculty/staff and Black alumnae. • I accessed data via the NAIS and individual school websites.

Reliability and validity. As I persisted through my final year of my master's program, I was torn between going on to my PhD (which meant leaving my job) and waiting a year or so. I knew leaving my students was probably going to be the hardest thing I had ever done, but I also could not picture myself staying there another year. Furthering my education was necessary for me to do the work that I desired. I soon realized that my school and work experiences, as well as

my Black girls' experiences, shaped my passion and research interest. Over those 2 years, I developed lifelong relationships with my students. Not only had I served as a mentor and advocate for them, I sought refuge in them when I was overwhelmed by my own experience. They had impacted me just as much as I had impacted them.

This study is reliable and valid because Black women and girls are sharing first-hand accounts of their own personal thoughts and beliefs regarding their work and school experiences. "In the lived experience the realities and claims of the knower (Black women) is considered truth and is therefore not subject to 'White gaze.' Meaning, our subjective reality is factual and should not be interrogated" (Watson, 2016, p. 240). Questioning the validity of the participants' stories is futile, because no one else has the ability to know or understand their lived experiences. I do recognize that half of the data will come from retro-interviews which means student participants may not be able to recall everything they experienced in grave detail. However, the students have had time to reflect and analyze the impact of their experiences. I engaged in peer debriefing to ensure that I have handled participants' stories with care and authenticity.

Contributions to the Field

This work fills several gaps in the literature, adding to research on independent private schools, on Black girls in these spaces, on Black women and girls' friendships, as well as the impact of their intergenerational relationships. Examining these groups and their environment from social justice lenses not only provides empowerment and counternarrative but also insight into what they need to truly thrive and be authentic in this space.

Chapter 4

Socialization, Identity, Racism, and Coping

Black women and girls receive varying socialization messages from different areas of their school communities. From interactions with colleagues, peers, parents, administrators to traditions, policies and procedures, participants discussed struggling with assimilating, being outsiders, and facing different levels of discrimination from microaggressions to outright racism. They constantly received mixed messages about who they should be, how they should act, and whether they belonged in that space.

"It's Hard to Separate"

The intricacies of intersectionality emerged throughout all of the conversations I had with participants. They talked at length about how their race and gender impacted their experiences but also how their age, sexual orientation, and/or socioeconomic status was also a factor. There was only one student that openly discussed her sexual orientation. Although she volunteered this information at school, she did not generally feel comfortable or that it was the ideal place to disclose such personal information (this experience will be discussed a bit more in Chapter 5). All of the participants, especially students, felt that socioeconomic status exacerbated their experiences even more, because generally in these school communities, those with money hold the power.

All of the participants were asked how they identified racially or culturally and also if they felt that their race and gender impacted their experiences. All of the participants identified as Black or African American women. There were two participants that were biracial, and both had white mothers. There was a participant that was half Jamaican and another participant that

was Jamaican and Haitian. When asked what their racial or ethnic identity meant to them, Arielle said,

> Being Jamaican to me means . . . I've never thought about that. I don't know. Just a sense of pride and confidence, like willingness to connect with other people. I feel like in general, a shared thing amongst Jamaicans is a willingness to connect, and be friendly with other Jamaicans even if they're complete strangers. Like you hear them talking in the store like oh my gosh, you're a yardie too! And then you start to talk like you knew each other your whole lives. And then being Black, it means to me connecting to the African diaspora and something that I've been trying to do for a couple of years.

Tauni reflected,

> It means so much. I've learned more about how to identify it being I guess being in white spaces like [my high school] and [university]. I just think that I learned more about myself and these spaces. I feel like I just, I love being Black.

The adults talked a bit more in depth about how they define themselves and the significance of their identities. Debra asserted,

> Yes. I'm definitely Black and I think that makes some people uncomfortable for me to say that that's how I identify. I don't identify as African American. The [politically correct] way of describing your culture and race and ethnicity is the Jesse Jackson way. Like we're Afro American. First of all, I don't agree with that. But I do understand why there's that moniker. For me, I identify as Black because it encompasses the African diaspora and it also just gives credence to the fact that there are Black people spread around the world. All through the Americas, Europe, Africa, everywhere because of the transAtlantic slave trade, but still, even though we're miles apart we're still connected and so I call myself Black so that I'm communing with other Black people who may have a shared experience, a shared political and socio-economic experience here in America. I also feel like we have a particular dialect, [African American Vernacular English] or Black English and I do feel like we have a very specific culture even though it's assumed that our culture was ripped from us and even though we're quote un quote just trying to be like the mainstream. I don't agree with that at all. I don't believe in it.

Renee expressed,

> It has informed my whole familial background. It definitely partially defines how I carry myself and especially depending on the environment. So, like predominantly white environments or even predominantly Black environments, my Blackness means something in both of those places. There's probably not a place where it doesn't mean something, but there are instances where it might be more potent than not. It means things are hard. It means a lot more thinking and planning and preparing in ways that

> people who are not Black don't have to do. It just means that I get maybe a heightened level of awareness as well.

Having navigated various spaces over her lifetime, Renee was keenly aware of how her Blackness impacted her life experiences. She understood what it meant in certain spaces and also how she had to carry herself, depending on the environment. Surprisingly, a few adult participants felt that their gender did not have as big of an effect as their race in these schools, because education is a woman-dominated profession. Arguably, however, for centuries white women have willingly upheld white heteropatriachial power dynamics, even to their own detriment. As the assertion below from Mariam illustrates,

> We live in a white male work dominated world. And when you're not a white male . . . things are from their perspective even when you're in a school and because independent schools, at least the ones I worked in, tend to have so many women, but things are still viewed from a white male perspective because that's how the world is.

Faith discussed how white women faculty/staff in particular know exactly how to navigate these schools, because they possess "the institutional knowledge and know the history, so they know how to navigate that space like the back of their hand." Therefore, if independent schools are primarily composed of white women who are upholding white patriarchal norms, anyone who does not meet these criteria will experience discrimination at various levels and areas. The excerpt below depicts Lolita's common reaction from prospective white parents.

> I've had several times a family come to interview that I've spoken to via email or on the phone. And they're like, no, I'm looking for Lolita. And I'm like oh, that's me. Nice to meet you. And then they're like, no, you don't understand. We already talked on the phone and I'm like, still me. Same person. I think instantaneously, you know, it's the color of my skin that they notice first. I think the secondary thing is in a Jewish environment, you know, if it's a more traditional family the men and women are treated and viewed very differently. And so, if it's an Orthodox family that is used to a culture of men dominating, it's kind of . . . I've had families say, okay, but who's going to make the decision? And I'm like, that would be me, still me.

The fact that Lolita works at a predominately white Jewish independent private school adds another layer to her experience as a Black Christian woman in that space. On a daily basis, she must not only navigate race, gender, and wealth in relation to power but also religious customs that are not her own. Her excerpt illustrates how others' perceptions of her based on her identities impacted how colleagues, families, and sometimes students treated her. She also discussed how sometimes families would refuse to have her interview them. She clearly communicated to her Head of School that yes, someone else could interview them, but the school could not—and should not—make that concession for them in this scenario, and furthermore, are they the type of family the school wants to admit?

Independent schools are a costly commitment with average tuition for Day Schools being $22,301 and $50,811 for Boarding Schools in 2015 (About NAIS, n.d.). Many of these schools have robust endowments, scholarships, and financial aid available for prospective families. Although some Black students may be receiving financial assistance, not all of them are, as Faith explains,

> The stereotype about, you know, all the kids of color, particularly Black students are on financial aid. Well that came to a head because that wasn't the case. And the Black families used to get really pissed off and say, "hey listen, whoa pump your brakes we're paying full tuition just like you for two or three [kids]. Majority of financial aid is going to white people, it's not going to us." And that was just factual, you know.

At Faith's school, there were several Black families that were not receiving financial assistance. The age-old stereotype, however, is that Black folks can't afford to send their children to these types of institutions. So, whether Black students receive tuition assistance or not, it is always assumed, consciously or unconsciously. Jordan was attuned to how her socioeconomic status, coupled with her Black woman identity, influenced her school experience.

> I think that my experience as a Black woman was also intertwined with socioeconomic status. So just like that kind of being ignored as well by the school. Like I was Black but

> it's also a rich private school too so just that was always intertwined. We had a basketball tournament. My friend and I decided not to go, because of the money but we didn't say anything. Our coach pulled us aside and was like we found some money if you want it and I was like . . . it was just like expected that we weren't as wealthy as the others . . . expected that we couldn't do certain things because we're Black we must be dirt poor.

One can only imagine the complexity of feelings these students might have in this moment. These types of incidents are not uncommon and also manifest in other ways, such as a student wanting to participate in a study abroad trip but knowing they don't have the money to go, like the rest of their peers. Students found it rather difficult to navigate their school communities as Nakiya reflected,

> If you're dealing with racism and socioeconomic status because I am on scholarship so I'm not at the same financial level as a lot of the kids that go to [the school]. So, when you have both of those pieces going together it's kind of hard to navigate a white affluent space. If you're navigating a white space but y'all all make the same money that's a little bit different.

Similarly, Natahlia described feeling like an outsider because she was a Black girl that wasn't as wealthy as everyone else.

> Because the school was so predominantly white and it was more of a socioeconomic thing than just race because [my school] is like the white people that are the one percent of the population whose grandparents were billionaires and whose grandparents came to the United States owning people. So, it was like kind of hard being the Black girl because not only was it being the Black girl but it was being the Black girl that wasn't as wealthy as everybody else was. So, it's kind of like being an outcast and having to look from the outside in.

Not only were these students aware that they were being treated differently, they knew why and could explicitly name it. I found it interesting that Natahlia pointed out that it isn't just wealth, it's generational wealth, meaning that many of the white families may have generations that went through the school and/or their name might be on a building at the school or in the city. Because independent schools are tuition and donation driven institutions, wealth creates a unique power dynamic that ensures the people with the most money have the most influence in the school

community, whether explicitly stated or not. This stereotype amongst all the others, directly impacted how Black women and girls are perceived in independent schools.

"She's disrespectful, she's snippity, she's sassy." It's no surprise that societal norms and stereotypes trickle into school communities, especially predominantly white, affluent communities. Participants were very aware of how they were perceived by their peers, colleagues, teachers, and the parent community. Participants spoke of the stereotypes they faced, the double standards that were placed upon them, as well as how they were perceived by community members. One student explicitly stated that it seemed like Black girls were taboo at her school. Dakota describes the stereotypes that were assumed about her and her friends.

> [To] other students, I think we were all seen as loud [and] obnoxious. I thought it was crazy because if we were in senior courtyard listening to our music getting rowdy we were seen as ghetto, less educated, the stereotypical Black people. But if they were playing a stupid game of badminton, playing their music and being rowdy they were just having fun. So, I think that was the biggest thing. And I think that's what we all had to realize that if we did the same things as them it was always going to be seen as negative.

Black people realize at a very early age that they must live by a different set of rules. An administrator asserted, "for Black girls, it's she's disrespectful, she's snippity, she's sassy. But for the white girls, [it's] she's strong, she's a leader, she uses her voice well, she self-advocates." The angry Black woman/girl trope is low hanging fruit that is constantly engaged as a means to invalidate Black women and girls' passions, concerns and feelings. Predominantly white environments often call for Black women and girls to alter their behaviors in order to be more palatable to white people. In the reflection below Debra illustrates,

> [The mom] was like, "no the welcome letter that you guys sent home, it had your pictures in it and [my daughter] just looked at your picture and was like, 'wow, my teacher looks so mean.'" And [the mom] said, "I think it's because you weren't smiling." And I was kinda taken aback because I didn't remember the picture. And I was like, hmm . . . I haven't had many people describe me as you look mean, unless it's like, you know, when you witcho homegirls or something, and they be like, you always got your resting b-face or whatever. But with kids, that was just not a thing.

The mom in this situation went on to suggest that the teacher give the kids candy, so they like her. Similarly, Danyelle had a parent tell her she was intimidating.

> One that made me really so angry. It happened last year, I had this student and she was not doing well in my class, like C range and I kept telling her to come for help and she wouldn't come. Her mom was really rude to me and she ended up telling me I was intimidating and that's why her daughter was scared to come see me.

All participants were aware of the angry Black woman/girl stereotype impacting their experience; however, a few of them also took measures to be less vocal or change their tone or appearance. Dorothy stated, "I feel like my speech, my dress always has to be professional. There's no room for error." Caroline affirmed,

> I regret not saying some stuff, but then again, I was more timid. I just didn't want to cause more problems and be the angry Black girl. I was very aware if I was the angry Black girl because I had gotten angry once and everyone was like "woah, calm the fuck down."

On the other end of the spectrum, Black girls are hypersexualized and their bodies are constantly policed. As an administrator, I was often told by colleagues to tell Black girls to pull their skirts down when white girls had similar or shorter skirt lengths. Due to society's standards of beauty and proximity to whiteness, in independent schools, Black girls are not deemed worthy enough to date by Black or white boys. Ceslee recalled,

> I just know that my sophomore year there was a senior who was white and he was talking about our friend group [all Black girls] in general. Because he was one of the white boys that was a senior that all the girls thought was attractive and basically one of my friends thought she caught his interest or something and then he ended up saying that to her. Which was he wanted to know what it was like to be with a Black girl. But he was like, not dating or anything, but just you know, I want to see what it's like.

In this particular excerpt, the white boy views Black girls as nothing more than a sexual conquest. Black boys' views on dating Black girls will be discussed later in this chapter. Black girls begin dealing with issues of dating or generally liking someone in middle school. While Black women and girls are dealing with all of the aforementioned stereotypes and racism, they

also realize that their actions have an immense impact on how their group as a whole is viewed in the school but also in society.

“I have to represent them all.” Black people in predominantly white settings often feel tokenized in that they are looked to as an expert on their race, and they are both hypervisible and invisible simultaneously (Davis, Dias-Bowie, Greenberg, Klukken, Pollio, Thomas, & Thompson, 2004). Both the women and girls were aware of their tokenized status in their school communities. Caroline reflected,

> So yeah, I was the token minority. I always felt like I was like the minority, everyone was like looking, you know what I mean? I used to be called a good Black or whatever sometimes by my neighbors and I was like, oh, this is problematic.

As we also see from this quote, tokenized Black people are also viewed as the exception and deemed “better than or different from those other Black people.” In an effort to diversify or seem as though people of color are members of their community, schools look to students of color to participate in advertisements. Caroline, who was the first Black student at her middle school, exclaimed, “I might still be in the advertisements, not gonna lie.” Additionally, Danyelle asserted,

> I do know that one girl had the joke, like the publication office was looking for kids to be in pictures and she would laugh like, oh, I’m about to get pulled out of class. Like they know one of them is always going to be in the pictures when they come around for advertisement pictures.

The idea of “the good Black” allows white people to rationalize why said Black person deserves to be in their—white people’s—space. Nakiya remembered that she was seen as special by the adults in her school.

> So being that “great Black student that’s so well spoken” and you know, “she’s so outspoken” and “oh my god, she speaks so well” you know. But I’m just like every other student, I’m just Black. So, I think I did have kind of like the gold star next to my name in terms of the school because they knew that I was a good student. . . . I did kind of feel like a token sometimes.

The weight of being the token in a predominantly white space is arduous, to say the least. Black women and girls must move through these spaces carefully, always remembering that any slight misstep could not only be catastrophic for them individually but for Black women and girls as a whole. Dorothy elaborates,

> My burden is heavier than I assume it is for maybe my white counterparts. I believe especially in this world where students and faculty are limited to the number of African Americans they see and African American women they see. So, I feel like I have to represent them all.

Jacqueline who is also a parent affirms this same notion.

> I am never not mindful of my own racial identity or [my daughters'] and what we can expect from the institution because of our racial identity. So, it's important for me to be a good representative, I hate that we're in that space, but it is important for me that I represent other African Americans broadly well. Coming here to this school and again, I'm new here, I've only been here since July. I'm very mindful of the reality that there are few African American women who serve as the upper school directors.

One former administrator did speak of a positive experience she had at one of the schools she worked in that was diverse in every area: faculty, staff, and students. In a different school where she was the only Black person, she described the genuine support she received from her Head of School and that she did not have to represent all Black people. In both of these settings she felt that she could not only be herself but also be successful as a teacher and later a diversity practitioner. Unfortunately, these experiences—which only encompass two of the five schools she worked in—are uncommon for Black women and girls.

"Oh, I thought you went to one of those other schools." Almost every Black woman faculty/staff participant described various ways in which they had to "constantly prove themselves" or defend their work and credentials. Dorothy had a rather traumatic experience during her first year in an independent school.

> So, the dad came in and said, you went to [university name]? And I said, I did. And he said, when? And I'm thinking maybe he went [there too], in my naiveté I'm thinking he's

> going to wonder if we crossed paths or maybe we know some of the same people. And I gave him the years and he said, but for what degree? And I said, for my undergraduate degree, [he said] I thought [the head of school] said you went to [university name]. And I said, for my doctorate, I went to [university name] for my undergrad, [university name] for my masters and then [university name] for my doctorate. And he said [university name] as in [city name]? And now it's becoming clear to me that that's really not what this is about. And then he said, I just assumed you'd gone to one of those other kinds of schools. And I asked him what he meant. And he says, I don't know, what do they call it? . . . You know somewhere down south or the one over in [city name]. So, his assumption was that maybe I'd gone to [an HBCU], so that's what he assumed. There was nothing to make him assume that other than the fact that I was a Black woman. . . . He had nothing other than the fact that I'm a Black woman. There was no other reason for him to make that assumption.

Yet again, white people have a hard time believing and understanding how a Black woman can not only work in "their" space but also obtain an education from "their" universities as well. However, no matter the level of credential or caliber of the institution from which it was obtained, Black women still had to prove their work was valid. Diane shared,

> I've been challenged just in terms of my own scholarship being diminished and pushed aside. I feel like I work much harder than many people and bring more experts with me in order to be heard. . . . In terms of programmatic recommendations, you know, I feel as though I have to gain the credibility of my faculty, which is of course appropriate, but I feel that in some ways I carry a higher, a greater burden. My boundaries have had to be much broader. I've not been able to just work in the capacity of my job as an administrator. I've also had to be politically active, more professionally active. I believe I've had to have a higher level of engagement than similar peers in order to have some credibility and to support issues that are relevant to creating more inclusive and equitable school experiences for everyone.

Similarly, Faith noted,

> I was teaching these AP level courses and of course I had these white parents who would question am I qualified to teach the classes. I felt like I needed to wear my degrees on my forehead and say here's the experience that I have.

The age-old lesson, "you have to work twice as hard," is a constant in the lives of these participants who most definitely work harder than their colleagues but receive little to no recognition or compensation for the extra work. A middle school teacher requested to have her work with the Black affinity group count for extra points—which eventually accumulate into a

stipend—like other extra work does in the school, but her superior said, "well it's during the school day anyway and you're getting out of having to do lunch with kids." This participant also discussed being nominated for an award alongside, frankly, a mediocre white man—who regularly gets the award—who didn't even perform his main job well, let alone take on extra work. Danyelle expressed,

> [He] doesn't do any extra work. He barely does the required work. He always leaves early. He's in the gym all the time for his planning period. I didn't like the way he was talking to my little girls. It kinda made me irritated because I was like, if he were Black he would have been fired, but everybody loved him for doing nothing and I feel like I'm busting my ass and here he is doing the bare minimum and we're sitting at this award ceremony on the same level.

Interestingly, despite dealing with issues of discrimination, a couple of participants discussed how their rank influenced how they were treated by colleagues and parents but also recognized the rarity in that experience. Sonya, a diversity practitioner proclaimed,

> In this role, I can say certain things and they have to like, listen, they have to hear me out and I appreciate that I'm able to. Because it's a director level, I don't have to do the proving and the persuading. People accept what I'm saying and what I'm observing, what I'm suggesting as something that they actually need to wrestle with or think about. So, yeah as a Black woman that's very rare, I feel. Where we don't have to be in a constant state of proving ourselves and I've actually, that's something that I've had to work on just like personally as I think like my professional development because that has been my orientation in so many spaces to come in and it's like oh I don't have to shuck and jive. I don't have to perform for you people to realize, oh [she] knows what she's talking about. When I came [here] there was an assumption that I knew what I was talking about, so it was oh this is new! But then I have Black colleagues, Black women colleagues who are having a very different experience because of the level, like where they are in the organization and just trying to be a resource for them.

Mariam, a former admission director, expressed the same sentiment.

> I will say at school because of my position, I didn't experience as much as people who had a lower position would experience. People would come and talk to me about things that a parent said to them or especially the afterschool staff, they got it worst of all.

To say credentials matter in these spaces is an understatement. Independent schools take great pride in touting where their faculty and staff attended college and the number of advanced

degrees they possess. For Black women entering this space, even if they do check those boxes, their worthiness of being in such a space is still constantly questioned by the community. Similar to credentials, another area that is constantly critiqued is Black women's appearance.

"How did you get your hair like that"? Black women and girls' hair has been a constant topic of discussion in society. For decades, we have been told our natural hair is ugly, nappy, dirty, and unprofessional. Issues around Black girls' hair emerged in the majority of the interviews. One student recalled, "people told me that they liked my hair better when it was straight or one time my coach stuck her finger [in my hair] to feel what the track felt like, where it was sewn in." Debra, a teacher and parent described her daughter's experience when she was in kindergarten.

> Some of our Black kids were complaining that their white friends would not keep their hands out of their hair. And my daughter was in kindergarten at that time and I would pull her hair into a little puff, Afro puff and one morning I was pulling her hair into a puff and she was crying like, please do a different style. And I was like, what's wrong with this puff? Like your curls is poppin'! What's the problem? She said her friends were pressing down on her Afro puff like it was a button. So, like they're answering at a game show and they would just press down [*participant raises voice*] on the top of her head! So, you know, I was pissed! I was like what?! Listen, you tell people, keep their hands out of your head. Oooh I was hot.

This teacher was also working with the Black affinity group and decided to do a program about Black hair. She stated, "the main takeaway was keep your hands out of other people's hair because [*participant yells]* don't do that! Like, stop, please stop petting them. They're not pets." Arielle describes this same sort of experience while at lunch.

> Someone touched my hair while I was in line for lunch once. I was just standing in line peacefully not bothering anyone and I just randomly felt this hand in my hair, I was like, "I'm not an animal at the zoo. Get your hands off me."

Dealing with mixed messages about their hair, some Black girls experienced angst when choosing how to style their hair for school. One participant asserted that she always wore wigs or

a weave and that she only wore her hair in its natural state for maybe a week during her entire high school experience.

"That's not my name." Every single participant talked about being called the name of another Black woman or girl. Oftentimes, not surprisingly, they looked nothing alike, the person didn't attend or work at the school anymore, and/or there was a distinct age difference. One participant made the significant observation that white girls often actually have the same name and maybe have a similar appearance, but nobody ever got them mixed up. Ceslee stated,

> I guess the name, that switching and getting our names mixed up at a certain point was frustrating because there's so many different Carolines and Katies, there's five blonde Caroline's and they can call them, you know Caroline D., Caroline M., Caroline S. There's me and I'm like lighter skinned and my hair is curly. And then there's a girl who is darker skinned and I was called [her name]. I was called people who had already graduated and it just makes you think if they just see us as the exact same.

A faculty member made a similar observation stating, "the Black girls get called each other's names all the time when they're less than 10 percent of the population. That's an issue considering the other 90 percent of the population don't get confused with each other." Arielle described how parents called her the names of other Black girls.

> They would call me one other Black girls name all of the time. You know who I am. I've been in your home, like how hard is it for you to remember that all Black girls do not look the exact same? The few who did remember, they were giving themselves pats on the back each time they remembered I was me, it was obvious they were giving themselves pats on the back. I'm like, yes. Hello Susan. Congratulations.

Similarly, Faith explained how an Asian woman trustee consistently called her the name of a former Black woman teacher. Faith asserted,

> There was a trustee board member, an Asian woman who was married to a Jewish man. She would call me by the wrong name all the time. And it was like she learned one Black woman's name and then all Black women, we're just going to be [person's name]. And it was just like, now mind you [the other Black woman] taught fifth grade and then left and she was married to a white man. And she could probably be my mother. Like that was the big age difference.

Now some might be surprised that a person of another marginalized group committed this act, however, it is not surprising at all. Anti-blackness is not only held by white people and there's plenty of literature (Wun, 2014) discussing internalized racism, proximity to whiteness as well as the prevalence of anti-blackness. Debra explained how students confused her and another Black woman at the school.

> My first year the kids would often call her [my name] or they would call me [her name]. We don't look anything alike except that we're both kind of small framed and we're brown. But the similarity stops there. She's probably almost 20 years older than me. And so, she looks like an older woman and you know, she always wears heels and I'm not wearing heels to nobody's elementary school. That's not happening. And she always wears her hair, pulled back at the nape of her neck in a tight bun, but meanwhile I done had copper hair, blonde hair, big Afro, crochet, braids, twists.

These types of actions say to Black women and girls that they are not worthy of getting to know on a personal level. Not only is it irritating to constantly be called out of your name, it also reinforces the feeling of not being viewed as a real member of the school community. Various messages, whether verbal or not, convey to Black women and girls that they are outsiders, and oftentimes participants recognized they would never be insiders.

"Having to Look from the Outside In"

For students, wanting to belong and fit in is not a new phenomenon. Adolescence in particular can be an extremely tough time, because students are becoming curious about their identity (Carter, Leath, Butler-Barnes, Bryd, Chavous, Caldwell & Jackson, 2017). For Black women and girls in these spaces, their race, gender, and socioeconomic status create barriers that impede them from becoming genuine insiders in independent school communities. Many participants described insiders as white, wealthy, residents of the school neighborhood, and who typically possess familial legacy to the school. An interesting finding was that two students described insiders as skinny and noted, "being bigger was a big problem. People make fun of you

or whatever. Like maybe you shouldn't be eating this or maybe you shouldn't do that." Other participants also described insiders as those that were highly engaged and knew how to navigate the community. Outsiders, at the other end of the spectrum, were characterized as not just people of color but most times specifically Black people, less affluent, not as engaged, new to the school, and/or those that don't entertain the social hierarchy. Faith asserted,

> So, an outsider, nine times out of ten what I have seen is always a Black person and in particular, more so Black women than men, more so Black women than men. And the sad thing about that is the Black women, you know, we're put in three categories. You're the mammy, you're the sapphire or you're the jezebel. So, in these independent schools, they want us to be a mammy because they want us to be nurturing and supportive. And if you are the Sapphire, it's you're too strong, you're too loud, oh it's you're angry. When it really means to them is, "Oh, you think you're the same, you think you're equal. Oh no you're not equal. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. You need to know your place."

The onus is often imposed on marginalized groups to put themselves out there and try to make connections and relate to the dominant group, when in actuality, this group should be developing spaces that welcome and equitably include marginalized students. Renee describes immersing herself into the community but still feeling like an outsider within.

> I'll be frank and say I think that I have, as a new person, I've done a lot to try and fit into the school taking on things that I didn't have to, coaching two seasons, teaching an afterschool class, covering for other people. In ways that I think other people haven't necessarily done, which is not to put them down, but it's to say I've really tried.

Nakiya described how her friends were involved yet weren't thought of as real members of the school.

> I think, I don't know, it's such an interesting role that we play because I had friends who were on the cheer team and I think even for them they were on the cheer team but people did not think of them in the same way that they thought of the other cheerleaders. I think that there was an understanding that we would always be somewhere on the outside.

Students felt that they were often "on the outside looking in" but had each other and became less concerned with fitting in as they matriculated.

Interestingly, a couple of participants described feeling like an insider in some cases because they were highly involved and knew numerous people in their schools. I found it intriguing that despite dealing with discrimination, they sometimes viewed themselves as insiders. Tauni, a student, described a recent conversation with a Black faculty member—who was also an alumna of the school—at her high school where the teacher expressed

> to Tauni how different [her] experience [was] from [the teacher's]. And saying because [she] was a [student leader], because [she] was so involved [her] Black experience was different. Basically [the teacher] called [her] an insider in that, [she] knew a lot of people on campus.

Similarly, Danyelle, a faculty member, explains,

> Oh, I would actually consider myself an insider I think because people come to me and tell me everything and then people come to me and ask me for advice on stuff a lot. So, I feel like in some ways it's me, in some aspects, but then also I feel like there's a secret group, like the head of school is a white man and he has like his cronies. It's obvious that that's his group and they meet and make decisions.

It is intriguing that these participants have the ability to hold both outsider and insider status within one institution. However, on one hand this phenomenon might speak to W. E. B DuBois' double-consciousness (DuBois, 1903), and on the other hand, it actually underscores the idea that Black women and girls will never be full members of these communities. DuBois (1903) describes double-consciousness, "one ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." No matter our achievements we are still viewed in a very particular way.

"I Didn't Process It as Assimilation"

Close knit predominantly white communities such as independent schools expect everyone to conform to dominant ways of thinking, knowing, and being. Adults and students discussed the different ways in which they chose whether or not to assimilate and also described

“playing the game,” in which they sometimes made decisions to get what they need from the institution. Students often felt as though their peers expected them to be like them, and they had to act complacent as if “the majority of stuff they said wasn’t an issue.” Arielle explicitly describes the measures she took to fit in at her school,

> I went out to go get frozen yogurt all the time with people and we went shopping at urban outfitters all the time and some other stuff that I tried to assimilate and do. I straightened my hair most of high school. Maybe like a week spread out over the four years total did I wear my hair natural to school. It was all extension weaves or straightened. I sort of shifted my music taste. I was never super into hip hop that much. I played an instrument, so I was into classical music and stuff like that. Once I got into India alternative, I sort of really committed to it and was in it head on.

As a follow up, I asked her if she thought of her actions as assimilation when she was still in high school and she said,

> I didn’t process it as assimilation then, so I didn’t really feel anything. Looking back at it now I see it as assimilation. But I think I processed it as looking to make connection. I didn’t see it as that big picture, me changing myself type thing. [I thought] oh, this is an easy way to relate to people.

The next two excerpts from administrators describe altering how they do things but fully recognizing that they are doing it in order to accomplish something. Sonya expressed, “I also know how to be in white spaces and not scare white people, basically. Especially being tall. I have figured out ways to be palatable without completely compromising my integrity or what I know needs to be said.” Dorothy asserted,

> It means conforming to some extent to get the degree, the diploma, or the certificate that says you have gone through x school. In order to have a seat at the table where most of the decisions are being made, you need these networks.

Unfortunately, for the majority of Black folks, we are aware that we have to do certain things in certain ways because it is more acceptable by the mainstream. I do believe there is a fine line here, where if one is not careful or perhaps possess a strong, positive racial identity, they might lose themselves. In regard to Black girls assimilating, Lolita, an administrator, shared,

> What I've noticed that they've all, they've almost all had this moment where they're like, okay, if I could just wear these jeans and these shoes and do my hair like this, like I'm going to be more like them. Then they quickly realized that it doesn't really matter if you have all of those things and you look like them, you will never look like them.

Dakota explained the paths Black girls are confronted with as new students.

> My perspective on it is that when you start [at that school] you have two paths kind of. You can be how I felt whenever I started. How I saw it as a seventh grader is like you two distinct paths. Like you can be a crusader and you can fight all these issues and you can talk to administration, you can be an advocate, and the downside of that is you get seen as the angry Black woman and you kind of get outcasted socially, then you can only hang out with like one group. And then the other path is you act like you don't hear things, you act like you don't see things. You act like you don't notice how different it is and you just kind of put on a mask and you play the role and you play the game and you just get by. And I would say I lived both paths at some point. And then my junior, senior year I realized why are there two paths like that doesn't need to be a thing. And that you can do both. You can be both. You can be an advocate and have friends and go out and do things and you can be a crusader and still be active in the community in other ways.

She went on to say,

> You want to be as similar as possible to the people around you, like you don't want to seem different. I think like whenever I started reverting back to who I actually was, what I actually cared about is when I started building my self-confidence. The fact that I thought that I wasn't going to have friends or I wasn't going to be able to do what I wanted to do unless I was this, honestly, bland person. It's such BS. And honestly, I was like, I'm a bad bitch. Like Ima be okay either way. So, I think there is pressure and I think that it's added pressure when you're going through those times of like teenagehood, you know.

I believe Dakota's perspective above speaks to the administrator's excerpt before; however, instead of realizing she would never "look like them," she realized she didn't *have* to. She realized that she could be herself and within that she found positive self-perception and authenticity.

"Culturally We Were Different"

This section discusses Black women and girls' vexed interactions with coworkers and peers. Independent school culture can be extremely overwhelming for individuals who are new and unfamiliar with the norms and traditions. Navigating such a predominantly white, elite, wealthy environment is daunting for Black women and girls, who often have to be overly

conscious of their actions and how they might be perceived. Students described the general differences amongst the school, as well as the discrimination they faced as they grew older. Natahlia said,

> There was definitely a divide between me and the majority of my class just because of . . . culturally we were different and there was really nothing that anybody could do to mend that.

One might infer from the Natahlia's excerpt and Arielle's below that the cultural differences create concrete barriers for Black girls. Arielle details how and why things changed as she got older.

> It started out good and I felt like I was making friends, but as we got older there would be microaggressions or they were just really emotionally immature and was in their bubble of being super affluent and closed off and not being exposed to anything different from them. So, I sort of just withdrew myself from them. There was sort of a group of all ages in the high school of literally like 15 people of color. So that's the group that I would usually have lunch with and hang out with after school or go to sports games or something with.

Arielle's statement confirms Clark's (1991) assertion that as kids get older, they prefer same race friendships. Some of the adult participants also described strained or difficult relationships with colleagues. Sonya analyzes the strained relationship she had with a former boss.

> I remember saying to someone, I don't know the name of the person, the Black woman who was like the plantation owners/master's wife. So, what is she like the mistress or whatever. The Black woman who was like her confidant, whatever, friend, but also was still her slave. That's how I felt at [my previous school] because [my boss] would want to come to my office and chit chat. But as soon as she was ready to flip the script to say, "Sonya, I really need you to be here on time and when you're not here on time." . . . And I had to put her in my phone as NMF, not my friend. So, every time she would call I would remember. She is not my friend. She wants me to think we're friends, but any opportunity she had to put me in my place, she would do it and when there was an opportunity for me to move into the diversity role, full time, she did not advocate for me I think the way she should have because she was afraid of losing me. She didn't want to have to go through a search process to find somebody to replace me because I did a lot of her work and I think she didn't want to run the risk of not being able to find somebody to do her work, so instead she ran interference for an opportunity for me.

Interestingly, Mariam, a director of admission, had good relationships with her peers but not with those she managed. She explains,

> I have really great relationships still with the people I worked with. I would say the people that are on the Senior Admin team, I've always had good relationships with them. I've always had problems with the people on my admission team who don't want to work for a Black woman and over the years you get the ones who have experience and think "well surely, I've got more experience than you, so we don't have to do it your way. We're going to do it my way." No, no. Nope. Not going to work like that. Or the ones who just didn't want to respect me just because I was Black. I would go to my Head of School and tell them, "I can tell you what the real problem is and don't think I'm paranoid by telling you this. Let me tell you the real deal."

Black women rarely hold leadership roles in independent schools. Given the perceptions held in these communities regarding Black women, it is no surprise that these administrators faced tumultuous interactions with colleagues. Similarly, Black girls had questionable experiences with various teachers and administrators.

"I think they were slightly intimidated." Several students shared various experiences they had with teachers, coach, or administrators that were sometimes blatantly racist. However, there were a couple of students that had some positive relationships with adults in their schools. Dakota recalled the blatant lack of support she received regarding her college choice.

> It was just more about a couple of coaches and I think one teacher expressed to . . . one coach expressed to my mom and the others to me just that, you know, it wasn't a reasonable goal and that it wasn't going to happen and I wouldn't fit in there and that if I did get in, I wouldn't excel. And just hearing that from people who had been in my life since I was in seventh grade, it was just kind of like, wow, so you preach a big game, like you want the best for us, you want us to do all these things. But when it comes down to it and I'm telling you my goal, I want to go to this great school. Like you're not really behind it, you're not really for it. And I have no idea where those claims came from, whether it was race related or gender related, I think a little bit both to be honest.

One can only imagine the hurt and frustration Dakota felt during this time. To work so hard and be accepted into your top choice school, only to have this accomplishment belittled by those that

were supposed to be in your corner, adults no less. Natahlia recalled having to solicit assistance from other adults when issues arose with teachers.

> Some teachers would openly say things that weren't politically correct and there were times where I had to have somebody speak up for me because as a student, as a child, it wasn't in my place to put them in their place and there were older authorities that I had to go through such as my parents or through their boss and that was just the reality of it.

I found it interesting that despite her adultification (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017; Morris, 2007), Natahlia recognized the distinction between adult and child, even though she, as a Black girl, does not receive this same courtesy. Adultification is described as dismissing Black kids' childhood experiences while viewing and treating them as adults (Epstein et al., 2017). Additionally, I agree that children should not have to put adults in their place nor educate them on their lack of cultural competency; however, they should be instilled with the voice and agency to stand up for themselves. Similar to Arielle's recollection below,

> I think they were slightly intimidated by me because I was that outspoken and I was seeing them all the time. I was always like at the board of trustees or education policy committee and I think they knew if they ever stepped out of line that I would call them out on it. So, I think they all sort of tiptoed around me a little.

There were a couple of students that recalled having good relationships with their teachers. Jordan shared,

> I had a really good relationship with my teachers because I talked in class and asked questions and contributed to discussions. I got the Faculty Award for three years because . . . since I wasn't really involved with my peers a lot I shifted my focus to excelling in my academics . . . reaching out to my teachers, going after school to talk to them about stuff. So, I had a good relationship with them and I think they really respected that too. Like not really pointing out . . . like using us as examples or props in class. Like, you know, we're talking about Black people. History classes are always an issue. When it came to talking about the civil rights movement and all that stuff. Just kind of like not really using us as props and they would kind of just overdo it. I feel like a lot of teachers, they either overdo it or they just don't do it at all. Like it's not really a balance.

Although Jordan had positive relationships with some teachers and met with them outside of class, she was still very aware of being singled out as the representative for her race. Her

statement also illuminates the fact that many teachers in PWIS lack the skills to effectively conduct conversations about race. Tauni also had positive relationships with her teachers. She stated, “I absolutely loved my teachers, and they made [the school] what it is now. So, I think the faculty was a huge pull in why every day I did like showing up to school and being there and being present.” It goes without saying that administrators and teachers have a dynamic impact on student development. Therefore, it is gravely important for Black girls to have school leaders and teachers that appreciate and validate their life experience. Parents are another constituency with which Black women and girls experienced controversial incidents.

“You’re a child and you’re talking to a parent.” Due to the reliance on tuition and traditions in these schools, parents play a huge role in the school community. The parent’s association is extremely important and often have a hand in decision making. In this section, participants describe alarming occurrences with parents. Tauni recalled,

> And then another incident, we had senior tea, a few of the senior moms would get food for the seniors for lunch, it was Monday through Thursday they would get food for us. And they had an Instagram page where they post about what the food for tomorrow was going to be and on Wednesdays they did Where’s Waldo and on one Wednesday it was like they were going to have southern food. They put Waldo on the plantation and I saw the post and I commented on it. I was like, Waldo is literally on a plantation and then proceeded to screenshot it and send it to one of our affinity group faculty sponsors. The things that they were going to have by the way was fried chicken, macaroni and cheese and I’m pretty sure there was also watermelon on the list.

Not only was this incident clearly racist, Tauni shared that the only correction to the issue was deleting the post. There was never any discussion of the incident. When experiences like this occur and administrators fail to address them directly, it sends the message to the dominant group that their actions are okay or weren’t that serious. It also tells marginalized groups that their concerns aren’t important. Below, Camille discusses the adult/child issue,

> It’s hard when you’re in that situation and you’re a child and you’re talking to a parent or an adult, a guardian or someone you have to be respectful to so most times in that

> situation I would just stay to myself, try to be quiet. I wouldn't really go back at them but a lot of those times it would be hard for me to stay friends with kids even if I knew that they weren't the same as their parents or didn't believe the same things as their parents. It's hard for you to be friends with someone or go to their house when you know that that's what their family is like about so yea.

The intricacies of the power dynamics between a white, most likely wealthy, adult and a Black girl are abundant. Schools must include parents when doing equity and inclusion work (Horsford & Clark, 2015), which is very difficult for PWIS because many fear upsetting the parent community and potentially losing donations and/or families. Though there's a shift in dynamics, being that Black women are also adults, the administrators and teachers experienced similar types of issues as Black girls. Faith remembered,

> I would really get a lot of pushback from white parents when I would test the students. And I would say, well, I don't think, you know, he's not prepared to be in my class. And it was like, "I don't understand because in ninth grade he made As." Well that's ninth grade and this is an advanced placement college level course. He's in 10th grade and here's what I expect. And it was always pushback from [the] white male's parents, not the girls so much. The girls' parents would always say, well what do you think? Do you think if she did this? Do you think if she did that? And it was like, okay, well I just want her to be in your regular class because I know it's still going to be an academically rigorous course if you teach a regular section, but the [parents of] white males would always go above my head. Their parents would always meet with me. They would skip the department chair and just go straight to the division director or sometimes to the head of school.

In this situation, gender clearly had a significant impact for Faith when dealing with parents of white boys versus white girls. Black women in these schools often encounter blatant disrespect to their person as well as their scholarship. Dorothy discusses hiring a speaker that was recommended by the Head of School,

> He was a bit fresh, a little inappropriate in some of his examples, and it was just not a good event. The next day I received several calls and parents were thinking, you know, "where did you get this guy" or were saying, "where did you get him from"? And you know, "we drove out in the snow." One lady said, "I don't know about your people, but that was not acceptable to us. And maybe where you grew up and with your people, you would've found his comments humorous or acceptable. Maybe in your community and maybe with your people, but in the [school name] community and with our people, it's

> not acceptable. Maybe you're out of your league, maybe you need to have a conversation with someone else so they can help you make decisions that you're not used to making." She refused to give me her name. I was actually in tears. I tried not to cry. It was the fact that the woman continued to say with "your people" and "your people" and "your people." In my head, that's an expression used to mean, people of color or Black people and it's a negative term.

This was clearly a traumatic experience for Dorothy during her first year working in an independent school. Not only did this parent disrespect Dorothy professionally, but attached her personally. The mom was essentially telling her that she wasn't cut out to do her job, and maybe she didn't belong in their school community. The emotional toll that these encounters have on Black women and girl's psyche is detrimental to their mental and physical health (Robinson & Ward, 1991).

"You literally just disrespected me." Not only do Black women and girls have problematic encounters and relationships with individuals that are members of the dominant group, many also experience strained experiences with Black men and boys. These complexities emerged throughout all of the participant interviews. The adults and students explained that Black boys deemed Black girls unsuitable romantic companions. Ceslee exclaimed,

> And you know, Black boys liked being friends with Black girls or girls have things where they like Black boys. But for Black girls it's like, you know, the Black boys sometimes would openly say that they only like white girls and the white boys you don't really have to ask if they like Black girls, you just assume that that's not the case.

From Ceslee's observation it seems as though Black boys buy in to society's norms in this school setting which deem white girls attractive and worthy of dating. Faith recalled,

> So at least since the last seven years, the Black girls never get asked to the prom by Black boys. If they do, it's the Black girls who as my students would say, "well, you know, they look like, they light skinned, they have long hair. They not checking for me." I'm just like, what? And then I saw it play out. But what was crazy is they would hang tight with them all the time in the diversity office and ke-keing[1] and oh yeah, we cool, even date. But then when prom rolls around you not taking her to prom. So why are you not taking

[1] "Ke-keing" is a term in African American Vernacular English that means laughing.

> her to prom, let's talk about that. Are we going to be honest about why you're not taking her to prom or we're not going to be honest? And the parents wouldn't be honest and it's like, you know why your Black boy is taking this little white girl to prom but I know you're not going to say that, but you know why he's taking her to prom. One little Black boy was honest with me. So, he was like, "listen, I like her and I like her, but you know, it's prom." I was like, "no." I mean I knew what he meant, but I was like, "no, what do you mean"? He was like, "you know, our parents know each other." I was like, "oh, so you know she's not going to do anything sexually with you and if it did happen you might get in trouble so you not going to take her to prom. Is that what you're saying to me"? And they'd be like, "well . . . " And I'm like, "that's what you're saying."

Yet again, this excerpt confirms the notion that Black boys in these spaces believe lighter skin and long hair is beautiful. However, it also explores the idea that may solely view Black girls as strictly friends due to their familial relationships. Additionally, Jordan shared an incident where she felt disrespected by a Black boy in her class,

> We were in class and there was another Black kid, a Black boy in class and one of the white kids said to him on Facebook, look at this nigger, look at him, like watermelon, Yada, Yada, Yada. Whole bunch of racist stuff and one of the white kids is like, are you really gonna let him say that stuff around you and the Black kid is like, oh well, I can say cracker then he can say the N-word. And I'm like, right behind there and I'm like, okay. So, I guess I have no say in this. You literally just disrespected me in front of me.

Through the participants' interviews and my own observations, it seems as though Black boys seek to distance themselves from their Blackness as much as possible. In Jordan's situation, this Black boy completely ignored the fact that she might feel differently about these racist remarks. It can be extremely disheartening to constantly experience rejection and outright disrespect from individuals who are supposed to be fighting with you. Patriarchy affords Black men and boys the opportunity to grasp a level of privilege that Black women and girls in these spaces will never obtain (Collins, 1986).

"Black boys are generally more accepted." When asked why she thought there was a difference in their experiences Nakiya stated,

> I think Black boys are generally accepted more at those kinds of institutions. It could be because they're being tokenized, or in a nonsexual way, fetishized, just because of the

> glamour of everything that is bad with Black men. And you know like white people are fascinated with this hood trauma, this hood stuff and Black boys are able to come to these spaces from or not and either act like they are . . . just be taken as that, that be accepted as being their character traits and making the white people around them cooler.

Nakiya's reflection speaks directly to Ispa-Landa's (2013) research on Black students' experiences in affluent schools. Being seen as "cool" and "athletic" affords Black boys the opportunity to attempt to truly assimilate into the school community. Tauni affirmed,

> They would bond with students over like, oh we're on the same team together. That was enough of a benchmark for them to make friends. So, it was easier for them. Whereas for Black girls it was like, you worked to maintain the friendships that you had.

Despite being involved around campus and playing sports, Black girls were still unable to be accepted at the same rate or level as Black boys. Dakota expressed,

> I think it's because like every Black guy was an athlete, and a really good athlete, like don't get me wrong, you know, they were good athletes and the school was big on sports so they gave a lot to what the school valued the most. And the Black girls, I think with the exception of [a few of us] weren't involved in a lot of school sports, were involved in a lot of other things and a lot of very meaningful things. But it just wasn't the same. Even me and [my friend], we played almost every single sport at that school, and especially her she's a phenomenal athlete and it just wasn't the same because it gets into the whole debate about women's sports and men's sports and so that's different. But I would say yes, they were treated differently with the faculty and as well as with the students.

Here, Dakota touches on a longstanding double standard regarding men and women's athleticism. Men's sports have always been deemed superior and more important. Along this same vein, Danyelle, a teacher, revealed her thoughts about Black men in independent schools,

> I think the men since they're so rare, they get like a special pedestal that they're on like Oh, we have these Black men like they're unicorns or something. And especially the new one, we have a new college counselor like maybe two or three years in and he's young and he's handsome and he's fun. The little white boys love him because they like to talk to him about rap music and you know suburban white boys and that they actually know a Black person and he gives them dap. I think the men get this special kind of treatment and then I think the women get in another little. . . . We have to work really hard not to be seen as aggressive or harsh. We don't get the same kind of love that they get in that way.

Black men and boys should never play into the divisiveness that materializes from white heteropatriarchial norms. Instead they should stand alongside Black women and girls supporting and assisting them when necessary.

"It's important for us to have Black male counterparts." Despite these encounters, participants stressed the need for and importance of Black men and boys in these spaces. Nakiya asserted,

> I do think having Black boys . . . that was also influential because having [names friends] them there made the world of difference my freshman year. Freshman year was one of my best years of high school because I didn't have to worry about people picking on me. They were like older brothers to us. They made sure we were good and so having somebody who had been through the process and could give advice and protect us . . . tell us what we needed to do and what we didn't need to do really made the difference that year.

This excerpt clearly shows that positive relationships with Black boys are conceivable and influential, arguably for both sides. Sonya said, "it's really important for Black girls to see Black men working in their school. It's important for us to have Black male counterparts." Tabetha went on to say,

> As far as that, no males. And the reason I keep saying no males is because although the little girls can see Black women in the school. Not seeing a Black male still causes them to be underdeveloped in knowing how to react to Black men. And the same thing with our young Black males.

Although Black women and girls' relationships with Black men and boys are tense, not surprisingly, participants still believed in their counterparts and desired their presence in these spaces. Black women have been crusading for Black men since the dawn of time (Bambara, 2013). "Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race. . . . We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men against sexism" (Combahee River Collective, 2017; Taylor, 2017, p 19). Black men must be

accountable for their actions and recognize how they impact Black women. Additionally, Black boys should be taught to love and respect Black girls in spite of the pressure to conform.

It was gravely important to understand how participants feel and felt in independent schools as well as how they coped with all of the trauma they experience in these communities.

“You Just Let It Roll Off Your Shoulders”

The age-old stereotype that Black women and girls are strong, indestructible, and now magical beings, while true in some respects, invalidates their humanness and right to express their feelings (Harris, 2001; Harris-Perry, 2011; Smith, 1983). Oftentimes Black women and girls internalize this invincible label and contradict their own feelings in the same breath. This notion surfaced throughout several interviews. Danyelle proclaimed,

> Oh, I actually love going to work. I love teaching. I want to teach forever. I’ve thought about wanting to work from home so I could be available to my baby more. But then upon looking I was like, oh no. I really do enjoy my job and I think the environment that I’m in lets me do the best job that I can do. Like if I’m going to be a teacher, this lets me be the best teacher that I can be. And on the days that I feel real, like I just had a thing go on at school and I just felt real Black and alone, but then I just come home to my Black husband and my Black baby and my friends in my Black neighborhood and I block it out. Almost like I have separate lives, you know. So, I do like going to work. If I had to go to work, this is where I would want to be.

Here we see, despite the negative encounters, Danyelle still felt as though it was a good environment in which to teach. Her world outside of the workplace is consumed with Blackness, which allows her to decompress and be herself. Outside activities and relationships grounded in Blackness are essential for mental health and positive racial identity development. When asked how she coped with her experiences, Jacqueline asserted matter of factly, “I’m really good at what I do. I show up every day and I’m really good at what I do and people know it and you know that’s my best revenge.” It’s clear that participants chose to cope in different ways,

whether it be compartmentalizing or throwing themselves into work; however, some might contend that these actions are not truly dealing with the root of the issues. Dakota disclosed,

> Then I think a lot of things you just let roll off your shoulders, just microaggressions and like little things that people say you just kind of okay, like you're ignorant, we know this, you've established this. We've tried to help you, there's nothing . . . so you just let it roll off. And then we all just kind of talked once or twice every day at least my sophomore, junior, senior year . . . the girls and I would just, you know, talk in choir or something, and we would kind of do it in such a way that it was like making fun of the situation. And I think that's kinda how we coped with it which sounds really sad now that I'm thinking about it.

Resorting to humor when discussing traumatic events might be frowned upon by some, but on some level for these girls it allowed them to release some of their stress and trauma through laughter and friendship. Similarly, Arielle shared,

> Once it got to a certain point, like about 10th or 11th grade, somewhere in between there I stopped trying and I was like I'm not talking to any of you unless I absolutely have to. And I just kept to myself and I was like I'm here to get my education and that's what I'm doing.

It can be truly exhausting trying to crusade for your humanity and continuously face exclusion and discrimination. With such small numbers of Black people in independent schools, and especially Black women and girls, those that are in these spaces oftentimes seek out the Black community that is present as well as outside the school. Jordan expressed,

> I kinda just surrounded myself with Black people the best way I could. I would hang out with them, sit with them at lunch. On the weekends, I would go to Black parties and go to my Black church. So just kind of be able to surround myself with as many Black people that I can to just kind of raise that confidence and when I'm around Black people I don't feel alone.

Similar to Danyelle above, Jordan recognized the importance of having a strong Black support system. She also realized that these relationships gave her the confidence she needed when it was time to go back to school. Several students talked about feeling alone and/or isolated during their time at their alma maters.

“There were really, really, really dark times.” As one of only a handful of Black students and even less Black girls, it can be difficult to find a solid, affirming community in PWIS. For several participants, they were the only Black girl in their grade, in the high school, or in their classes. Some participants isolated themselves from the larger community for protection, some were physically isolated by teachers, and some just merely felt alone in such a white, affluent space. Natahlia maintained,

> Yeah so in seventh grade there were only three Black girls including me. And I really didn’t have a lot of friends in seventh grade and I think that was a time in my life where I felt the most alone because I felt like nobody could really understand where I was coming from.

Lacking positive affirmation at school can negatively impact Black girls academically and emotionally. Jordan remembered being picked last, “because I was kind of isolated group projects were horrible . . . I would always be picked as last. And since I was quiet it was kind of like I was not smart.” One can only imagine trying to focus on school work with feelings of inadequacy flooding your mind, due to how your peers and/or teachers treat you at school.

As a coping mechanism, participants often removed themselves from the larger community in order to find some peace throughout their day. Arielle stated, “I sort of isolated myself. Sometimes I would just be like, okay, I don’t have the energy to eat lunch with all of you people. So, I would eat in the study hall room.” We’ve all heard the argument about Black students isolating themselves and not putting themselves out there. However, I believe that Arielle found that she needed this alone time in order to deal with the things she was experiencing at her school. Natahlia recognized the emotional damage feeling alone had on her,

> Definitely took an emotional toll on me because I’ve had to feel like I was alone and feeling like I was alone didn’t stop in seventh grade. There were really, really, really dark times during my senior year when I felt alone.

Natahlia did not give any more detail on this reflection, but I imagine as one of less than five Black girls in her grade, even with her Black girlfriends, there were still strenuous moments and feelings she dealt with internally. Sometimes organically or in response to a follow up question, several participants detailed the mental and physical effects of their experiences.

"I'm thinking about being black all day." Generally speaking, Black people are hyper aware of their race and how they are perceived in certain spaces, especially predominantly white spaces. We oftentimes have to critically analyze our actions and responses beforehand to attempt to ensure we are not perceived negatively. This constant mental work, coupled with racist encounters, is mentally and physically damaging. Although most of the adult participants were attuned to the psychological harm of these environments, the students realized it only after they were in college. Tabetha acknowledged that, "Black girls [don't] really get the emotional stability and understanding that they need" to be their most authentic, true selves. Nakiya exclaimed,

> But I do feel a certain level of exhaustion because I feel culturally exhausted is what I like to call it because I kind of have to go through the day worried about who I am. I got better at focusing more on school and more on my work but it was kind of frustrating to have to think about what you say and how much you expose of yourself because you can only say so much in that kind of space.

She went on to talk about how the school impacted her mental health,

> Do I think that it affected my growth as a human, as a person, in my development, I definitely would say that it did because I wasn't dealing with any of the emotional aspects of it. I was working, I was organizing in some ways. I wasn't doing any emotional reflection at the time and really consider how upset I was in that environment. Whenever people ask me about it. . . . And because I have a lot of reasons why I'm going through the things I'm going through, I think that school added to the mental health problems that I was facing, but I mean they're not like . . . mental health is in some ways biological and so, I mean I couldn't have escaped my mental health by not going to [that school] is what I'm saying. I was going to have those experiences regardless. But I think that [the school] did impact them. Now as I'm going through dealing with my mental health, I think about how I didn't know how to cope and what I was using to cope was just throwing myself into my work, which is not healthy. I think now I'm unlearning that.

Not surprisingly, it is clear that Black girls, and arguably the Black women as well, are not equipped to cope with constant racist experiences in a healthy way. The rise of even acknowledging mental health in the Black community is only just now beginning. Being strong and suppressing feelings is the age-old way of dealing with trauma in the Black community. In many cases, especially when not already equipped with the tools, it takes being removed from a situation to truly dissect its impact on your life. Nakiya also shared all the concerns she dealt with every day at school,

> So, I'm thinking about being Black all day in a white space. I don't really want to be in that space. I was concerned about that all day. Especially in high school. I was concerned with the money, my family's money and keeping my scholarship but also getting a scholarship for college. That was a really big part so I was always worried about class. I was always worried about my grades. I was worried about making friends that were Black because I feel like I wanted to have Black friends so I wasn't worried much about making white friends, which would put me out of the social status almost entirely. And then I was worried about high school things like dating. I didn't date anyone that I was at school with ever because there weren't a lot of Black guys. And I really only liked Black guys.

Not only are Black girls dealing with "normal" high school stress, they are also dealing with racial issues that arguably nobody should have to, but especially not in high school. Natahlia noted,

> Honestly being in that environment has psychologically affected me. It's not that it's given me like anxiety or depression or anything like that, but honestly it was a traumatic experience at times and it wasn't all bad, but looking back I really don't. I really try to block out some of the things that I experienced there. And a lot of it was emotional.

This stress and mental trauma sometimes manifests into physical symptoms much like the ones Faith experienced.

> But going to work at the school where I told you the diversity director was thinking it was funny that white people were calling me by the wrong name and you know, white parents are questioning am I academically prepared to teach their children even though I've been doing this for eight years. That's when I got high blood pressure. That's how bad it was. And I'm nowhere near overweight at all, but I had to go to the doctor and I was put on high blood pressure medicine because of that stress, *be-cause of that stress*.

> So, when I tell people, oh, I'm on hypertension medicine, they're like but you're not overweight and I'm like, I'm Black and I'm stressed and I'm working in this space. Like I'm glad that's the only thing I'm on, you know what I mean? But going to work there, like when I say I hated it, I would cry when Sunday rolled around. I mean it could be just starting, I could be, getting ready to go to church and be like, oh lord tomorrow's Monday. Why Jesus is it Monday, like oh I don't know if I could do it. I used up all my sick days. I mean I was just like, I can't do it, I can't, I can't. Like my hair was falling out.

Several scholars have noted the negative physical and psychological effects of racism on lives of people of color and women (Clark, Anders, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Landrine, Klonoff, Gibbs, Manning, & Lund, 1995; Robinson & Ward, 1991). Yet and still, we often have to work in predominantly white spaces, where we most often have to deal with discrimination on some level. Despite combating these emotional and physical issues, several participants proclaimed that they "would do it all over again" or described why they continued to work in these schools, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

As expressed in this chapter, Black women and girls endure gendered-racial discrimination and receive dehumanizing messages that seek to diminish their self-esteem. Participants were highly aware of how they were perceived and why they were treated differently. In PWIS, socioeconomic status undeniably exacerbates gendered-racial issues. The racist experiences participants endured impacted many of them on a psychological and physical level.

Although Black women and girls have similar experiences, the dynamic of these experiences differ due to their location within the school. Similarly, both groups deal with racism and stereotypes such as the angry Black woman/girl. Due to this stereotype, some Black girls opted not to formally report issues. For Black women, to some degree they may feel they can only do so much, because they need to keep their jobs in order to provide for themselves and/or

their families. Black women are experts in their fields, and yet their credentials were constantly questioned by colleagues and parents. Unlike Black girls, Black women have more power and control to leave the school if they so choose. Black girls, however, may feel as though they have no control since their parents are more than likely making educational decisions on their behalf. The social pressure on Black girls during such a crucial developmental time also exacerbates their socialization experiences. Black women, on the other hand, have had time to work through this phase and are more likely to be secure in their identities in this school space.

While Black girls may be receiving a "top tier education," parents and students must not neglect the psychological harm these institutions cause. Black women must also recognize that they are not obligated to stay in these spaces at the expense of their mental and physical health. Though seemingly lengthy, this chapter is still only a snapshot of Black women and girls' experiences in predominantly white, independent schools. This chapter focused primarily on the institution and the school community's impact on Black women and girls. The following chapter focuses on how Black women and girls build community amongst themselves, the significance of these relationships and also how they practice agency and resist these systems.

Chapter 5

Relationships and Resistance

Relationships: Othermothering, Fictive Kin, and Mentoring

The relationships Black women and girls cultivated amongst themselves proved to be imperative to navigating and resisting independent schools. Both Black women and girls discussed how crucial it is to have others that share their experience in these spaces. Their sheer presence validates and affirms one another's truth. The intergenerational relationships between Black women and girls is arguably just as important as the peer-to-peer relationships. It is important to note that participants candidly expressed that they did not always get along, like each other, and felt that Black girls, specifically, shouldn't be forced to be friends with one another. Faith, an administrator, concurs,

> Black girls are different and don't make the presumption that because I'm Black and you're Black, we gone automatically connect. No, we not. We may connect over Black girlness and we're not gonna clown each other and we have each other's back but we not gone be together all the time. I may not have the same interests and they are really bad about doing that. Let me say this, for the littles, you know, K-5, yes, but soon as you hit middle school you can't just think you can lump all the Black girls together and they all gone be together and kumbaya and love each other. It's not gone happen.

Faith's reflection hits a pervasive stereotype regarding the Black community; that we are all the same. When in fact, as Faith asserts, we are all different, have had distinct experiences, and possess unique interests. Therefore, just because Black girls share the same race, doesn't mean they will automatically be friends. In the end, though, all participants expressed that their sisterships (James-Gallaway, Griffin, Kirkwood, in press) with one another, despite common conflicts, were instrumental to their survival in these institutions.

Black women faculty/staff relationships. It can be difficult to find a safe space in predominantly white communities where people that look like you are far and few. Black women

are scarce in independent schools, and when they are present, nine times out of ten they're in staff roles with little connection to the student body. When they are fortunate enough to connect with one another, their relationships present a space that "affirm[s] one another's humanity, specialness, and right to exist" (Collins, 2000, p. 102). When asked what her relationship was like with other Black women at her school, Renee, a teacher, exclaimed,

> Pretty great. Pretty like life savery. Very. Like I don't know that I would still be here if they weren't here as well. A lot of it is kind of like, you know, we catch each other walking around the corner and something happened earlier. We're talking through our teeth to the person to try to let them know what's happening and get some mirrored comfort or feedback about it. I think we all have somewhat of a shared understanding. Well, not all of us, a number of us, maybe the majority of us have a shared understanding of the ways the school has failed us in particular and we make no mistake to consider [it] a coincidence. And I think that informs a lot of our relationship unfortunately. I think we all have somewhat of a shared understanding. Well, not all of us, a number of us, maybe the majority of us have a shared understanding of the ways the school has failed us in particular and we make no mistake to consider [it] a coincidence.

Renee's use of the phrase "live savery" struck me deeply because it is a very vivid way to describe the significant impact and necessity of their relationships. Her excerpt clearly illustrates Black women's understanding of and the functions of their relationships. Diane, a lower school director, said,

> Very good. I think that we're all very supportive of each other. We all work very hard. We're all carrying more than we should in order to get this job done. I think all of us feel, you know, we're very aware that we're all very well regarded, very well respected but we also recognize that there's a fragility to that. There have been times where there are issues around intersectionality. That's our challenge and particularly when they come from men, particularly powerful men of color. We recognize that we only have each other to be able to tell the truth about that experience and to seek out support.

Like a few other participants, Diane recognized how the intersections of her racial and gender identity created a unique experience to which only other Black women could identify. Black women's relationships are versatile, in that they take on different purposes depending on the

need. Older Black women in these communities oftentimes step in to guide and advise the younger women. Mariam, former director of admission, explained,

> For the younger people, for the most part I kind of serve as a mentor. And then some people just really good friends. We hang out, you know, sometimes you just got to go and have your time and go to lunch or whatever and not invite others [white people]. Just so that you can have your time.

Mariam stresses the importance of Black women stepping away from these spaces and cherishing alone time to commune with one another. This sacred time provides Black women the opportunity to shed their masks, vent, and be their authentic selves. Internalized racism can take many forms and in some cases "all skin ain't kin," meaning that not all Black women (or girls) will get along and be friends with one another. Internalized racism is described as persons of color believing in the racial stereotypes about their culture, as well as conforming to the status quo through "self-hatred or own-group denigration as expressed through pro-White/anti-Black attitudes" (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011, p. 133). Faith, an administrator, shared,

> We know we always have that one Black person in our community who is iffy and they want to be what I call the Black Unicorn. They want to be the Special Negro, you know, it's like, well, no you can't take my spot, only one of us can shine.

This internalized racism might manifest in different ways. For one adult participant, her boss, another Black woman, was extremely hard on Dorothy because she held herself to extremely high standards. Dorothy, an admission director, asserted,

> In terms of my transition, my Head of School was, I think the hardest one to help me assimilate or help acclimate me to this community. She had very unique expectations of me. So, it's very interesting. Here I am with someone who looks like me and she made it harder. Because she's an African American woman and I believe that she sees me as an African American woman who is a reflection on her. So, I think that she holds herself to an extremely high standard, very, very, very high standard, and she wanted me to hold myself to those same standards. So, there are differences between me and other members of the leadership team and her expectations of us in terms of dress, in terms of how we wear our hair in terms of how we present ourselves. There are things that they can say and do that I cannot.

Perfectionism and the idea of being twice as good continues to hold weight in the Black community. Although sometimes there are struggles, in most cases, Black people find companionship amongst one another. Sonya, a diversity director, maintains,

> Well, I think it's really cool that you can come into a space and it's kinda like, you know, you'll kind of like size each other up but you quickly can assess, is she on our team or is she not? And once it's realized like, oh, she's on our team, you don't really have to do . . . it's just the beauty of being Black women. We're all in this together kind of thing. And there's an assumed level of trust and connection, which I appreciate. So, from the front desk to the assistant teachers to me and [person's name] to the lady in the business office, because that's it. We just know that we can talk to each other. And it wasn't like so eehh . . . we just dive right in. "LISTTENN let me tell you about this crazy white girl!" So, I appreciate that.

The camaraderie and friendships amongst Black women provide a source of empowerment and resistance (Denton, 1990; Collins, 2000; Niles, 2007). Although most often the conversations around affinity groups speaks to students (Chase, 2008; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Gaztambide-Fernández & DiAquoi, 2010; Jacobs, 2017; White, 2013), it is clear that these spaces are necessary for adults in these schools as well. Black girls' relationships with one another are strikingly similar and often take on the form of peer-mentorship described in the JAD framework (Minnett, James-Gallaway, & Owens, 2019).

Black girls' relationships. Several of the students described their Black girlfriends as sisters, suggesting a deeper attachment to one another. These sisterships (James-Gallaway et al., in press) offer refuge from discrimination, loneliness, outsider status, and inferiority. Their relationships took on various forms with peer-mentoring being one of the most important aspects. Nakiya conveyed,

> I saw myself being sort of like a role model for some of them which was exciting because like I said I wasn't interested in appeasing the white people around me at [my school] and I think that that's a big life lesson that I learned early and I think that being able to show other Black girls that that's important to your mental health and your growth as a human towards confidence is important. I think Black women are often not told to be confident.

> They're not always encouraged. And I think that me having confidence in that white space was important for other girls to see.

Nakiya recognized the value she added to other Black girls' lives and what it meant for their overall well-being. Black girls are acutely aware of the injustices and stereotypes they face in predominantly white spaces (Jacobs, 2017). This awareness allows them to maneuver through these institutions more authentically. Knowing this, as they get older, they become role models for the younger girls, also sharing with them how to navigate the school and its culture. Nakiya also recalled,

> I think she was in sixth grade and she came to school because she'd never worn her hair natural before she came to school and she had just washed it. Oh, my goodness. Her mother did not do anything to her hair. I just felt horrible. They pulled me out of class. I did not know what was going on because it was the middle school principal or like the Reverend came and got me out of class. I was like what's going on? They were like, yeah, there's a girl, and we don't know what to do with her hair. You know, you wear your hair natural, is there anything you can do? And I remember they called me [and two Black women]. And we all braided her hair for her. I just remember how confident she felt when we finished her hair. It was those kinds of things that made me feel like I was playing an important role in the lives of other girls at the school.

The actions of the older student and the Black women are more than commendable. They stepped in and assisted this young girl when there was no one else in that space to help her. In the end, the sixth grader returned to class confident in her appearance, thanks to an older Black girl and two Black women.

As mentioned above regarding Black women, Black girls also felt that they were obligated to be friends because they were Black girls and strongly opposed this phenomenon. Nakiya explained,

> All of the Black girls did feel a camaraderie. I think sometimes it did feel like it was a required camaraderie though. I think that's unfair because there are so many reasons to be friends outside of being Black and so we should've been allowed the liberty to decide our friends on our own. But we all had an understanding that, you know, we did support each other, we made sure that everybody was good and if something did happen where one of us was wronged, we all felt [it] because it could have been one of us.

Relationships are complex, and although being Black girls is a baseline, there are also other factors that impact with whom someone chooses to be friends. Black girls should not be expected or forced to be friends with one another. I do believe, as the student above mentioned, on a basic level they should have each other's back in these spaces where genuine love and support is often lacking.

As a researcher, I believe it's important to also understand Black women's observations about Black girls' relationships in these institutions. Faith, a teacher and mother of a young Black girl, described,

> All her little friends that she talks about outside of kindergarten are older Black girls, she love[s] em. "Mama, [other child's name], she's in third grade. She's a Brown girl like me." She loves that. Like when I drop her off, the fifth graders help them get out the car. She always wants it to be a Black little fifth grader. She's like oh mommy I know her I hope she helps me get out of the car.

From this excerpt, it's clear that at a young age Black girls recognize when they have mirrors or in other words, other or older girls that look like them. Mariam, an administrator, affirmed,

> They tend to have pretty strong relationships with each other. I think the Black girls have better relationships with each other than the Black boys. When they get older it's like, some of the ones when they're little they hang out with everybody and then as they get older, third, fourth, fifth through middle school, they find their Black girl relationships. You see them hanging out with everyone. [But] you definitely see the Black girls together.

When asked why she thought they hung out more as they got older she responded, "I think it was noticing they needed each other and needing that kind of relationship with other Black girls." Though complex, as any relationship might be, the sisterships (James-Gallaway et al., in press) and peer-mentoring (Minnett et al,, 2019) between Black girls is crucial to their success in predominantly white, independent schools. Additionally, the relationships between Black women and Black girls are also essential for each group.

Intergenerational relationships. It's imperative for Black girls to have Black women in their schools to not only confide in but also look to for guidance. Black girlhood is a unique, complex experience that only Black women understand how to navigate. These relationships provide Black girls a space to be their authentic selves. Additionally, working with Black girls provides a deeper purpose for Back women while also creating a sacred, safe space for each of them. Dakota declared,

> [They] brought me back to remembering who I was in that community. I think that was one of the things that made me realize that I could pretend, I could play the game all I wanted, but it was never gonna be the same. So I feel like faculty was very positive just because [they] also did a lot to . . . especially for the Black girls there, give us confidence because [they] were such confident women and are so unapologetically who [they] are. And I think to us that showed us just like . . . [they're] both also very educated and smart people. So, it showed us that you can be a strong, independent Black woman but you can also be an impactful, educated, influencer. And I think that was really inspirational to me at least, at least that's my perspective.

This student discussed her attempts to assimilate and distance herself from Black culture, but for her, the Black women at her school brought her back by stepping in, even when she didn't always want it and by just being their true selves in that space. Nakiya shared,

> I think my relationship with [her] is very special for me because we had the same passions. We thought the same about a lot of different topics, different issues and there had been no one else in that space before that felt the same way about those problems. And so, it was exciting to recognize that I could get past this stage and I can get to a level that [she was] at, where I can start making the difference I wanted to see on a large scale. Having that physical example of success and a Black woman that's doing the things that you want to do in your life is impactful. I mean it's not always true but you can't be what you can't see.

The relationships between Black women and girls are extremely personal and oftentimes life changing. When asked what she thought she represented to Black girls, Diane, a lower school division head, replied,

> I think that I represent to them, I think [to] all of them I'm just a really nice lady who likes and loves them. And you know, sees their worth and value. Who sees them. And so, for the most part, for most of my students because you know, they're young, fourth and

> fifth graders are starting to think in terms of racial identity. And I think that it's positive for them that I'm there and I'm available and not just as an administrator, but I'm available to see their worth and to validate their school experience and their life experience and can give voice to the value they bring to the school.

The need for validation for Black women and girls in predominantly white spaces is pivotal. When there are so few in these schools, they often feel alone and that nobody understands their experience. Tabetha, an administrative assistant, affirms,

> We have a student versus staff basketball game and she was dancing [during the halftime performance]. She had been in ballet and she had been in other different dance groups. And I would always watch her. And I kept saying she's not comfortable there. And so, she finally got into the hip hop dance. And I was able to tell her, "I think you found your nitch. You did amazing." And tears literally started to come down and she said, "I appreciate that so much."

Tabetha shared that this particular student was heavyset with very short hair; she was adopted by white parents and had an adopted Black sister, who was thin, with long, permed hair. The student Tabetha spoke of in her excerpt will probably never forget that moment of positive affirmation from a woman who shared many of the same characteristics. When asked about her relationship with Black girls, Jacqueline, an administrator that works at an all-girls school, expressed,

> It's fantastic most of the time until I'm telling them something they're not happy with hearing. But I came in the door unapologetically positioning myself to be an advocate for and support for African American girls in this school. It's important that they see somebody like me here. It's important that I be here and available for them and I think they are getting a sense of that already little by little, bit by bit.

She went on to say,

> I tried to be clear with them and I think they see this, that I am their advocate in getting through their challenges. I think when they interact with me, what they can see is an administrator who really sees them and every aspect of their experience here. And that's why I'm here. It's why I do what I do. I love the work, but that is absolutely my reason for being here. I couldn't do this job if there were no African American students. I mean, it's fine that I'm one of very few Black people on the faculty. I can live with that. But if there were no Black students here I wouldn't be able to be here.

These intergenerational relationships are just as important to Black women as they are for Black girls. For one adult participant, her relationship with Black girls was mother-daughter like, being that she did not have a daughter of her own. Mariam, former admission director, shared,

> I think it's a great feeling and just knowing that I could be a part of their lives. I have a son; I don't have any daughters. People that can kind of fill that role. It was awesome, awesome, awesome being the person who could accept them, you know, having that job. And for some of them just knowing that I'm a part of the experience that's going to change their life and just being able to accept them. And for some just to make that accessible and make sure that they're able to stay there. And you know, something happens with money, making sure they're taken care of. And I can still do that now as a member of the board because I'm like, okay, I'm gone so call me if you need to.

Inextricably linked, Black women and girls' intergenerational relationships feed a need that nobody else can fill. Having been through life as a Black girl and knowing the hardships they face, Black women are able to assist Black girls through a critical period of development. For Black women, Black girls inspire a hope and purpose that is deeply personal.

Mothering. The significance of their roles as mothers and lessons from their own mothers, for both adult and student participants, emerged organically throughout the interviews. A couple of student participants also shared that they did not want to burden their mothers with the racism they faced at school. An older woman and the first Black woman to work at her school, deemed herself the mother of all the Black women faculty and staff. Tabetha expressed,

> I am the mother and I put myself in that position because I had to start out with no one here to help walk me through this independent school experience. I let them know that I'm available to talk to them. I have plenty of shoulder that they can cry on and they have come to me. I've listened to them. I've directed them as best as possible too.

Tabetha uses her own life experiences in this school environment to guide the advice and coping strategies she shares with the younger Black women (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Collins, 2000; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015: Phillips, 2006). Interestingly, two students shared that they did not

always tell their mothers what they were going through at school, because they didn't want them to worry or feel responsible. Jordan shared,

> I had my mom but certain things I just didn't feel comfortable talking to her about. Because usually when I brought that up to her, she was like, "oh, I didn't want you to go to this school, I'm sorry." Like she just kind of made it on her and I didn't want to feel like I was blaming her for putting me in white schools my entire life. So, I didn't really feel comfortable in talking to her about that.

Another student, Caroline, explained,

> They called my mom once when I was applying to college, like your daughter is an irresponsible student, she's not filling out the forms dah dah dah but . . . and literally while I was right next to my mom, they were yelling at me. And my mom was like "I told her how to do this. I advised her, what the hell are you talking about, why are you yelling at my daughter like this"? So, my mom would defend me. My mom also didn't know all the racist incidents because I didn't want to concern her. I was like you know they're paying for my education so I didn't want . . . You know, my parents have enough to worry about.

Although they had the support of their mothers, they still felt that they weren't able to share everything with them. The first student had other Black women and girls in her school to talk to, but the second student did not, which meant the majority of the time she was dealing with many of these issues on her own. A few Black women faculty/staff shared the lessons their mothers, who in some cases were also teachers, taught them and how they continue to carry those with them throughout their lives.

Black women's lessons from their mothers. In the Black community, Black mothers impart essential life lessons to their daughters, such as being strong, resilient, and independent (Collins, 1987; Davis, 1981). Again, Black women know first-hand the challenges their daughters will inevitably face in the real world. Lolita, an admission director asserted,

> I grew up with a strong African American woman as my mom in education that kind of already fought those battles. Like my mom, when she started teaching, she helped to integrate some of the schools in Tennessee and one of her first jobs was going into an all-white school being the only Black teacher. And so, I think in many ways that was a struggle for her. But that was a blessing for me because she's passed along those lessons;

> at the end of the day people will see what they want, but you were going to be consistent and you are going to be confident in your value and they will adapt based on what you do and based on what you say and based on how you carry yourself. I feel like I carry with me those lessons and that mentality.

The stories of Black mothers serve as blueprints for their daughters, showing them what they should or shouldn't do, but most importantly how to handle stressful and sometimes dehumanizing situations. Similarly, Jacqueline, a teacher, shared,

> My mother was an early practitioner of differentiated instruction, for me and for my brother. And that just really boiled down to what worked for him didn't necessarily work for me and vice versa. So, my mother would repeat herself and say the same thing to us four different ways. We're like, yes, we heard you the first three times you said it there's no need to say the fourth one, but you know, she would find different ways to present the same information to us. She would find different ways to demonstrate the same idea for us over and over. So, I never think of teaching as a complete process. I guess that's what I learned from her. There's always something to learn. There's some other way to deliver curriculum which enhances mastery and understanding of students. It's never a one and done.

She went on to say,

> [My mother] would always remind me not to stay somewhere where I'm not valued and appreciated. And she said never let anyone at a job, don't let them think that you need them. They need you. She was like, as soon as they feel like you need them, they'll do anything they want to you. She was like they will misuse [you]. And so, to be honest with you that's really how I cope with those situations. It was my mom. I talked to her about everything.

These lessons are part of a storied tradition amongst Black women where our success, happiness, and freedom are inherently, forever connected. Some women, a few that talked about their mother's influence, shared how they prepare their own daughters to attend independent schools.

What they instill in their daughters that attend these schools. Although Black parents were not the focus of this study, I found it beneficial to talk to the adult participants about their daughters who also attended independent schools. Knowing the intricacies of these spaces and what they themselves endure, I wondered what they instilled in their young girls in order to prepare them for this school environment. Sonya, a diversity director replied,

> They have a level of comfort talking about their Blackness and other people's racial identity and I love it. So, it's important for me to model for them and to convey implicitly and explicitly that being Black is fine. Yes, there are challenges. Yes, we are treated unfairly and yes, there are systems and structures that disproportionately impact Black people. We need to know that. But they still want to be us. And the other day [one of my daughters] was like, "Mommy, Black people are the smartest people." I said, "you're damn right. We absolutely are."

Sonya makes it her priority to affirm her twin daughters' identities as Black girls and also arming them with the knowledge they need to stand up for themselves. Faith, a teacher, conveyed,

> We're very intentional about making sure that we attend a Black church, we're Catholic but our church is Black. She's in a class where there are Black girls. She's in a school where there are Black girls who love all of their Blackness with their braids and their twists and their big puffs and curls. We're also mindful that she is in a privileged space and coming from a privileged house, you know, we travel, you go to French school, take violin lessons, you're in ballet. So, then I also still balance it where I never want her to think that she's a better Black girl than the Black girl who doesn't get to do this. So, the balance in that is, she said she wanted to be a Brownie girl or girl scout. Well I'm in [a graduate chapter of my sorority] and they have a huge community center in [the city], and they do phenomenal things and so they have a girl scout troop. I was like, humph [you gone join] an all-Black girl scout troop

In this excerpt, Faith touches on two very different but equally important lessons she instills in her daughter. Not only is she teaching her daughter how to navigate a white, affluent space, she also ensures that her daughter does not succumb to internalized racism by surrounding her with different types of Black people from all walks of life. When Black children attend predominantly white schools, it is imperative to surround them with a community outside of school that affirms them and assists them in building a positive racial identity. Jacqueline, an administrator, shared,

> I really do talk to them really candidly about race, about gender, about identity as it informs them. I try to protect them to the degree that I can. I try to make our household a place of Black female positivity everywhere I can. The pictures of the people in our house are family members and Black people. The toys that they had growing up, whenever they could had Black people on them. We bought books and stories about Black people. When we go on vacation, we go to places where there are other Black people around. We are involved in outside organizations and institutions that affirm their identity as Black people. And when we are at school we're fully participatory in the things that are going on at school. But our lives outside of here are mostly Black. And people are cool with that. Which is not to say we don't have white friends, we do, lots of

> them, but our lives would be less full and less rich without the experiences of being in places where Blackness is affirmed and supported and that's important to us as a family.

Intergenerational relationships and mothering prove to be integral to Black women and girls resisting and navigating environments that seek to diminish their humanity. Knowing the significance of these relationships, there should be action taken to increase the numbers of Black women and girls in these spaces, if they so choose to be in them.

"If there were more Black women teachers." Most independent schools lack a critical mass of Black faculty and staff, as well as Black students. Several of the participants were the only one at their school or one of a handful, and they candidly expressed the importance and need to have more Black women and girls in their schools. A student shared that in the beginning she "didn't have a lot of Black girlfriends at the time to support [her] and say, 'naw you can't just let this happen, this is serious.'" The presence of more Black girls ensures that their experiences are validated by others that genuinely understand. Tabetha, an administrative assistant, posited,

> There was a little girl in the three to six class. She must've been about four at the time, a little Black girl, and I say little Black because both of [her] parents were Black, African American. And there was a little white girl and so I won't keep saying little Black girl. This is not her name, I'm going to call her Asia. Asia had natural hair and it was out, you know, twist out. And Helen, the little white girl. She just kept feeling [Asia's] hair and Asia kept saying, "stop, stop, stop, stop." And one of the assistants who is [Latina] came out and said, "what's wrong"? And Asia said, "she's touching my hair." And Asia just began crying and she said, "she's touching my hair and I don't want her to touch my hair." And the assistant said, "oh, well, she's touching it because she likes it. She likes it." And at that time I had a perm. So, when the assistant went back in, I asked Asia "what's wrong"? She said, "there's no one in the school with hair like mine." And so, at that moment I made a decision to be a mirror for our little Black girls. So that was my first indication that there were no real windows or mirrors in this school for Black girls.

In that moment, this woman decided to go natural in order to serve as a mirror for the Black girls at her school, and she has been natural ever since. Although more Black women administrators

are desperately needed, students spend the majority of time in the classroom. Therefore, more Black women teachers are equally necessary. Jordan affirmed,

> I would see [her] like passing by but it's different. If [she] were a teacher I feel like I would see [her] more and it'd be easier to just go up to [her] and having [her] as a teacher [she] could serve as a help in the classroom itself. I think it would have probably been better if there were more Black women teachers or even just Black teachers in general. There's really none.

Similarly, Renee, an assistant teacher, said,

> I've noticed this since when I first visited, just visited the school. I think you had a similar experience of like as soon as the Black girls see a new Black woman in this space, their ears and eyes kind of perk up. And they're like who's that? Is she here to stay? That kind of eager, almost like deprived thirst for an older mirror is almost always the reaction. Even if it's not verbalized, it might just be eyes that are stuck much longer than everybody else who's walking past in the line that you can kind of tell. It's like, I know you see me, maybe you don't want to acknowledge that that's what's happening. Or maybe you don't have the words, you don't know that's what's happening. But I know because I've been there and I know that's where you are right now based on that look.

When conducting preliminary observations at Renee's school, this need for more representation was evident by the sheer curiosity the Black girls had about my presence. One Black girl asked Renee if I was going to be a new teacher at the school. Another little girl, about five or six years old, remembered my name a week after I spent time in her classroom. I was very surprised by this because I was only in her classroom for about an hour. Recruiting and retaining more Black women isn't just beneficial for Black girls but also for other Black women faculty and staff. A teacher declared, "sometimes it's nice to just look around and see their faces or know that it's not only me or have somebody to do affinity group with and it's not only me, I'm not the only option."

Resistance: Standing Up and Speaking Out

To say that Black women and girls progress through independent schools quietly would be extremely inaccurate. In many cases, unfortunately sometimes to their detriment, they take it

upon themselves to fight for an equitable experience not only for themselves but also for their peers. Both Jacobs (2017) and Robinson and Ward (1991) discuss resistance for survival and resistance for liberation. Resistance for survival refers to actions that serve short-term survival in oppressive environments (Robinson & Ward, 1991), whereas, speaking up, demanding change, and being their authentic selves embodies resistance for liberation (Robinson & Ward, 1991). It is important to note that there are those that choose to resist in more subtle ways or those that do not resist at all. These choices are understandable, given the various consequences of fighting white supremacy.

Silencing Black women and girls is a historical tool used to maintain the status quo and continue harmful acts against them (Fordham, 1993; Morris, 2007). Caroline discussed how her middle school math teacher separated her from the rest of the class by moving her desk so that she sat alone each class period. This math teacher went out of her way to ensure Caroline felt inferior in her classroom by either not calling on her to answer questions or getting angry if she answered a question correctly. When asked about reporting racist incidents to administrators Jordan asserted,

> With the blatantly racist remarks . . . at the time I felt so inferior. Like I saw how my friends would report stuff and they would get harassed and talked about by everyone in the grade and at the time, I was a freshman, I didn't want to do that.

Similarly, Arielle said,

> I was never the reportee. It was usually the other Black girl. That's why everyone hated her. Because like I said, I was withdrawn. I isolated myself. So, I never knew enough in the first place about what was going on because I wasn't interacting with them. I didn't feel like it was my place to report them, but like she knew everything that was going on and had the screenshots of everything. So, I was like, okay, you want to do that? Go ahead. But I never took that upon myself.

The school climate around reporting racist incidents was clearly not in favor of Black girls' well-being. Instead, these students were made out as troublemakers or labeled too sensitive and/or

disruptive. The chastisement Black girls—and arguably Black women as well—face when merely standing up for themselves is despicable. Oftentimes, Black girls are made to feel unsafe and alone if they report incidents to administrators. Caroline stated so matter of factly:

> Everyone oh, be true to yourself. No. No, I think Black girls, it's like this new movement, oh be true to yourself. But sometimes you really can't be true to yourself. Sometimes it's not safe to be true. Yeah, you need to be yourself and yeah you need to stand up, but sometimes you just need to know when to let things go. Write it down in your journal, curse them out later and cry. But sometimes it's not the best environment to curse them out or wait [for] another time. Because their time will come. That's what I have to say.

With Black women and girls often lacking genuine support in these spaces, it's crucial that they protect themselves no matter which path of resistance they choose. Because at the end of the day their mere presence in these spaces will always be a form of resistance. For those that choose the more vocal path, they participate in and lead diversity clubs, meet with school leaders, and demand justice for marginalized students.

"I was the go to person." With schools at different stages on the equity continuum and Black women and girls' varying levels of power, their actions take on different forms. For Sonya, diversity director, her advocacy began years ago when she herself was a student in a predominantly white school.

> I went to predominantly white schools my entire life and I think before I knew the language, I knew how it felt and I knew that there was something that wasn't right and I knew that it wasn't fair that there were some Black kids who were having a dramatically different experience than I was and I couldn't figure out why. So, I remember in high school being very vocal about how there were only two Black boys in any of my honors classes and my AP classes. I was like you can't tell me of all the Black boys in this school, there's only two who could do this work. That's a lie! Did you cap it at two? Because the same two were in my classes every year, year after year after year. And I said this, this is ridiculous!

As a young high school student, she probably did not realize that one day she would work in the capacity to advocate for marginalized students on a daily basis. For Black women, even if they do not have a formal role as a diversity coordinator or director, they often find themselves taking

on—or being forced upon them—these responsibilities. From leading affinity groups to serving on committees to being the go to person for parents of color, exhaustion becomes ever present in their lives. However, many choose to continue the fight. Dorothy, an admission director, recalled,

> a comment she'd made in the meeting and she felt like I had taken it in a negative way. We were talking about recruiting more students of color and students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. I wanted to make sure that everyone does not always think that those two things are synonymous. Just because you are a person of color does not mean that you are going to live in a different socioeconomic neighborhood or that you automatically need financial assistance. One of the teachers, one of our pre-k teachers says she would love to have more students of color; however, she wants to make sure that those students are prepared for [the school] and that, you know, they're ready for school. And what I said to her was, "we're not changing the admission requirements. It would be the exact same thing that it will be for other parents." And she said, "it would just be harder to know what was going on at the homes of those children." And I did say in the meeting, "are you assuming that they wouldn't have books at home because they don't live in [location name] or because they're little Black kids that their parents don't read to them"? So, she came to me after the meeting and really, she kind of made it worse. But, she felt bad. She did approach me to say, "she didn't want it to seem like she wasn't open to having students of color in her class or students from different socioeconomic groups in her class."

Unfortunately, several participants discussed how this mentality is prevalent in these schools. If Dorothy hadn't been Black or a person working from an anti-racist lens, the teachers' comment would have been widely accepted. Instead, the teacher's ideology was challenged, and though she probably didn't change completely that day, it's an experience she won't forget.

Though they were students themselves, the Black girls I interviewed were called upon quite frequently to do diversity work in various forms. There are those that take on these responsibilities voluntarily, which is admirable; however, they should never be the lead person doing this work. Although diversity and inclusion is the responsibility of everyone in the school community, there should be a position that requires an adult to be solely dedicated to the work full-time. These students shouldn't be called upon time and time again to teach their classmates

or faculty/staff about diversity, especially when they are still learning themselves. It's an unfair burden to carry on top of dealing with the racist incidents and feeling like an outsider. Caroline shared,

> When I entered fifth grade and up to six, seventh, eighth, they had me teach diversity to the younger grades. Like I had to do a Kwanzaa celebration for the whole school. I literally had to teach Kwanzaa which apparently was messed up. . . . Like oh it was wrong for me to start teaching diversity when I was in fifth grade. I didn't understand that my school was messed up.

This particular student was the first Black student at her middle school, and she also described how her mother assembled diversity curriculum for the school. Instead of committing to the work and hiring someone full-time, they exploited this student and her mother. Nakiya remembered,

> I had to request to look for a diversity director because I felt like we had a need that wasn't being met, the students weren't feeling the impact of that role. I felt like we needed to look for someone and the process of that was literally just to voice myself to the administration. And different groups putting their input on it and kind of getting a consensus and then moving forward to the interview process and the voting process and getting the parents involved . . . [the] different groups that have to agree on it. Getting started, getting all of the students, at least some of the students to agree to say that this is a cause that they care about.

Nakiya took it upon herself to demand better from her institution and led the charge from start to finish. Many of these schools are happy with the status quo, because it ensures that the power is always in their (white people) hands. Unfortunately, it often takes a person of color putting their livelihood and/or education on the line to seek an equitable working environment or educational experience. Arielle noted,

> I was like the go to person to talk to faculty. So, I stood on the Education and Policy Committee and the Board of Trustees. I spoke to them frequently and the whole faculty. On one occasion, I outed myself. I also identify as pansexual. So, I outed myself to the entire faculty, the K-12 faculty and explained to them the importance of diversity and being open minded and importance of conferences like the Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC) and why it's important to give students time to participate in things like that. I think [administrators] were slightly intimidated by me because I was that

> outspoken, and I was seeing them all the time. I think they knew if they ever stepped out of line that I would call them out on it. So, I think they all sort of tiptoed around me a little.

She was the only participant that openly discussed her sexuality during the interview. She talked about how she outed herself to administration while talking to them about diversity issues. When asked if she felt pressured to come out because she was the spokesperson for diversity she stated,

> I had a certain confidence with being pansexual because I've always known since I was five years old. So, I have the confidence with that identity as itself. But I don't think it was an ideal place. There wasn't a general comfort with having people know. It was like a thing, and I have a personality where I don't let things bother me that much. So, I was like whatever, it's not that big of a deal, but also sort of just as the spokesperson, it was like, this is something that I need to do.

Although she states that she is comfortable with her identity, it is also clear that the responsibility of her leadership role pushed her to share this information, despite not feeling like it was the best place to do it. The diversity leadership burden that is often placed on students of color in independent schools creates a level of stress and exhaustion that white students never have to endure. Some participants chose to tackle issues at the root by changing some of the systems and policies in their schools.

"Here I come with all my Black girl magic." The inequities in independent schools are deeply rooted in their policies, procedures, curriculum, and traditions. Black women and girls enter these institutions demanding that marginalized groups' stories and experiences be taken into consideration by overhauling the systems that oppress them. Their advocacy and leadership is more often than not met with active resistance from peers, colleagues, parents, and donors. Debra, a lower school teacher, expressed,

> I had a lot of pushback from my team partner because he was just like, you know, all of this might not be developmentally appropriate for the kids. Let's just stick to MLK because he's the acceptable Black person to teach about. So here I come with all of my Black girl magic. And I'm like let's actually talk about MLK and what he did. And they were like [gasp] "woah, well I didn't know MLK like that."

She also talked about requesting diverse literature,

> And so, I got with the librarian and I was like, what's our budget like? Because I noticed that there aren't a lot of books in the library that are written by Black authors. So, she was like, yes, that's something that I'm working on. I would love, if you have a list of books, I'd love to purchase some. So, I went [to the website] and I downloaded the list of books that they had curated, and I sent it to her and she bought every single book. So immediately we had an infusion of Black literature.

This particular action was part of a program she implemented at the school that brings in Black leaders and professionals to read to classrooms, which has also turned into a career day.

Although students recognize the problems at their schools, many don't know how to go about making changes. Nakiya talks about learning these skills for change at SDLC hosted by the National Association of Independent Schools.

> I didn't know how to start doing that until I got to SDLC my sophomore year and then after that I knew that I had to talk to administration, like there are completely student led movements but in private schools, in these institutions, you have to work with administration, you have to work with the board, you have to work with the parents. So, it's a lot of literal organizing to get the interest of other people and getting the interest of the students to be apparent and then getting all of the other forces to get onboard with it.

The fact that Black women and girls are forced to gain buy-in from their oppressors in order to obtain the resources they need to thrive is mindblowing. But then again, this system is operating just how the dominant group intended. When asked how her peers viewed affinity groups, Natahlia stated,

> White people probably weren't always on board, but I mean that's assumed that that's going to happen because they never have had to be an outsider and they've never had to be the minority. So, there were things that we did within that club, like different speeches and chapel talks that we used to give that weren't a hundred percent accepted. but [we weren't] going to let that stop us.

Sadly, there are those that believe Black girls are completely powerless in predominantly white spaces that uphold cisheteronormativity. When in actuality, Black girls often innately call out

oppression and injustices. It's imperative to ensure that they are taught how to advocate for themselves but to also know where and when to seek help.

"It was my place to be an advocate." Oppression and stereotypes seek to steal agency from Black women and girls. Additionally, because American schools operate under the guise that the adult holds all the knowledge, students are not taught and often unaware that they can and should use their agency to speak up for themselves. When asked if she thought Black girls stand up for themselves, Renee, an assistant teacher, asserted,

> So, it's kind of a case by case basis, but my guess is unless their parents have given them the tools at home to proactively, like expecting these moments to happen . . . it's like, hey, if anybody says this to you about your hair or your name or your skin, etc., you can say something like this. Because my parents used to give that to me. So, unless that happens, they probably don't stand up for themselves or know how to because it's not something that I think is built into the curriculum. Awareness might be, diversity might be, this amorphous term, whatever that means, but specific instruction to Black girls about how to deal with discrimination or prejudice or what have you. I don't think it's a built-in part of the school. So, if it's not at home it doesn't happen. That's my guess.

However, she did recall an incident with a lower school student who advocated for herself,

> There's one other six-year-old, five-year-old, I think she is, so quite young. Who was called the name of a Black girl in my class [she teaches the age group above] and she kinda just was like, "That's not my name. My name is so and so. That person is who you're talking about is over there." It was like not a smile, not a joke, just like you're wrong. And very much matter of factly telling that person.

Black girls' resistance often begins at a young age due to the need to protect and stand up for themselves. During preliminary observations at Renee's school, I observed a young Black girl, Jada, attempt to stand up for herself to two of her white classmates. The teacher volunteered Jada to assist the two white girls with their lesson. Jada responds matter-of-factly, "I'm not helping them," never looking up from the materials in her hand. Jada is attempting to create a yoyo out of an old scotch tape ring and some string. The two girls, Elizabeth and Hannah, the teacher offered her help to had been making fun of her idea. I soon heard Jada respond back to Elizabeth, "at

least I have an imagination!" Immediately, like clockwork, the little white girl assumes the innocent, victim role as if she's done nothing to warrant this response. Elizabeth tells Jada she is being mean and that she hurt her feelings. To which Jada replies, "how are you making this my fault? Just because I say something doesn't mean you have to make it my fault." The girl continues to whine, so Jada then apologizes but in a "I know I'm not wrong kind of way." However, Elizabeth continues with her theatrics, saying her feelings are hurt and tells Jada to leave her alone so she can cool off. Jada began to apologize to Elizabeth, who insisted that she needed time to cool off, and Hannah chimed in to threaten to tell the teacher if Jada didn't leave Elizabeth alone. Ignoring Hannah, Jada continued apologizing and offered to help them with their work, to which Elizabeth responded, "if you want to." I understand that it's difficult for eight-year-olds to build the stamina or fortitude to stand their ground, despite pressure to give in to those that take advantage and/or oppress them; however, it still enrages me that Black women and girls are forced to concede in environments like this where they are already othered. This incident reminded me of when I attended a predominately white private school in elementary. Similarly, I was friends with two white girls, and when we got into arguments it was always the two of them versus me. I know that I noticed this growing up, but I never had the words to name what was happening to me. Therefore, it is imperative that Black girls have access to peers, faculty, and staff that look like them in order to foster positive friendships that teach and support them in their resistance to white power dynamics.

As a senior, Dakota had the opportunity to talk to the Board about her school experience (the only student of color of four to do so). She declared,

> I got up there and I was like you say you do a lot to include diverse students, and you can think that. You can wholeheartedly think that but that's not the case. I honestly just told them from the bottom of my heart. I just told them about my perspective, like my family especially. I was like, it was hard coming into this school with a single mom with one car,

> with one sister at college. It was hard and instead of helping for a lot of these things, you punish. I was like, those are the things that you're not helping with. I was like you can approve all the clubs you want and you can accept all the Black children, the quota that you need, but if you're not doing anything to actually listen to and advocate for these kids in the community you're not doing anything.

This speech should be shared with independent schools across the country because it definitely applies to many of them. The bravery and authenticity emanating from her words are convicting. Additionally, the poise and courage she possessed to walk into a room full of wealthy, mostly white adults and speak her truth is more than admirable. Another student recalled an incident that occurred in the classroom of a few younger Black students. Natahlia shared,

> As president of the Black Student Union I felt that it was my place to be an advocate and to put myself in the position to be an advocate. So, last year my brother was in seventh grade and one of his Black girlfriends was in a room and she and one of the other Black girls were saying the N-word and the teacher basically said the N-word back to them and said that they were acting niggerly, just outright. And she was white. So, they were scared to tell me because they thought that I would blow it out of proportion, which there's no way to blow that out of proportion because that's inappropriate. I had to go to administration.

Natahlia knew there was no doubt that she had to report this incident. She felt it was her duty to be an advocate because of her leadership role and also because of the challenges she faced. However, as a student and even an adult, there are always tensions when deciding whether or not and when to fight. Lolita, an admission director, stated,

> I think in some situations any person of any race or ethnicity or gender, sometimes you know, they don't know. And you not saying anything doesn't necessarily help because then they'll do it again or they'll say it again. So sometimes I find that that's also, that's probably the harder part is how do you address it without, even though they likely offended you, without offending them. So that they learn and they walk away thinking like, okay, next time I'm just going to be mindful that maybe that wasn't the right thing to say. To me that's the bigger challenge is like how do we just teach people, how do we make this an educational moment.

Black women and girls should have the freedom and be encouraged to advocate for themselves. Unfortunately, this is not the reality for most of them in independent schools. It is undoubtedly

inspirational that some of the participants have the courage to speak their truth and voice their concerns. However, the work of equity and justice should be assumed by all members of these school communities.

"I'm glad I went there." Many might wonder why Black women and girls continue to work in and attend these institutions. Make no mistake to assume that Black women and girls don't recognize the struggles they face in these schools. However, for various reasons some choose to stay or would choose to do it again, but there were some that felt strongly in the opposite direction. Natahlia shared,

> I would say that my time at [my school] made me incredibly, not militant but it made me incredibly irritated by ignorance. And at [my school] is when I realized I have a problem with injustices towards minorities and I have a problem with minorities always having to be the underdog. And always having to speak up for themselves and not getting basic rights and basic equality. So, I'm glad that I went there because I wouldn't be the person I am today if I hadn't.

She continued,

> It wasn't all bad. Like thinking back on it, I don't want to go back and my two brothers are there now, and for a Black boy and a Black girl in that type of environment, there's going to be two completely polar opposite experiences. But I do not want to go back.

Although Natahlia says she's glad she attended her school, she also clearly doesn't ever want to go back. I think this statement is very telling of her school experience and also shows that despite the issues she faced, she still attempts to appreciate the growth and lessons. Students knew they were receiving a great education as well as making connections with students whose parents and grandparents were very well connected, and sadly for many parents and students, these positives outweigh the negatives.

"What they tell themselves." The adults also talked a bit about how parents rationalize enrolling their children in independent schools. Jacqueline, an upper school director, shared,

> I think what they tell themselves is that this school will allow my child to be the best, fill in the blank, that she can possibly be . . . the best scientist, mathematician, the best writer, the best athlete, whatever. Parents tell themselves that sending a child to these schools is worth the sacrifice because it allows her to maximize her potential. I think most parents send a kid to a school like this with the idea [that she'll] get into the best possible college from here, that's certainly when you're talking about upper school, that's always the case, right? That they're trying to get them the access to the best possible college experience. And you can think about best in whatever terms you wish to think about here, but whatever that is, that this experience gives her the best shot.

There is no question that independent schools have the access and resources to provide what many consider a "top tier education" that prepares students for the rigors of college academics. However, this also means that this private, "superior" education is steeped in whiteness and provides the skills necessary to also navigate predominantly white private colleges and universities. Jordan declared, "I just kind of focused on my academics. That distraction made it all worth it, I guess. I was getting a good education. So that idea of, oh it's worth it, kind of helped. I got into a great institution." Dakota elaborated,

> I went through it and [all my friends] . . . And I don't know . . . I feel like it also prepared me for the real world. That might sound kind of cliché too but it's not . . . I mean the majority of . . . not people that sounds kind of cynical but there are a lot of people that behave the same way as high schoolers at [my high school] which is really sad but at the same time since I've kind of lived through it I know how to handle myself now better than I would have if I didn't go. Like if I have a chance to do it over again, I would go to [my school] again because the lessons that that school taught me about resilience and about perseverance and about self-confidence. I think it's uncanny what I learned there and how I learned to conduct myself and where I was uncomfortable in situations that I was the underdog. I think it helped me and is helping me now in my potential career.

Unfortunately, there is truth to this students' reflection; much of the "real world" she speaks of is strikingly similar to independent schools. I myself also believed that I needed to attend a predominantly white university in order to be prepared for the real world. It is saddening that enduring trauma at such a young age is considered preparation. Unfortunately, this is the reality for Black children in America. The adult participants also had their own reasons for working in independent schools.

"That's really why I stayed." Adults, unlike students, possess more autonomy in their decision to work in these institutions. Many felt their presence was crucial in these spaces for Black and white individuals. Danyelle, a teacher, expounded,

> I feel like it's part of the reason that I'm there, sometimes I feel like a sell out for going to an independent school, but I feel like the white kids need to see me in addition to the fact that the Black kids need to see me because they ain't seeing nobody all day. So, I feel like I appreciate seeing them as much as they probably appreciate seeing me and it's fulfilling to know like if they come to me with something or if we plan an affinity group activity that goes really well, that's fulfilling to me because I feel like it's probably so powerful for them because sometimes just going through their day can be so heavy for them.

Faith, a teacher, professed,

> Honestly that's what made me stay in independent schools because my mom told me that. Because I was like, "I don't feel like I'm giving back mommy, maybe I should go and teach in public schools so I can be with more Black and brown kids." She was like, "no, because think about it . . . you may be the only Black teacher, these children ever have in their life." She goes, "the white ones and the Black ones, but in particular the Black ones. So, you need to stay there." And that's really why I stayed because I know it's true. And now that I have a little Black girl who's at an independent school I know it matters. It really, really matters.

Tabetha, an administrative assistant, explicitly expressed staying for Black girls.

> I stay here because I see a need for, especially our little Black girls, a lot of our little girls are either biracial or they've been adopted by white parents or by two white moms or two white dads. So, they really don't, are not having those mirrors.

This is the same woman who decided to go natural after talking to a young Black girl who was upset that nobody had hair like hers in the school. Contrarily, Sonya, diversity director, urges colleagues to leave if they aren't being valued by their institution.

> If you feel like this is not the space for you, I don't ever want you . . . I don't ever want Black women to stay in places where they feel a level of toxicity that takes a toll on us because we'll do that for any number of reasons and if you don't have to, sometimes we have to because we have kids, we have families, we have responsibilities and so you just got to suck it up and deal with it. But if you don't have to suck it up and deal with it. Leave! Because the space does not . . . we don't owe anything to these people. We don't. What we owe to ourselves is, a space where we feel valued and affirmed and opportunity to grow and engage. Like to contribute and to be recognized for those contributions and if you feel like you're not getting that, then it's their loss, but you deserve to have that in

> your workspace. So, all those things I think about as a Black woman in this work environment.

I especially appreciate Sonya's candor, because like she said, Black women stay in toxic situations for any number of reasons, when in reality we can and should part ways. There was another participant, an older woman who is now retired, that expressed this same notion.

How the schools can improve experiences. Along this same vein, it's imperative to know exactly what Black women and girls feel needs to be changed in these spaces, as well as what they themselves need to succeed. Many schools have created diversity coordinator or director roles but fail to provide these individuals with the appropriate support and funding to be successful. Institutions sometimes implement programs and initiatives that they feel might be helpful to their constituents but often forget to first ask these individuals what they need to be successful. When asked how the school could improve her or Black girls' experiences, Faith, a teacher, responded,

> More Black faculty. The students need to see themselves and I'm not just talking about women. They need more Black female faculty and male faculty, more Black faculty. They need to mandate and make it a requirement that there is, if you're going to diversify your school, there needs to be ongoing, not just the checking of a box, but ongoing commitment to cultural competency training. All these schools need a person who their only job, not you teach two classes and you do diversity work. Your only job is the director of diversity and inclusion. They need to have that in their schools and they also need to have parent, I don't want to call it training, but there need to be conversations with these white parents. That's the best way I can say it and you know, for the social aspects of it, you know like they need to have a diversity practitioner who is doing anti-racist work. They need a white person who is on that campus who is doing anti-racist work.

Similarly, Sonya, diversity director, exclaimed,

> It's really important for Black girls to see Black men working in their school. It's important for us to have Black male counterparts. That's the first thing that comes to mind. I think we also need to be more cognizant of the roles that we're hiring Black women into. The next time we have like some head teacher roles, we need to get some Black women in the classrooms who are LEADING. You have [person's name] and I but

> we need other Black women in other spaces. For sure we need Black men in this building. [We have] one and he's the PE teacher. How cliché is that?

Participants did not hold back when expressing how these institutions fall short on their duty to provide equitable spaces for their students. Issues with white parents as well as the lack of Black faculty were of greatest concern for several participants. Debra, a lower school teacher, expressed,

> They got to do more to offset the effects of some of these parents and how ignorantly racist they are. They're going to have to be more intentional about who they let into the school because some of these folks are just ridiculous and they have no plans to be culturally sensitive. Some of the parents of color come up to the school and some of the white parents treat them like they are the help. They've literally said to some of the Black moms like, "oh, um, excuse me, could you take my plate"? And they're like, "No, I cannot. I don't work here." So, you know, those attitudes, like either we do a bunch of parent education nights where we talk about these hard things or y'all need to admit some different families.

Students are always vehemently aware of the things that need to change in their schools. Many of their suggestions mirrored those of the adults. Arielle shared,

> The administration needs to have more people of color there because I like little kids a lot, but some of them would be afraid of me because their families don't talk to people of color, they don't engage with people of color. They were legit afraid of me. I would be walking in the hallway and they would walk on the other side of the hallway. So that was like a sad and just a heartbreaking thing. Like wow, this is so sad. The administration has to diversify. It would've been easier if they had a diverse faculty and actually admitted students of color instead of three for each grade.

Interestingly, Natahlia conveyed a perspective that could be viewed by some as negative or pessimistic. She stated,

> I don't think the school itself could've done too much, besides just efforts to progressively address diversity and inclusion more, but even that doesn't really go too deep into the social scene of like what's actually happening with the kids. So, with that, I'm not sure. I guess with the teacher awareness, making sure teachers aren't uncomfortable with certain things that come up in the curriculum.

In the end, she does mention teacher training and the curriculum but she also understands the reality and permanence of white supremacy and exclusion in her school (Bell, 1995).

Needed to succeed. Though the participants spoke generally of how the schools could improve their experiences, they also spoke specifically to their own personal needs as Black women and as Black girls. As employees of these institutions, Black women find themselves in complex and demanding roles that often require them to act and react carefully. Several of the adult participants discussed the unforgiving nature of these schools, where one mistake as a Black person immediately ends your tenure at the institution. Danyelle, a teacher, shared,

> We were saying how it takes a special kind of Black person to be able to work in that environment because you have to be able to work around white people all day long and let it roll. Like if you're not used to working with white people and if you don't know how to maneuver in those politics, then you could easily dig a hole that they won't let you get out of or you could easily get overwhelmed. I also feel like you have to be able to balance. Like I feel like I get exploited all the time for people's committees and you know publications too. Like you have to be able to balance that with being able to check people a little bit. But in a nice, not scary Black way which I think is also a learned skill over time. So, I think it's a, I don't know like a unique set of background experiences that allow people to maneuver it better than others.

These institutions, much like the academy, are spaces that overwork and exploit the talents of Black women. At the same time, this work is often unacknowledged and unrewarded. This tokenism Danyelle is describing is commonplace in the experiences of Black women in predominantly white spaces. Black women are forced, guilt tripped, or strongly encouraged to sit on multiple committees, advise extra clubs, or serve as a resource for current and prospective parents, without any extra compensation for their time and hard work. In PWIS, Black women must learn quickly how to navigate the politics in order to sustain their career. Faith, a teacher, expressed the necessity of a critical mass of Black employees as well as Black kids.

> If you are going to hire Black folks in these spaces and bring Black children in these spaces, they must have people there that they can be with and that they can turn to. Too many times in particular for Black women, we are always the saviors and saving everybody by ourselves. Most diversity directors are Black women and we are tired because we have no support unless you're somewhere like [my previous school], which is rare. So yeah, if you're going to hire a Black woman, you need to hire another Black

> woman. Don't hire another Black man, hire another Black woman, then you can hire a Black man. You need that, you just do. You need that.

Similarly, but also different, Dorothy, an admission director, discusses Black women's need for support from their colleagues.

> Support. They need to have support from their Head of School. They need to have support from other colleagues who do not look like them and they need to have support from community members who do not look like them. If I'm a Black woman and a Black board member stands up and talks about why I should be welcomed in this community it's going to look self-serving. I need to have a person from the majority and an affluent person, I need to have a big supporter. I need to have an affluent white person, preferably a male to stand up on my behalf. I need someone who can bridge me with the people who may or may not respect me, and that person has to look like the majority and in an independent school they have to be affluent. So, I really need a rich white male, to be very honest with you. That's who needs . . . that person has to be my bridge. And my colleagues, I need white colleagues to also show support of me. That's just, that's reality.

Unfortunately, in affluent, predominantly white spaces, the power of a white man backing you can propel your career. There are many Black faculty/staff who refuse to play the game and are subsequently punished in a myriad of ways or let go altogether. Then again, there are Black faculty/staff that attempt to play the game in a way that allows them to make a positive difference in their school communities. It's unclear how far or long these individuals can play the game without losing themselves or site of their original goal to make marginalized groups' experiences better.

Black girls were also very vocal in expressing the resources they need in order to not only be successful but have the necessary emotional support as well. One adult participant, Tabetha, asserted, "I don't think that our Black girls really get the emotional stability and understanding that they need." The girls spoke of both intrinsic characteristics and extrinsic support that was instrumental in their success. Dakota shared,

> Oh my God confidence! You have to be bold no matter what. But also at the same time I think it's important to be smart, to like maintain a level of smartness like intellectually. Just because when someone challenges you which is going to happen time and time

> again, you have to be confident in yourself and what you know to combat that. And also, I'd say patience is very important as well because there's a time to argue about something and be like . . . not aggressive but like . . . yea I guess aggressive like to fight for your point and there's a time to listen to another's opinion before assuming that they don't understand. Don't assume you know how the conversation is going to go before the conversation happens.

The level of discernment that Black girls must develop rather quickly—and early—is somewhat disheartening but absolutely necessary for their survival. They are forced to take on adult skills in order to protect themselves. Dakota went on to say, "I would say it is important to know that your self worth is not contingent upon how that community sees you. And that's not easy to culminate, that's not easy to remember by any means." As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the friendships amongst Black girls are imperative to their matriculation through the school. Nakiya expressed,

> There's no, I feel like there wasn't a way that I would have done it without them, without them going through the same things as me. It would've been very difficult for me to navigate that on my own. Or I would've gotten lost, my identity would have been lost because you can only go so long not assimilating or not caring before you, you know . . . you can only go so long doing that. So, I think that having the support of other people validating your experience, understanding where you're coming from, all of those different things are very important to a Black girl in that space.

On the other hand, Jordan speaks of her admiration for the girls that were friends with both Black girls and white students but were still able to stand up for themselves. She shared,

> I think they need to not be completely isolated as I was. I'm proud of the girls who had their Black girlfriends but had their white friends too. Like we were kinda really isolated. I think you need to find that balance and make sure you know when racist remarks or microaggressions come up you need to call them out on it. You can't just let that stuff happen. Don't feel like you don't have the power or the voice to not speak up about it.

The girls were very aware of the repercussions of speaking up for themselves, but many believed it was crucial. Caroline exclaimed,

> To be honest, not take the bullshit, to really be honest. I've taken a lot of bullshit in my life and I regret not saying some stuff, but then again, I was more timid. I just didn't want to cause more problems and be the angry Black girl. I was very aware if I was the angry

> Black girl because I had gotten angry once and everyone was like, "woah, calm the fuck down."

Based on their observations and working with the students, the adult participants also commented on what they felt was important for Black girls to have within themselves and in the school to be successful. Danyelle, a teacher, said,

> I think having some sort of teacher support, even if it's not a Black teacher. Some sort of adult support in the school so they have a person or a safe place to go is really important. But I also think having the resilience and self-confidence to be able to make it through the day and know this is temporary or this is not really the measure of me. They have to have enough confidence. What's the word for like pride in your race? I don't want to say like Black pride. You have to have enough something so that when you go to school you know who you are and you know why things are the way they are, so you can process accordingly. Even if you have parents that you can talk to, but sort of confidence and that safety at home.

Again, predominantly white spaces require Black children to grow up at an exponential rate in order to hone the skills necessary for survival. Danyelle speaks of the importance of having a positive self-perception, as well as the support of parents and teachers. Below, Sonya, diversity director, goes on to discuss the uniqueness of Black girls' experiences and why connecting with each other makes a difference.

> So just being able to relate to somebody so much makes a world of difference because your experience as a Black girl is so unique and so individual that you need somebody that you can relate to. And I think that if you don't see that face or at least talk to them like you kind of start to lose yourself and I've seen it over and over again at the school, people who just don't have anyone to look to and they lose themselves in the culture of the school.

From many of the participants' interviews, confidence and a positive sense of self are imperative for Black girls in PWIS. These characteristics are essential when combating discrimination on a daily basis. Jacqueline, an upper school director, shared,

> I think it is a willingness to . . . it is a desire, it's an effort and this is a big thing I'm about to ask, but it's an effort to bring your A game every day, which is hard. It also is a willingness to ask for help and to seek help out and demand help for yourself in the moments where A game is not enough. And then it is the ability to seek comfort and

> companionship and alliance with those who would support you, if that's other students, if it's a teacher, if it's an administrator. Get the comfort where you need to get it, get the oxygen where you need to get it, and then you can be successful.

As she stated, this is a lot to ask of a child but also of an adult as well. Black women and girls are expected to bring their A game every day and to let many of the injustices they face roll off their backs. They learn quickly that they cannot speak out about every situation. Instead, they have to understand when, where, and how to take a stand for the issue at hand. At the same time, there are many who still continue to resist in small ways on a daily basis.

Conclusion

This chapter tackled not only the magnitude of Black women and girls' relationships but also the complexities within them. Each relationship type (peer-to-peer, mother-daughter, faculty/staff-student) afforded them comfort, affirmation, and joy. Connecting and communing with one another provided participants with spaces to share their truths, gain encouragement, and cultivate positive self-perceptions. The peer-mentoring, intergenerational relationships, and mothering/othermothering created strong connections and sources of strength and wisdom to help guide Black women and girls through challenging experiences. Participants shared that having more Black women and girls in PWIS is imperative to their mental health and success.

Additionally, these relationships are directly linked to Black women and girls' resistance in PWIS. Their relationships empowered and encouraged them to speak up for themselves and challenge the status quo. There are certain skills and characteristics that Black women and girls must hone within themselves in order to navigate PWIS. This same ingenuity, that is sometimes inherently within and sometimes taught to them, assists them in fighting for marginalized students and standing up for themselves. It is clear that Black girls must be taught that they can and how to advocate for themselves. Through activism and programming, the participants sought

to change the current systems and policies in place at their respective schools. Both adult and student participants were keenly aware of exactly what needs to change within PWIS to make their experiences better as well as what characteristics they personally need to succeed.

Chapter 6

Analysis, Implications, and Conclusion

Despite combating the everyday erasure of their opinions and experiences, the sheer presence of Black women and girls in PWIS disrupts the normal flow of the institution, meaning the way they act, interact, and present themselves challenges the norms and expectations that teachers, colleagues, administrators, and peers have set in their minds. Many of these women and girls refuse to conform to the prescribed roles set forth for them by these elite PWIS. For example, Arielle chose to eat lunch in the study hall room to give herself the opportunity to decompress, and Debra chose to infuse diverse perspectives into her curriculum despite resistance from her colleagues. Participants rock their natural hair, wear unsanctioned sweatshirts, advocate for themselves and others, roll up their skirts, sit together in the cafeteria, and walk the halls in groups. Tabetha wears her hair in its natural state in order to affirm Black girls in her school. Black women and girls' presence and activism is not without danger, as they may be alienated or blacklisted by colleagues, classmates, or administrators, not to mention the detrimental physical and psychological effects of racism. Both Arielle and Jordan spoke about Black girls being outcaste if they took a stand against the injustices they were facing. Through all of this, Black women and girls proclaim that their relationships with one another serve as their saving grace. Through meetings before school or during lunch, as Nakiya and Mariam described, Black women and girls find solace, affirmation, and wisdom through their collective relationships with one another. These relationships in turn empower them with the confidence and courage to speak up and be their most authentic selves. In this final chapter, I present a brief critical analysis, limitations as well as scholarly and practical implications and recommendations.

Analysis through Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Intersectionality. The intersections of Black women and girls' racial and gender identities created arduous work and school experiences for participants. As discussed in Chapter 4, Black women are expected to advise affinity groups but this additional work is not deemed worthy of more compensation for their time and effort. Despite Black girls being involved in various areas of the school, including athletics, they were still somewhere on the outside of the social hierarchy. Additionally, socioeconomic status, particularly for the students, negatively exacerbates their experiences. Although in some cases there are affluent Black girls attending these schools, it is often assumed that they are on scholarship because of the color of their skin. In PWIS, having affluence affords you closer proximity to whiteness while being on, or the perception of being on scholarship others you. For all of the alumnae participants, socioeconomic status created deep barriers, separating them from the rest of the school community. For example, Jordan discussed choosing not to attend a basketball tournament because of finances but also how her coach assumed she wasn't attending because she couldn't afford it. The generational wealth present in these institutions creates significant barriers seeking to keep individuals who hold a different socioeconomic status at bay.

When attempting to stand up for themselves, Black women and girls face the usual stereotypes of being characterized as loud, angry, and having an attitude. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants in this study continued to stand up and speak up for themselves and others. All of the participants recognized how their experiences differed from white students and Black boys, based on both their race and gender. Similarly, several of the adult participants felt that Black men were tokenized or put on a pedestal by white colleagues and families, whereas Black women were overworked and constantly had to prove themselves. The various forms of

oppression expressed at the intersections of participants' race, gender, and class identities produce traumatic experiences that seek to render Black women and girls invisible and powerless. However, participants described how they used their agency to infuse Black literature, change the curriculum, demand equitable experiences, meet together in the choir room before school, and sometimes just take a day off in order to reclaim their dignity and protect their mental health.

Whiteness as property. Predominantly white, independent schools are a brick and mortar embodiment of whiteness as property, because they continue to maintain white supremacy through traditions and policies that embolden white privilege. Harris (1995) asserts, "whiteness as property is derived from the deep historical roots of systematic white supremacy which have given rise to definitions of group identity predicated on the racial subordination of the Other, and have reified expectations of continued white privilege" (p. 288). Predominantly white independent schools were built by and for the wealthy, white elite, and Black women and girls' presence in these spaces disrupts the typical cadence of these schools. When systemic issues are challenged, the dominant group typically seeks to ignore or silence the "problem" (i.e., Black women and girls) by creating barriers to protect their property, which in this case is education, traditions, learning, and the school space in general.

The mere presence of Black women and girls, therefore, calls for a change in the structure of the admission process, requires the recruitment and retention of more Black personnel and students, challenges PWIS to create anti-racist curriculum, as well as demands acknowledging white privilege and deconstructing white supremacy. These changes are unsettling for white individuals who are not interested in giving up their privilege and dominance in these spaces. For example, a white mom literally told Dorothy, "this isn't the way we do

things in our community," which conveyed that Dorothy didn't belong at their school. This parent's quote also exudes ownership over the school community and simultaneously communicates that Dorothy is an outsider. These constant overt and subtle messages created toxic work and learning environments for participants, who were diagnosed with high blood pressure, described feeling outcast, were culturally exhausted, and constantly battled stereotypes. Therefore, the onus is on white individuals to do the necessary work to destroy the traditions and policies that perpetuate systemic oppression. White leaders in these schools must invest the time to do the personal and professional work to acknowledge and utilize their white privilege in order to create a truly equitable and just environment.

Interest convergence and permanence of racism. Two major questions that many might ask concerns why PWIS recruit students of color if they are ill prepared to holistically educate them, and also why Black families choose to send their children to these institutions? Although PWIS are private institutions with no government control, essentially, they were still forced to integrate due to pressure from the National Association of Independent Schools and threat to their public image (Clotfelter, 1976, 2004; Purdy, 2015, 2016). As stated previously, many of these schools were built by white people in order to protect white children from Black children. Therefore, at the very core of several of the majority of these institutions is exclusion. Over the last few decades, PWIS have recognized the importance of creating a diverse learning experience for their students; however, this is most often just surface level. As this study has shown through various participant excerpts, PWIS superficially welcome students of color without doing the hard work to actually change the core (e.g., curriculum, policies, values, procedures, etc.) of their institutions. This surface level inclusion benefits PWIS in that they are able to market themselves as diverse and inclusive on the outside, when in reality marginalized

students and personnel are not having positive, equitable experiences. Oftentimes, if and when schools do attempt to make radical change, they are faced with push back from the Board of Trustees, donors and parents, most of whom are wealthy, white individuals. This pressure forces administrators to back track for fear of losing financial support and rapport in these elite circles. Due to the permanence of racism (Bell, 1995), no matter how much work is done to change these institutions, racism and oppression will manifest in new or different ways to maintain white heteropatriarchal norms unless thorough systemic change takes hold.

Limitations

Limitations of this study include the lack of overall generalizability due to the small sample size. Therefore, a larger and/or longitudinal study might be useful in order to gain comprehensive insight into Black women and girls' experiences in PWIS. Some scholars might also feel that student interviews should come from current students instead of alumnae. However, it was apparent that the student participants had critically reflected on their primary and/or secondary school experiences. Some of the experiences shared by participants may in fact be unique to PWIS and therefore not apply to Black women and girls in other school types. In-person interviews may have also yielded more data or sparked richer conversations with student participants. Additionally, although I originally planned to have student participants share artifacts from their high school experiences, they were unable to access items, as they were away from home at college. School observations might also yield interesting insights that do not come through interview conversations.

Implications

Scholarly implications. The socialization of Black women and girls in independent private schools leads them to seek out relationships with colleagues and peers that look like

them. These relationships provide them with the affirmation and encouragement they need to resist their negative socialization experiences. This study clearly shows that negative stereotypes attributed to Black women (i.e., loud, angry Black woman, hypersexual) actually begin in childhood, which both affirms and extends the current Black Feminist (Collins, 1986, 2000; hooks, 1984; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015) and Black girlhood literature (Brown, 2013; Epstein et al., 2017; Evans-Winters, 2005; Morris, 2016a; Taaffee, 2016). This adultification (Epstein et al., 2017) leads Black girls to internalize these messages and in turn silence themselves or question their self-worth. Though I observed Black girls' bodies being policed in terms of school dress code (Evans-Winters, 2005), unlike the work of Morris (2016b), extreme discipline was not a significant theme in this study. Similar to Nunn's (2016) work, this dissertation highlights both the impact of the school community on Black women and girls but also, and more importantly, how Black women and girls create community and resist their oppression. The fact that Black women and girls are able to form sisterships (James-Gallaway et al., in press) in an environment that privileges individuality and competition speaks to their own fortitude. This collective building they are engaged in is linked to a long history of strategies of survival (Collins, 2000, 2004; Smith, 1983).

Broadly, this dissertation adds to the literature on education, independent schools, Black feminism, Critical Race Theory, and Black girlhood. It examines the issues Black women and girls face in PWIS and honors the collectives they create, as well as how they find the courage to resist white supremacy. By detailing the journey of Black girls as they seek to find themselves and create positive self-perceptions, this research also contributes to the field of psychology. This study adds to the dearth in literature on the significance of Black women and girls' friendships. Findings indicate that these relationships are vital to Black women and girls' mental

and emotional health but also highlights the nuances within these relationships. This study also contributes to research on Black women and girls' various resistance strategies in predominantly white spaces.

Unlike research that has been conducted in the past on PWIS, this study specifically provides insight into Black women's distinct experiences working in these schools. It examines how Black women navigate demeaning social encounters, how they create affinity groups amongst themselves, how they advocate for and support Black girls, as well as how they demand change from their schools. It also explores how Black girls forge their own identities and experiences. The study shows how they advocate for themselves and build positive self-perceptions. Additionally, most research on PWIS looks at Black girls that are currently enrolled in school, and typically all participants are attending the same school. This study, however, garnered participants from different parts of the country and various types of PWIS, which provides richer context to the data.

Practical implications and recommendations. Practically, this work gives recommendations, directly from participants, on what both Black women and girls need in order to succeed academically and socially in this school environment. Participants share their thoughts on what PWIS communities can do to improve the experiences of marginalized individuals on their campuses. Black women and girls provided exceptional insight into their lived experiences within PWIS. They detailed the racism, erasure, and trauma they endured and the detrimental effects. Black women and girls spoke at length about not only the complexities within their relationships with one another but stressed the importance of these relationships to their survival in these institutions. Many participants felt compelled to work toward changing the

policies, procedures, curriculum and experiences in order to create a more equitable environment for marginalized individuals.

Mental and emotional support from Black parents. For Black families, school choice has always been a complex decision. No matter which route, there is a cost at some level for Black children in America's education system. Many Black parents that choose PWIS feel that they are making the best academic decision for their child in the long run. If parents choose this route, they must find various avenues to be involved in these schools to ensure that their family's voice and needs are not just heard but acknowledged and taken into account. Parents must also be attuned to their children's mental health when attending these schools. It is extremely common for Black people to dismiss their mental trauma because they feel the access, education, and/or connections are worth the sacrifice (Horvat & Antonio, 1999). Sometimes, and maybe in many cases, attendance at a PWIS is not worth the mental turmoil placed upon the child. Parents must ensure that there are open lines of communication between them and their daughters, so they are fully aware of the issues their child is facing on a daily basis and that their daughters know they can talk openly with their parents about their experiences.

Generally speaking, in our society and community, Black girls are expected to be strong, independent, and endure whatever comes their way (Harris, 2001; Harris-Perry, 2011; Smith, 1983). This mentality is failing Black girls because it forces them to suppress their true feelings and does not afford them the opportunity to tap into the full depth of their identities. As stated previously, Black girls should be taught that they have a voice and that it is okay to not have it together all the time. I challenge Black parents to attempt to find or create school spaces that affirm, nurture, and educate their children positively in all areas so that their kids have a positive school experience that sets them up to be successful, mentally healthy, and possess positive self-

perception. If parents decide to enroll their children in a PWIS, it is imperative that they take heed to the stories presented by the adult participants with children in these schools and immerse their child(ren) in Blackness outside of school.

Affinity groups and affirming Black women and girls. Predominantly white independent schools should embrace Black women and girls' resistance in order to affirm them, foster agency, and reinforce confidence. Black girls must be taught from a young age how to respond to comments or actions that seek to render them powerless, belittle them, or label them stereotypically.

> We suggest that an African American [girl] can be consciously prepared for the sociopolitical environment in which she will live by fostering development of a resistance that will provide her with the necessary tools to think critically about herself, the world and her place in it. (Robinson & Ward, 1991, p. 88-89)

Black women and girls in these institutions may very well fluctuate between resistance for survival and resistance for liberation (Robinson & Ward, 1991). Based on the findings presented in this study, several alumnae participants began at survival but ended up at liberation by the time they completed their tenure at their schools. Resistance for liberation emanated from the stories participants shared during their interviews. Black women and girls should be given the space and opportunity to challenge the status quo and demand a just work and school environment. School leaders must create and protect true safe spaces for Black women and girls to commune together because "Black girls better their chances of succeeding academically when they are exposed to collective spaces where the success of Black girls is valued and actively pursued" (Taaffee, 2016, p. 15). The various friendship types created among Black women and girls foster a certain confidence, strength, and joy that cannot be created in any other space. These friendships empower Black women and girls to believe in themselves and one another.

They foster agency and collective knowledge that provides Black women and girls with the skills they need to protect themselves and resist conformity.

The formal or informal affinity groups created by Black girls are positive, knowledge generating spaces that provide support and empathy (Chase, 2008; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; Gaztambide-Fernández & DiAquoi, 2010; Jacobs, 2017; White, 2013). Some PWIS have welcomed formal affinity groups, recognizing and accepting their necessity to group members' development. On the other hand, there are schools and parent communities that believe affinity groups are detrimental and create more division (French, 2018). Students should have the opportunity to participate in affinity groups that serve to affirm their identity and act as spaces of comfort and healing. "They maintained that these organizations were critical to sustaining African American students' ability to negotiate their outsider-within status at the schools" (Datnow & Cooper, 1997, p. 63). Participants in Jacobs' (2017) study shared that though they benefited from the Black Student Union, the Black Girl Project specifically provided a space where they could talk about their experiences more intimately. The sacredness of affinity group spaces should be protected and not diminished by expectations that "those outside of the affinity group could become educated about the issues and experiences of its members" (Jacobs, 2017, p. 220). Alliance groups and/or other initiatives should be used to promote diversity initiatives and educate the larger school community about equity and justice.

Dismantling personal bias and systemic oppression. Furthermore, the entire school community must work toward making their respective spaces equitable and just. This takes a genuine commitment from the top-down and bottom-up to invest the time and money to unlearn destructive, dehumanizing habits and learn how to authentically engage with families and students from all backgrounds. Colleagues, teachers, and administrators in PWIS must recognize

their personal biases when it comes to responding to Black women and girls. It's not enough to recruit diverse families and offer them a scholarship; it takes investing the money to mitigate transportation issues, aid to assist with being a full member of the school community (i.e., tickets for dances, study abroad trips, athletic gear, etc.), and actively confronting racist incidents, students, or families in the school community. It takes letting go of toxic families and/or employees that are not on board with the vision of change.

Struggling to meet these goals/accomplish these tasks and serve Black women and girls, many schools worry about their image and reputation amongst the elite class. It takes constantly creating and recreating curriculum that includes diverse and equitable perspectives. It takes committing to not just recruiting but understanding how to retain Black faculty and staff. There should be more Black women and girls in these institutions as students and staff but most importantly as teachers. Teachers spend the most amount of time with students; therefore, it is imperative to hire and retain not just teachers of color, not just Black teachers, but Black women teachers. Black girls need to see themselves in the adults in their school to feel inspired and affirmed.

Practitioners must recognize that demolishing the systems of oppression in their schools requires persistent effort. Educators should understand that "[s]chools play a role in the production of race as a social category both through implicit and explicit lessons through school practices" (Lewis, 2003, p. 188). Children learn race through relationships with school leaders and curriculum, which oftentimes perpetuate racial disparities (Lewis, 2003). Independent school personnel must acknowledge the inequities in how they serve children and also identify methods to challenge how race impacts their institution (Lewis, 2003). Thoroughly developing a critical race theorist lens will assist PWIS leaders in critically analyzing their institutions' power

structures, how racism is perpetuated, and discover how to create an equitable school environment. Though not perfect by any means, there are some PWIS that are doing the work to change the way they impact marginalized students. Predominantly white independent schools must have an Office of Equity and Justice, where there is more than just one person solely focused on this work. Generally, the Equity and Justice Director position has not been taken seriously or deemed important in PWIS. In actuality, the Director should report straight to the head of school, be a member of the executive committee, and sit on the board of trustees because this role is vital to creating and sustaining equitable schools. There should also be a substantial budget for this office that allows Directors and their full-time staff to create programs, professional development opportunities, and provide resources to diverse families.

Conclusion

Critically examining Black women and girls' experiences within PWIS allows school leaders to first dismantle the current dehumanizing system and then develop policies and programs that better serve not only Black women and girls but all marginalized groups. This dissertation sought to present Black women and girls' distinct experiences in PWIS. Through the lenses of Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory, I shared Black women and girls' truths which defy dominant deficit beliefs. The socialization of Black women and girls in this school environment is largely negative and detrimental to their physical, mental, career, and academic success and development. Exclusion, inadequacy, and outsider status plague Black women and girls in PWIS. They combat these issues, among many others, while simultaneously working toward academic and career success. Oftentimes Black women take it upon themselves to advocate for, mentor, and/or mother Black girls in these spaces, because they realize the stress and trauma that their students endure. At the same time, these women are also fighting to be

adequately compensated for their extra service and to be valued as credible and knowledgeable in their area of expertise. Despite these negative socialization experiences, Black women and girls find ways to create positive experiences and self-perceptions for themselves through their relationships with one another and through outside organizations. The relationships they build with each other prove to provide the support, courage, and strength to continue. For some participants, these same relationships equipped them with the ingenuity and poise to resist in PWIS.

It is my hope that these institutions heed the call to dismantle the oppressive systems that consistently tell Black women and girls they don't belong. *It is my hope* that safe spaces are created for Black women and girls to convene privately in order to support and affirm each other. *It is my hope* that Black women might be inspired to insert themselves into this environment *if* and *how* they see fit, in order to provide a positive connection and relationships for Black girls. *It is my hope* that Black girls in these spaces feel more connected to one another, even though they may be in different schools and/or states. *It is my hope* that scholars and practitioners recognize and appreciate the experiences and blessings that Black women and girls continuously bestow upon the world.

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Appendix A

Faculty/Staff In-Depth Interview Protocol

Date:

Thank you for participating in this study. I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Illinois Urbana—Champaign. I am conducting a research study on Black women and girls' experiences in independent private schools. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research may be published, but I will not identify you by name either verbally or in writing in my analysis and reporting. If you have any questions concerning this research study, you may contact Dr. Anjale Welton, Associate Professor, at 217-333-0807 or ajwelton@illinois.edu.

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

[Letter of Informed Consent]

Do you have any questions before we begin? Let's get started.

1. How did you find out about independent schools?
2. What was the application and interview process like?
3. Why did you choose to work in an independent school?
4. How was your transition into the school?
5. Were there resources available to assist you and your family (i.e. orientation, parent meetings, affinity groups, buddy families)?
6. How do you identify racially or culturally?
    a. What does that mean for you?
7. Do you think your race and gender impact your experience at the school? If so, how?
8. How do you feel going to work every day?
9. Have you experienced any type of microaggressions, discrimination, or racism?
    a. If so, what happened?
    b. How did you handle it?
10. What has your experience been like with your colleagues?
11. What is your relationship like with other Black women at the school?
12. What is your relationship like with Black girls at the school?
13. What are Black girls' relationships like with each other?
14. What have you observed regarding Black girls' experiences at the school?
15. How do you think Black girls are perceived by teachers, administrators and other students?
    a. Do you think the girls are aware of these perceptions?

16. Do they experience any type of microaggressions, discrimination, or racism?
    a. If so, what happened?
    b. How do the girls respond to these incidents?
    c. Have you ever assisted in reconciling any of these incidents?
17. How could the school, if at all, have improved you or Black female students' experiences?
    a. What do you think is most important for Black women to have in order to succeed in this type of environment?
    b. What do you think is most important for Black girls to have in order to succeed in this type of environment?
18. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience?

Thank you for your time and participation. Do you have any questions for me? Again, thank you!

Appendix B

Alumnae In-Depth Interview Protocol

Date:

Thank you for participating in this study. I am a doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Illinois Urbana—Champaign. I am conducting a research study on Black girls' experiences in predominately white independent private schools. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research may be published, but I will not identify you by name either verbally or in writing in my analysis and reporting. If you have any questions concerning this research study, you may contact Dr. Anjale Welton, Associate Professor, at 217-333-0807 or ajwelton@illinois.edu.

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

[Letter of Informed Consent]

Do you have any questions before we begin? Let's get started.

1. When did you begin attending an independent private school?
    a. Was it your choice or did you have a say in the decision?
2. How was your transition into the school?
    a. Were there resources available to assist you and your family (i.e. orientation, parent meetings, affinity groups, buddy families)?
3. How do you identify racially or culturally?
    a. What does that mean for you?
4. Were you involved in any diversity clubs or organizations? If so, which?
    a. Did you hold a leadership position?
    b. How do you think others perceived these clubs?
5. How did you feel going to school every day?
6. What was your experience like in the classroom/with teachers?
7. What was your experience like with your peers?
8. What was your experience like with administrators (i.e. head of school, admission, head of upper school, dean)?
9. What was your relationship like with Black women faculty/staff?
10. What was your relationship like with other Black girls at your school?
11. Did you experience any type of microaggressions, discrimination, or racism?
    a. If so, what happened?
    b. Did you report it? If not, why not?
    c. Did the school take action in any way?

12. How could the school (administration, teachers, peers) have improved your experience?
    a. What do you think are most important for Black girls to have in order to succeed in this type of environment?
13. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience?

Thank you for your time and participation. Do you have any questions for me? Again, thank you!