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University of Missouri- St. Louis, cryslynnbillingsley@gmail.com

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**What About Us? For Girls Between Worlds:
How Black Girls Navigate White High Schools**

Cryslynn C. Billingsley

B.S. Elementary Education, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2008
M.A. Educational Administration, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2012
Ed.S. Educational Administration, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2014

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Advisory Committee

Matthew Davis, Ph.D.

Chairperson

Thomasina Hassler, Ph.D.

Timothy Makubuya, Ph.D.

Carl Hoagland, Ph.D.

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Abstract

This qualitative study is about the experiences and challenges Black girls have while attending predominantly White high schools and what they are doing to navigate that particular space. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand more about how Black girls navigate White space as minority members of a system that was not originally intended for them. Through semi-structured interviews, Black girls were asked directly to share their lived experiences. This study hopes to illuminate and amplify the voices of Black girls and help others see them by giving them a platform to discuss and tell their stories. It also aims to create agency in Black girls by asking them to examine the challenges they face while attending predominantly White high schools and how they navigate that particular setting and make it work for them.

Keywords: Black girls, African American girls, Critical Race Feminism, Critical Race Theory, Crooked Room, Intersectionality, White high schools, White space, navigate, navigating space, challenges, racialized experiences, lived experiences, micro aggressions, qualitative, voices, stories, counter-narrative, counterstory, perceptions, stereotypes

This dissertation is dedicated to:

God for always having your hand on me.

My husband Lyenn and our children together: Tony, Colyn and Evan.

My nieces: Kylie (d. 2017), Aneisha, Aniyah, Aundrea, and Callie

The people who have shown up as angels on my journey as a Black girl.

All the Black women and girls everywhere in the world.

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I am grateful for the six high school girls who were a part of my study. You trusted me with your stories, you affirmed why this topic matters, and it was a blessing to work with each of you. One of you said "I can't wait for you to be Dr. B so people can see we can be doctors too. Representation matters. Kids need to see that!" What you did not know is that the first few months of being admitted into this program, I considered quitting due to various obstacles, but I had people pushing me to persevere. Dr. Flagg, Dr. Mayes, and Dr. Ming, a trio of Black women with doctorates were a few of the people who were there not only encouraging me, but they were also the representation you spoke about. They were what I needed to see as an example of what was possible. So I stuck it out in this doctoral program. And I got to hear you proclaiming what it meant to be represented in all spaces. I am thankful for you and every student I have met as an educator; my why is students.

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Chapter One

“I come as one, I stand as ten thousand.” Maya Angelou

Introduction

In 1849, public education was segregated according to the laws and this was a normal part of American society (“A Century Before Brown,” 1997; Dubois, 2007; Hasian & Klinger, 2002; Roberts v. city of Boston, 1849). Negro schools were set up under legal segregation after the Civil War and during the Reconstruction Era (Dubois, 2007). Since schools were legally separated by race at that time, this caused five-year-old Sarah Roberts, a Black girl living in Boston, Massachusetts, to walk by five elementary schools on her way to school since those elementary schools were all White. (“A Century before Brown,” 1997; Roberts v. city of Boston, 1849). “The Smith Grammar School had been maintained by the city of Boston since 1820 for the education of Negro students” (“A Century before Brown,” 1997, p.138) and this was the school that Sarah Roberts was assigned to attend. “An assessment of the Smith school commissioned by the city of Boston reported that the school rooms were too small, the paint was much defaced and the school equipment had been so shattered and neglected; it could not be used until it was thoroughly repaired” (“A Century Before Brown,” 1997, p. 138). This assessment contained typical characteristics of Black schools in comparison to White schools especially at that time. Instead of accepting this situation as standard for his daughter, Sarah's father took the city to court claiming the right to have Sarah admitted to one of the closer all-White schools (“A Century Before Brown,” 1997; Hasian & Klinger, 2002; Roberts v. city of Boston, 1849). The all-White school would not only be in the

neighborhood where their family lived, but it would surely be in better condition than what was offered to her and other Black students by the city of Boston.

The lawyer Sarah's father contacted to take the city of Boston to court was a young abolitionist named Charles Sumner, who would eventually become a U.S. senator ("A Century before Brown," 1997). "Sumner argued the case for free and he believed in equality before the law. Sumner argued that school segregation would brand a whole race with the stigma of inferiority and degradation and that the separate Negro school was not an equivalent to the all-White schools" ("A Century before Brown," 1997, p.138). Surprisingly to some people, there are families present day who would say the same of their children's schools.

Besides the Black schools not being equal to the White schools and segregation cultivating racial inferiority, "Sumner also argued that segregation even harmed White children. He said their hearts while yet tender with childhood, are necessarily hardened by this conduct, and their subsequent lives, perhaps, bear enduring testimony to this legalized uncharitableness" ("A Century before Brown," 1997, p. 138). The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court was not convinced by Sumner's arguments on behalf of Sarah Roberts' case nor the implications of segregation on Black and White children as a whole. The judge ruled against Sumner and his client ("A Century before Brown," 1997; Hasian & Klinger, 2002; Roberts v. city of Boston, 1849). "The court declared that both races benefited from racial segregation. The ruling in the Roberts' case, which upheld Boston's segregated school system, was used as judicial precedent in at least a dozen states" ("A Century Before Brown," 1997, p.138). Sarah's story is a

glimpse into what Black children often experienced in order to access education in America.

In 1957, “Elizabeth Ann Eckford made history as one of the Little Rock Nine, the nine Black students who desegregated Little Rock Central High School,” an all-White school, that year (“Elizabeth Ann Eckford,” 2016). The images of Elizabeth, a 15-year-old Black girl, walking alone through an angry crowd outside of Central High School, forced people across the nation to see what was happening in Little Rock on television along with the rest of the world (“Elizabeth Ann Eckford,” 2016; “Fifty years ago,” 2007; Nakata, 2008). The Little Rock Nine students were scheduled to arrive at Central High School together that morning and meet in the front of the school, but their meeting place was changed the night before to meet on the side of the school to avoid the expected protest (Nakata, 2008). Elizabeth’s family had no phone in their home like the other students, so she did not know of the change in meeting arrangements (“Elizabeth Ann Eckford,” 2016; Nakata, 2008). The mentor for the Little Rock Nine students, Daisy Bates, intended to meet Elizabeth at her home that morning, but they did not connect (“Elizabeth Ann Eckford,” 2016).

Elizabeth arrived to the front of the school as originally planned, but her group was not there, instead the Arkansas National Guard was there under the orders of Governor Orval Faubus (“Elizabeth Ann Eckford,” 2016). A large crowd of angry protesters against school integration met Elizabeth in front of the school that morning too. Elizabeth walked towards the front doors of Central High School, and as she made her way through the hateful crowd of men, women, and teenagers, they accosted her by shouting “Two, four, six, eight, we ain’t gonna integrate!” (“Elizabeth Ann Eckford,”

2016). As “Elizabeth moved closer to the school doors, the crowd became infuriated. Someone in the screaming segregationist mob yelled, ‘Lynch her. Lynch her.’ The mob chanted, ‘No nigger bitch is going to get in our school. Drag her over to this tree. Let's take care of that nigger.’ They continued” (“Fifty years ago,” 2007, p.5). Despite the vile words being yelled at her, Elizabeth continued her walk forward toward the front entrance of the school. At some point, she must have stopped to sit because “a White man sat down beside Elizabeth. He put his arm around her, patted her shoulder, raised her chin saying, ‘Don't let them see you cry’ the man said” (“Fifty years ago,” 2007, p.5). This nameless man like Charles Sumner, the lawyer for Sarah Roberts, appeared to be an ally in the fight for school integration.

Elizabeth continued to walk to the front door. “Elizabeth finally entered Central High School. Some of the White students were so panicked they jumped from second story windows” (“Fifty years ago,” 2007, p.5). At the end of the school day, Elizabeth made her way through the mob outside again and caught the bus to where her mother worked (“Elizabeth Ann Eckford,” 2016; “Fifty years ago,” 2007). Nothing about that day went as planned for Elizabeth Eckford; it proved to be an extremely challenging experience for her when “she simply wanted the opportunity to go to school” (Nakata, 2008, p. 24).

“In 1958, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus closed the schools in Little Rock rather than continue to comply with the federal desegregation order” (“Fifty years ago,” 2007, p. 5). Elizabeth Eckford ended up moving to St. Louis, MO where she earned a high school diploma by taking correspondence and night courses (“Elizabeth Ann Eckford,” 2016; “Fifty years ago,” 2007). She went on to study history and earn an

undergraduate degree from Wilberforce University in Ohio (“Elizabeth Ann Eckford,” 2016; “Fifty years ago,” 2007). The situation Elizabeth faced as part of the Little Rock Nine shows again that certain schools were not intended for certain students just like in the case of Sarah Roberts. Elizabeth’s story serves as another glimpse into how difficult it was for Black children to access American education whether the law indicated access for all regardless of race or not.

In 1994, it was my second year attending a predominantly White school as a desegregation student in St. Louis, MO. I was from the city and I struggled to know where I fit in the county school where I was a minority member of the student body. I had rarely attended school with White students, and now I was usually one or two Black students in a classroom. My ninth grade English teacher gave me a book titled *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. Teachers suggest books to students all the time, and as an educator, I have done the same thing. When my teacher gave me the book, he mentioned that he thought I was one of the good readers in class and could handle the mature content of the book. People always considered me more mature and/or older everywhere I went, so to hear him say I could handle a mature book was part of my normal experience. The book my teacher gave me turned out to be significant for reasons he did not know.

It was the first time I saw myself, my Black female self, depicted in a book. In the novel, Angelou shared many of her life’s experiences. Many of her experiences mirrored mine, and she turned out to be ok, no, better than ok. I believed this meant I could be ok too. I am grateful that I got the chance to read that book, for it has been a powerful, inspiring story to read in my life and Angelou became one of my favorite authors.

Looking back at that time in my life now, I am wondering about a few things. Why was that the first time I saw someone like me in a book? What was it about me that made my teacher think I could handle the mature content of the book? Why did people think I was more mature than others my age? I often thought it was because I was the oldest child in my family or because I was taller than other kids in the neighborhood. I was more mature than other kids I knew because I always had to be grown up in different situations. I was a little momma and I took care of things so no one had to worry about anything. There were many things going on with my family life that were outside of my control, and I grew up feeling like things were not ok, and I wanted them to be someday. Angelou's journey inspired me for sure and maybe I would not always have to play these different roles and just be the me I was in the moment. It was like I always had to be something else for someone.

Nevertheless, I was a good reader as my teacher stated, and Angelou's memoir made me love reading even more. Later in my life, I read a couple of W.E.B Dubois' books and his writing about double-consciousness and it resounded with me in a similar way as Angelou's work had. Dubois (1969/1994) states, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness... One ever feels his two-ness- 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" (p.2). Although I did not know the term Dubois used back when I was in ninth grade, I was very aware of this complex feeling of being between different worlds and having to be conscious of how I had to adapt to different things in different spaces.

At the present time in my life, I am able to name the feeling of double-consciousness succinctly, and I can trace it back to a more specific transition in my life when I was feeling part of different worlds. This is when I was an eighth grade student; that year was the first year I was as a desegregation student. The feeling of not quite fitting was very distinctive. I had to learn quickly about navigating this new space and several experiences I had that school year were instrumental in that process. I rode the school bus with 10 or 12 other students from the South and West Side of St. Louis to a suburb of St. Louis County each day, and the bus ride could be anywhere from forty minutes to an hour depending on the traffic. My family had moved all over St. Louis City; when I lived with my mother, we lived on the North and West Side and when I lived with my father, we lived on the South Side. I knew all about getting around the city. I could get anywhere on the Bi-state Bus at age 13. I had been taught to catch the Bi-state Bus at age seven to help get my sisters and myself back and forth to school because we had moved so often. I knew nothing about traveling to St. Louis County, and what I knew about the highway was you took it to go out of town. My riding a school bus for 40 plus minutes to and from school each day felt like a daily road trip.

At my new middle school, I was in pre-Algebra for math class. This was because I had a B in math from my old school, but the math was very different at this new school. It was more difficult almost like someone speaking a different language to me, and I would barely understand a few words here and there during class. I learned quickly at my old school and was always ahead of the class but not here at this new school. I started reading at age four, and in primary grades, I went to the higher grades for reading and math instruction. It was suggested that I be moved a grade or two ahead so I could be

challenged academically. My mother was afraid of me formally skipping a grade because she said I already acted grown enough; she thought I needed to stay with kids my own age. Teachers considered me one of the smart students at my old school, but I would get bored in class and they would try to find ways to keep me busy. I would often run errands for teachers and tutor my classmates.

At this new school, things were different for me though as an eighth grade student from the city. Learning was not coming as easily as it had in the past, and I was struggling academically for the first time in my school experience. Some students said I talked ghetto. They would ask where I was from, and I would say St. Louis. They would say I did not talk like them and they were from St. Louis too; that this must be how people talked in the hood. It was annoying to me to have to keep explaining where I was from or what I meant by a word or phrase I said. A few of the teachers would correct the things I said in class, and this was as embarrassing as it was annoying. As a result, I decided to lay low and not draw attention to myself. I decided to keep quiet and just listen in class and everywhere I went at the new school. I was usually an outgoing, confident girl who had a lot to say, and now I was no longer sure of myself. Pretending to be a quiet student was opposite of my true nature, yet it felt like this was the way I had to be at the new school.

Although I was being quiet and reserved at the new school, another student decided she wanted to fight me. She was a popular eighth grade girl who was known for being the best dressed, the toughest, and the one all the boys liked. She said I thought I was all that since I was from the hood. She was Black too, but her family lived in the district and to me, this meant her family had some money; she certainly dressed as if they

did. My family did not have money and when I lived with my mother, we moved all the time. At that time in my life, I lived with my father, and he did not have money either but I would babysit and do odd jobs to help with things I needed. Having moved all the time before, I understood what it meant to be the new student at school, and often this meant that I might have to physically fight or verbally check someone to get respect. It was nothing to me to have to fight at any of the other schools. It was expected.

I was used to seeing fighting around me at school even when I was not involved. I was used to seeing the adults fighting in my home and sometimes there was fighting and much worse in the different neighborhoods we lived in. I did have my reasons why I would personally choose to fight: to defend myself, to protect my sisters, or to protect my friends. If things were unfair or to get things my family needed, I would fight authority too just not physically but with my words instead. Fighting gave me power. I was powerless about so many other things that were happening and had happened in my life, but fighting was up to me. Life had taught me to stay ready to fight, that way no one would hurt the people I cared about and no one could hurt me. This thing with the popular girl at this new school was not fitting in with my usual reasons for fighting though; something was different about it this time.

Something was stirring in me at the new school as I was learning to get used to the way things worked there. Going there was supposed to be a new opportunity for me, and I needed to stay out of trouble and be good; that is what I had been told. I had gotten in so much trouble at my old school that I would be assigned to a worse school the following year with the other bad kids like me. A teacher intervened on my behalf and found another solution since I did not have academic issues, and she believed I needed a

different school environment than the one I was caught up in at the time. My home life did not help matters. My teacher believed I needed a chance to experience something else. She kept saying she saw something in me. The opportunity to go to this new school was supposed to be a fresh start for me and now this popular girl had called me out and this situation with this girl messed with my plan to lay low and be a quiet girl in school.

Even though I was the new girl at the new school, and being the new girl like so many times before, it was clear to me what that meant, but I did not feel the need to fight this particular time. I was hoping to not worry about this kinds of stuff at the county school, but I was wrong. I tried avoiding the popular girl for a couple of days by walking down different hallways, skipping both the bathroom and cafeteria because as a seasoned fighter, I knew the typical places where fights occur. My avoiding her did not work, for she was looking for me. Eventually, she and a bunch of her friends found me and cornered me in a hallway. I knew not to stand there and argue (because that is how your opponent can catch you off-guard and you might get beat up in the fight) but we were surrounded by all her friends, and I could not walk away either without resistance from one of them. I was stuck. Besides worrying about getting in trouble at school by the principal, if I got beat up at school that was going to be a problem for me at home, and I did not want that problem either. I had to choose.

The girl moved closer in my space, leaned in my face, yelling stuff about me, and the other students were yelling too, yet I would not say anything back. I stood there knowing there was only one way out of this: I gave the popular girl a quick boxing combo, and the fight was over. The kids stepped back quickly and it was all over. Teachers seemed to appear out of nowhere yelling at students to go to class. One teacher

helped the popular girl up off the floor, and the principal grabbed me and started walking me down the hallway. I turned around to find the popular girl and when I spotted her, I whispered “sorry” in her direction. I felt bad about what happened and usually, I never felt bad after a fight.

Surprisingly, the consequence for fighting at the county school was only in-school suspension (ISS) for a few days. I was expecting to be out of school for a while. On the last day of ISS, the principal came and talked with me. He was a Black man, and I had never seen one as a principal except in a movie. He explained how things worked at my new school. He told me that we do not fight out here [in the county] with these White folks around. He said that they already thought we were animals. I had not ever considered what White people were thinking about Black people before. I had never really been around them on a regular basis before coming to this school. A few of the White people I was familiar with, acted and talked like we did in our neighborhood where pretty much only Black people lived. They were not like the White people I saw on television or even like the ones in the Judy Blume books I loved to read.

The principal also mentioned he had been watching me and knew the fight was not my fault; he said he noticed that I was smart. He said my being smart was better than me fighting. He talked to me about how people were viewing me as a Black girl from the hood and one of those poor city students, but that I had the power to change that narrative with my actions. He said if I wanted to make it out here in the county school, I needed to leave the hood at home or on the bus. He said I needed to learn how to code switch when I came in the school. I asked him what was code switching, and he asked had I ever heard my mother on the phone trying to pay a bill or do business, and I said yes. She sounds

fancy and White I confirmed. He said no, not White, that she switches from her relaxed English to proper English when she needs to so she can get things done. He told me to learn to code switch with my talking and my behavior while I was at school or doing business, and I would be good. We talked more about code switching and how it could be used at this school and how it could be used to make it in the world. He said I could become a successful person and be able to make choices about my own life. The principal reminded me again about not fighting anymore. I agreed. I never wanted to fight at the new school in the first place. Being in trouble had never felt like this before. I would get to make choices about my own life one day. That felt good to know. The principal gave me so much to think about and all the things he said layered on top of why I was attending this new school in the first place. My brain was full.

When I got out of in-school suspension, the popular girl and I became friends. She had never been in a physical fight before even though people assumed she had been because she acted tough and was pushing everyone around all the time. She thought since I was quiet in class, I was judging her, and I would be an easy target. This popular Black girl was figuring out how to navigate the White school just like I was even though she had been in the district all of her school experience, and I just got there in eighth grade. I learned that she too did a lot of code switching along with the other Black students at the school. We would talk and laugh however we wanted to talk and laugh at the lunch table, outside at recess, or on the bus, and it felt like our own club. When we were in class though, we were about our business which was to focus on school, and we did focus for the most part. Whether we were Black students from the city or living in the county, we were all figuring out how to navigate our predominantly White school.

Moving forward, things got a little easier at the new school. My principal would check on me to see how things were going, and we would talk through different things that were playing out at school and sometimes, not too often though, we would talk about how things were at home. I liked the new school, meeting new people, learning new things and trying new activities. I was enjoying school. The popular girl and I became friends, I had the respect of my peers, and I was even participating in class and not afraid to speak because I had this new trick: code switching. People learned that I was not quiet at all. I was feeling comfortable at my new school. I was learning what it felt like to be good. When you are learning to navigate different space than you are accustomed to though, being good is not quite that simple.

I had two more fights that eighth grade year. One incident happened in reading class when the teacher put us in groups. A White girl arrived to class late and was mad that I was sitting in her desk. She told me to move and called me a nigger bitch in her demand that I give her the desk. I calmly moved out of the desk. When she sat down, I punched her in the face so hard, the desk toppled over on its side with her in it. The teacher immediately told me to go to the office, and I quietly complied. I explained myself in the office, and the principal said he understood, but I still got in-school suspension. He said I should have told the teacher. I asked him why did I need to tell the teacher when she and the entire class watched what happened from the beginning of the incident and the teacher did not say anything until I did something to the girl. I told him the teacher did not care about what the White girl said to me or that the girl was late to class and came in disrupting the class, that the teacher only addressed me, and I was sitting in the group she put me in. Besides this incident, the teacher always ignored the

girl's behavior in class, so to me, there was no point in telling her anything when she was right there when it happened.

The other incident occurred near the end of the school year. I got suspended off the bus for a few days after I beat up a boy for touching me on the rear-end every day. No matter how many times I told him to stop or cursed him out, he and his friends would laugh, and he would do it again the next day. I finally had enough and did what I knew to do. The principal said I should have told the bus driver and let her handle it, and that was why I was in trouble that time. I had not even considered telling the bus driver about the boy. I had learned early on in my life that it does not matter if you tell when something happens to you. No one does anything anyway and somehow it would be my fault. I was taught to just deal with it. Be strong, be tough, and handle it myself. These messages I was getting at this new school about dealing with conflict were offering me some new perspectives to consider even if these new perspectives were not exactly clear.

With the suggestion of a fresh start at this new school, I started to discover that one day maybe I really could get to a place where I could make choices about my own life. Although it was challenging at times, eventually, I was back to being one of the smart students once I figured out how to navigate the new school and make it work for me. While I was starting to figure out my new school life, when I got home each day where my neighborhood was mostly Black people, they started saying I was trying to be White or called me an Oreo which meant I was Black on the outside, White on the inside from going to a White school all day with the White people. I am a dark skinned Black person, and all of a sudden, I was not Black enough in my own neighborhood. What was

I then? I could not keep up with all this! Either way, it was tough to fit into whatever image of what Black was supposed to be at school and at home.

In addition to the things I was experiencing concerning school, my home life was tumultuous to put it lightly. As the oldest child, it was my job to take care of whatever needed to be done. I was used to running the house and being in charge of my siblings. Being the dependable, responsible one was a part of my identity. I had always known being the oldest girl in the family was demanding when I was growing up because I had so many responsibilities at home and I wished for less to do. Once, when I was a little girl around six or seven years old, I wished to be a boy because they seemed to have it easier than I did as a girl. Then at 13 years old, something else felt more true: being a Black girl was not easy. It was tiring! I was exhausted from the stereotypes and from pretending to be a quiet girl hiding my true nature in an attempt to be good. I was exhausted from navigating the new school and figuring out how my identities played out in all these different spaces. I was a girl living between worlds and it was not easy to do all the time.

Having reflected on my school experiences in the early 1990s getting acclimated to a new school environment where the dominant culture was White, becoming aware of other people's assumptions and perceptions about someone like me, learning to deal with micro aggressions, and pretending to be quiet and calm so I would be viewed as a good girl is not unique to just my school experiences. When Sarah Roberts and her family questioned why she could not have access to a quality school in their neighborhood back in 1849, this was not unique to her life either. The objection to Elizabeth Eckford attending Little Rock Central High School in 1957 revealed the sentiment of that time in history. How dare she and the other Black students try to attend that White school even if

the federal law allowed them to be there. Unfortunately, she was not the only Black girl to experience this kind of rejection and hate from a community when schools were integrated. From the subtle slights I encountered, to the systematic blatant racism that Sarah and Elizabeth survived, these narratives illustrate a range of afflictions that occur during Black girls' schooling experiences. All three of us wanted to be in school but accessing it certainly presented some challenges for us.

In 2009, President Barack Obama instituted a program called The White House Council on Women and Girls. "The goal of the Council was to ensure that Federal programs and policies address and take into account the distinctive concerns of women and girls, including women of color and those with disabilities" (Executive Order No.13506, 2009, p.2). In November 2014, the Council released "White House Report: Women and Girls of Color: Addressing Challenges and Expanding Opportunity" (2014) that highlighted the progress-to-date of women and girls particularly "women and girls of color" (The White House Council, 2014, p.2).

On examination of the Council's report it was noted that from 2009-2012, while there was an increase in college graduation rates by 3.1 percent for Hispanic women, 2.7 percent for American Indian/Alaska Native women, and 2.1 percent for Asian American and Pacific Islander women, there was only a 0.9 percent increase for Black women. Most pressing, since 2009, while high school dropout rates decreased by 30 percent for Hispanic girls—it only decreased by 16 percent for Black girls. While the rest of the report revealed how the different groups of girls were making progress in the face of challenges, there was no mention about Black girls and why their numbers in the report showed a significant gap in

progress in comparison to the other girls of color. Omitted from the Council's 2014 report were the distinct challenges Black girls face that caused them to lag behind in educational attainment, namely, college and high school graduation rates. (Watson, 2016, p.240)

The challenges impacting Black girls' education were not mentioned in the report. What about them? Why was this left out of a report geared towards girls? Are educators and the American public socialized to not notice that Black girls are left out of educational discourse? This report from The White House Council shows that Black girls are marginalized in national education efforts even though they are experiencing challenges in school like other student populations do.

In 2017, Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality published a study called "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood" conducted by Dr. Jamilia Blake from Texas A&M, Rebecca Epstein from College Station, Texas and Thalia Gonzalez, Associate Professor at Occidental College. The researchers stated "for the first time [there is] data showing that adults view Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their White peers" (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017, p. 1). The data collected during the study included "325 adults from a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds who were surveyed about their thoughts and impressions about gender and race with girls being the focal point", (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017, p. 1; "New Study Finds," 2017). In a "snapshot of the data, compared to White girls of the same age, survey participants perceive" (Epstein, et al., 2017, p. 1) the following:

"Black girls need less nurturing

Black girls need less protection

Black girls need to be supported less

Black girls need to be comforted less

Black girls are more independent

Black girls know more about adult topics

Black girls know more about sex.” (Epstein, et al., 2017, p. 1)

This data might explain why it was acceptable for Sarah Roberts to pass by five neighborhood schools to attend a school that was both neglected in its structure and resources; would this have been ok for White students? Elizabeth Eckford faced the indignant crowd outside Little Rock High School that day in 1957 alone; would it have been acceptable for her to be alone if she were White? Would my ninth grade English teacher have offered Maya Angelou’s memoir to a White girl in his class or would the book have been deemed too adult for her instead?

In her book *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, Monique W. Morris (2018) explained that Black girls are plagued by many perceptions that influence the way that society views them when she stated:

As children or adults, Black girls are treated as if they are supposed to ‘know better’ or at least ‘act like’ they know...Black women and girls in America are subjected to dormant assumptions about their sexuality, their ‘anger’ or their ‘attitude.’ They have long understood that their way of engaging with the world- how they talk, how they walk, how they wear their hair, or how they hold their bodies- is subject to scrutiny, especially by those in positions of relative power. They feel the gaze. They intuit its presence. They live with this knowledge in their

bodies and subconsciously wrestle with every personal critique of how they navigate their environments. (Morris, 2018, p. 34-35)

The way that Morris described how Black girls feel and sense the assumptions by living with the knowledge (Morris, 2018) and their subconscious wrestling with others' criticism (Morris, 2018) makes the notion of Dubois' (1969/1994) double-consciousness more pronounced in their everyday reality.

The “good girl” and “bad girl” dichotomy, as chronicled by Monique W. Morris in *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, is a condition that has plagued Black girls and women for time immemorial. Society's deeply entrenched expectations of Black girls—influenced by racism and patriarchy—has led to a ritual whereby these young women are often mischaracterized, and mislabeled because of how they look, dress, speak, and act. In short, Black girls are devalued based on how others perceive them. (Anderson, 2016)

The perceptions society has placed on Black girls has manifested in the school setting influencing how they are treated and disciplined. “These impressions about [Black girls] affect the quality of the education they receive and how severely they're punished in school and, ultimately, the justice system” (NPR.org, 2017).

Although Black girls make up a minority in the school population, they represent a large portion of girls whose school discipline process ends up handled by the police. “Black girls are 16 percent of the female student population, but nearly one-third of all girls referred to law enforcement and more than one-third of all female school-based arrests” (Morris, 2018, p. 3). “From minor infractions to arrests, Black girls face higher rates of punishment across multiple public systems, and schools are no different. Earlier

research on the disproportionate discipline rates for Black students has focused primarily on boys” (“New Study Finds,” 2017). “Black boys remain at the center of research efforts and national initiatives aimed to improve their educational outcomes” (Watson, 2016, p. 239).

Until recently, the research did not reflect the patterns of what was unfolding when Black girls were disciplined in schools. Considering that “Black girls are disproportionately represented among those who experience the type of discipline that renders children vulnerable to delinquency and future incarceration” (Morris, 2018, p.13) continuing to overlook and disregard how unfair or how harsh discipline practices affect Black girls does not make any sense. These issues with unfair or harsh discipline practices present yet another challenge for Black girls schooling experiences yet those same discipline practices aimed at Black boys dominate the conversation. As important as it is for the unfair or harsh discipline practices to be addressed for Black boys in school, this should not come at the expense of what girls of the same race need.

The needs of Black girls are often overlooked by teachers, administrators, and policy makers. Policies simply focusing on race or gender ignore the unique positionality in which Black girls live and learn. This oversight has contributed to a lack of educational programming and policies that address the impact of the intersection of racism and sexism on the educational experiences of Black girls. (Ricks, 2014, p.10)

The blend between race and gender causes Black girls to face challenges in their schooling experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). There seems to be a problematic tendency to treat them both like they exist as exclusive categories when actually, the experiences of

Black women and girls are really multidimensional or intersectional experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). “Intersectionality means the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how these combinations play out in various settings” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 51). The combination of these categories, as well as other categories, can be disadvantaging factors for people as they navigate different spaces (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). “Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (Collins, 2000, p.18). “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” (Crenshaw, 1989, p.140).

“Black womanhood is routinely debased and denigrated and that debasing and denigration helps to construct a perception of Black women as unfit and unworthy” (Ladson-Billings, 2009b, p. 88) One of the ways Black women and girls are subordinated is through skewed perceptions and stereotypes about them. Melissa Harris-Perry (2009) has named this reality the crooked room, and she discusses the crooked room and its systematic oppression of Black women and girls in America in her book, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (2009). Harris-Perry says,

When they confront race and gender stereotypes, Black women are standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some Black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion. (Harris-Perry, 2009, p.29)

A variety of American institutions continuously socialize people of color with stereotypes, misrecognition, and shame (Harris-Perry, 2009). Schools are one of those institutions where skewed perceptions and stereotypes about Black girls play out each day.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) makes educational institutions a crooked space for girls of color, especially the Black girl, and these girls face additional challenges in their schooling experiences because of it (Crenshaw, 1989; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Harris-Perry, 2009; Watson, 2016). The additional challenges Black girls face in school may also have to do with other identities they have like religious affiliation and sexual orientation which may make for challenges that are also intersectional layers compounded with the original combination of race and gender. Something else that might influence intersectional challenges for people of color is socio-economic status. All the aforementioned identifying factors can influence how Black girls are perceived in school. Intersectionality makes the spaces people of color navigate more complex, especially Black girls (Crenshaw, 1989).

I think about what Sarah Roberts experienced to attend school back in 1849, and I think about what Elizabeth Eckford experienced not quite a whole century later. I also think about what I experienced in school as a Black girl transferring to a predominantly White school district almost four decades after Elizabeth Eckford and how that compares to what I have observed Black girls experiencing in the predominantly White district where I taught students. I wonder what Black girls would say about what they experience in school. They have been left out of national reports and other educational discourse about them, so I would like to know what they are experiencing from their point of view

especially knowing the role intersectionality plays in creating a crooked space in their education and their life experiences.

Black girls are not seen as experts on their own experiences. Instead, they are seen through the problems they pose to society. Research, education, and programs that spring from a deficit-orientation do not, then, consider the Black girl, but instead what have been deemed Black girl problems or inadequacies. These problems have been decided for Black girls, and these girls' designation as inadequate excuses them from making or informing authentic decisions about themselves. (Edwards, et al., 2016, p. 427)

What might Black girls say they are experiencing at school if asked directly? More specifically, since I teach in a predominantly White school district, what would the girls say they experience in high schools there? Where are they finding success and what might be challenging them while they are there? How are they figuring it all out? I believe it is important to find out what Black girls would say about what they are experiencing in school since their cares, needs, and challenges continue to be disregarded, overlooked, and neglected in society especially in schools. This qualitative study is about the experiences and challenges Black girls have while attending predominantly White high schools and what they are doing to navigate that particular space.

Research Questions

This study revolves around the challenges Black girls face when they attend predominantly White high schools (PWHS). They are learning in crooked space and are

finding ways to navigate that space and make it work for them. The research questions are:

1. What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?
2. What might they say about navigating that particular space?

Statement of Purpose

Although “there has been a surge in research centered on Black girls’ schooling experiences in the last decade” (Watson, 2016, p.239), that research has focused on schools that are predominantly Black schools, charter schools, or even private schools. What is happening when Black girls attend predominantly White schools though? Some might assume that since most predominantly White schools located in suburban areas are affluent and have a variety of resources available to them that there are no problems and that they face no challenges. What might Black girls who attend those particular schools say of their everyday school experiences? What challenges do they face in PWHS each day? What are their perceptions about learning, about others, and about themselves in that particular space? How do they navigate the PWHS and make it work for them? What might they say about navigating that particular space?

The goal in researching about the experiences and challenges of Black girls in PWHS was to explore and understand more about how they navigate a space as minority members of a system that was not originally intended for them. This study aimed to find out how they navigate that particular space and make it work for them. Black girls were asked directly through interviews about the experiences and challenges they face in PWHS and this study reflects their voices. I am helping to create agency in Black girls by

asking them to examine the challenges they face in school and have them share their solutions. I hope to illuminate the voices of Black girls and help others see them in a new way by giving them a platform to tell their stories. They respond to the question ‘What about us?’ which serves as part of the title of this study by sharing their experiences learning in a White school setting.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it centers on Black girls and their voices in a world that presumes them insignificant. They are socialized early to accept a subordinate status in America especially in schools (Haynes, Stewart, & Allen, 2016) and this subordinate status creates crooked space where they “face disproportionately high levels of adversity in schools” (Edwards, et al., 2016, p.428). Harris-Perry’s concept of the crooked room with its stereotypes, lack of recognition, and shame is all about the racism and the systematic oppression of Black women and girls in America (Harris-Perry, 2009). The crooked room is rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT) “a set of legal scholarship theories about racial inequality and how race functions in the society” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.88). “CRT has been identified as a movement of a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power” (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p.2).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has five tenets that have the potential for informing educational research, curriculum and policy formation: (1) that race and racism are central, endemic, permanent and fundamental in defining and explaining how U.S. society functions, (2) challenges dominant ideologies and claims of race neutrality, objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness and equal opportunity, (3) is

activist in nature and propagates a commitment to social justice, (4) centers the experiences and voices of the marginalized and oppressed, and (5) is necessarily interdisciplinary in scope and function. (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.15-16)

CRT allowed me, as the researcher, to examine how the system impacts individuals as members of the system. The system in this study being the predominantly White high school and Black girls as members of the system.

Since interviews with Black female high school students were used as qualitative data in this study Critical Race Feminism (CRF) also allowed me as the researcher to analyze the experiences of the girls. “Critical race feminism is a branch of CRT. As a movement, CRT grew out of critical legal studies, which was dominated by the voices of White male legal academics (Wing, 1997). Those legal scholars who were a part of the CRT movement fore-fronted legal issues and strategies affecting people of color” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 19). Over time though, the voices of women of color were overshadowed by the voices of men of color.

In an overview of the history of critical race feminism, Wing (1997) explains that CRT scholars have taken up diverse issues, such as de facto segregation discrimination, affirmative action, and federal Indian law. Unfortunately, similar to how White males in critical legal studies excluded the voices and experiences of people of color in their efforts, often CRT was dominated by men’s experiences, excluding the perspectives of women of color. Additionally, feminist legal theorists highlighted the viewpoints of White and upper class women, but assumed that the gendered experiences of White women and women of color were

identical in character. Because of its unapologetic examination of the intersection of race, class and gender in the legal sphere and the broad experiences of women of color, the premise of critical race feminism is distinct from, but at times, intersects with CRT. (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 19-20)

“Rather than accept the societal and political marginalization placed upon people of color as identified in CRT, critical race feminism places me and my sisters as women of color in the center, rather than the margins, of the discussion, debate, contemplation, reflection, theorizing, research, and praxis of our lives as we co-exist in dominant culture” (Berry, 2010, p. 23). Since this study focuses on Black girls in school, it is important to examine their lived experiences with a framework that has an intersectional lens that places them at the center and not the margins.

“Black women deserve a theoretical framework that combats racial and gender oppression from multiple standpoints. Critical race feminism in education may provide legal and academic stratagem for studying and eradicating race, class, and gender oppression in educational institutions” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 19).

“Critical race feminism is multidisciplinary as it ‘draws from writings of men and women who are not legal scholars’ (Wing, 1997, p.5) as evidenced in the social and political writings of Patricia Hill Collins (1990; 1998), bell hooks (1990), and Joy James (1999). CRF is supportive of and concerned with theory and practice” (Berry, 2010, p. 24). It also encourages Black women and girls to “acknowledge and accept the multi-dimensionality of their intersecting beings” (Berry, 2010, p. 24) and identities.

The blend between race, gender, class, and other intersecting identities are what impacts the education of Black girls. “Feminism alone cannot address the educational

concerns of Black girls since White feminists have tended to overlook or ignore Black girls' experiences in schools" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 20) and focus on gender over race. "CRF builds upon intersectionality to understand the anti-essentialist plight of women of color by looking at the intersection of their race, gender, and other identities" (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017, p. 10). Critical race feminism was a thorough lens of looking at the experiences and challenges Black girls face in school.

"Young women of color, specifically Black ones, have educational experiences that are simultaneously similar to, even if divergent from, the needs and experiences of White girls and boys of color... The social and educational problems challenging African American boys' educational development should not be conflated with the gendered trials and tribulations confronting Black girls" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.19-20). To combat these issues, we need to see the issues in the perspectives of Black women and girls first, not as the last in order of Black males and White women.

Opponents of critical race theory and critical race feminism may argue that both frameworks rely too much on narrative and storytelling. Those in support for CRT and CRF "support storytelling or counterstory as a means of understanding multiple positionalities of individuals or groups of individuals, particularly those stories of socially and politically marginalized persons living at the intersections of identities" (Berry, 2010, p.25) like the Black female students attending the predominantly White school in this particular study.

"Counterstory, as described by Delgado (2000), is created by the outgroup, the members of the socially marginalized group, aimed to subvert the reality of the dominant group. For socially marginalized groups, this reality centers on a host of presuppositions,

commonly held wisdoms, and shared understandings are what Romeo and Stewart (1999) refer to as the master narrative, stories of shared reality that subsume differences and contradictions and narrowly define people and their identities by supporting ideas constructed by the dominant group. These are ‘stories we were taught and teach ourselves about who does what and why’ (p.xiv). Critical race feminist perspective is, in fact, a counterstory” (Berry, 2010, p.25).

Since CRF “centralizes the counterstory, it supports the lived experiences of socially marginalized students” (Berry, 2010, p.25). The socially marginalized students in this case are Black female students navigating predominantly White high schools. This is why the pairing of CRT and CRF is so important to this study and to the field of research itself. Together they offer a unique vantage point in revealing how Black girls as members of the system can impart their knowledge, experiences, and stories in context of this system in particular, the PWHS. There is a need for a study such as this that allows Black female voices to be heard and included in research about them. “Black girls learn adaptive behaviors- ways of responding to oppressive conditions defined by race, sexuality, class, and gender” (Morris, 2018, p. 35). This study allowed them to share what they are doing to navigate the PWHS. This study allowed them to become part of educational discourse that directly impacts them and their everyday lived experiences in school. This study provided a platform for Black girls to share what they are experiencing when they attend predominantly White high schools and how they are navigating that particular space and making it work for them. My hope is that by them sharing their stories, they are humanized, their voices are liberated, and those misconceptions about them are dismantled.

Limitations

As I set out to conduct a study about Black female students who attend PWHS, there were a few limitations that were outside of my control as a researcher. One limitation that I anticipated was gaining access to Black female students in high school since I was a middle school teacher at the time of the study. I had to rely on my relationships and connections to other educators in the district who had access to Black female high school students in the predominantly White school district where we were employed. The other limitation involved with other people connecting me to students was this would not guarantee that those same students would be willing to open up and share their experiences with me. Another limitation that I thought I might encounter was gaining parental consent for the minor participants since their parents would not be familiar with me. The parents also might not want their daughters discussing racial issues especially attending a PWHS. In the not so distant past, being vocal about these kinds of issues would cause Black people to face backlash or retaliation. Out of protection for their daughters, parents might not grant permission for them to participate in this study about race. A last limitation was time constraints that come from working with high school students who seem to always be busy and scheduling time with them might be tough. I would need to be flexible when it came time to schedule interviews with the participants. Overall, there were a few limitations that I considered about this study.

Delimitations

This study does not claim that my findings are true for all Black girls who attend PWHS or are true for all Black girls who attend any high school period. I do not claim that issues of race, gender, class, or any other intersecting identities are the only causes of

why there are challenges for Black girls in PWHS. What I am suggesting is that they are factors that impact the experiences Black girls have while attending school specifically predominantly White schools. A few other factors that create challenges for Black girls include them being misrepresented, stereotyped, and unfairly or harshly disciplined in schools. I am studying one particular group and focusing on their lived experiences in a specific school setting.

Summary

The challenges Black girls face are indicative of intersectional obstacles in an educational space that was not originally intended for them. The challenges of misrepresentation, stereotypes, and harsh discipline policies make for crooked space in schools. Critical race theory and critical race feminism were both useful frameworks to represent and speak to the experiences Black girls are having in the predominantly White high school setting. In closing, this study is about the challenges Black girls face in PWHS, what they are doing to navigate that space, and make it work in their lives. Chapter two of this study explains the literature reviewed and discusses the specific challenges Black girls face in schools, specifically in PWHS. Chapter three explains the qualitative research methodology for the study. Chapter four analyzes and presents the findings from the data collected during the study. Chapter five summarizes and discusses the results from the qualitative study, how they relate to the literature along with implications for action and further study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

“When denied the ability to learn, to grow, and blossom intellectually, there are some things- through experience, trial and error, love, and the will to survive- you just come to know.” June Cara Christian

Introduction

The challenges Black girls face are indicative of intersectional obstacles in an educational space that was not originally intended for them as we saw in the accounts of Sarah Roberts, Elizabeth Eckford, and a few of my school experiences. “Contrary to the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, schools are one of the first places young people experience discrimination” (Watson, 2016, p. 240). “Because of racism, sexism, and class oppression in the U.S., African American girls are in multiple jeopardy of race, class and gender exclusion in mainstream educational institutions” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 13). Black girls encounter a crooked room each day when they attend school, and that crooked room represents racism and the systematic oppression of Black women and girls in America (Harris-Perry, 2009). This chapter presents a review of literature on topics related to the research questions:

1. What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?
2. What might they say about navigating that particular space?

This chapter is organized into three sections: The History of Schooling for African Americans, Theoretical Frameworks, and The Crooked Room. It is necessary to have an understanding of the historical and current issues concerning the experiences and challenges of Black girls in school. To provide context for the study, this chapter first

provides background information on the history of schooling for African Americans. It also provides information on the theoretical framework Critical Race Theory (CRT) to examine the system that impacts Black girls' education along with intersectionality to examine how race, gender, and other combinations create challenges for Black girls in the school setting. Critical Race Feminism (CRF) is also used to frame how the system impacts Black girls as members of the system and how the focus on voice plays a role in this study about African American girls. This chapter also examines the specific challenges Black girls face in schools due to misrepresentation, stereotypes, and harsh discipline policies.

History of Schooling for African Americans

This section begins with a look back at the history of schooling for African American students in the United States. It discusses Black Inferiority, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), The Resegregation of Schools, Today's Schools for African American Students, and The Achievement Gap.

Black Inferiority

Education was not always accessible for African Americans. Since the first time enslaved Africans on record arrived here in America around 1619, systems of power have been instituted to ensure that White people maintain control (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2003).

The major leaders of the nation endorsed ideas about the inferiority of Black, Latina/o, and Native peoples. Thomas Jefferson (1816), who advocated for the education of the American citizen, simultaneously decried the notion that Blacks were capable of education. George Washington, while deeply conflicted about

slavery, maintained a substantial number of slaves on his Mount Vernon Plantation and gave no thought to educating enslaved children. (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.6).

During legalized slavery in the United States of America, the education of Blacks was illegal, punishable by death for enslaved Africans and punishable by fines for White teachers (Perry et al., 2003). Educated slaves represented a danger to upsetting the slave system. Keeping enslaved Africans uneducated increased the likelihood that they would remain dependent upon their slave masters. Laws such as these provide historical examples of the commitment of Whites in power to both purposefully and deliberately construct a system in which enslaved Africans were systematically oppressed with efficiency. They were stripped of hope for a liberated future. Keeping slaves illiterate kept them bound to the system, and yes inferior.

Law and custom made it a crime for enslaved men and women to learn or teach others to read and write... Even the threat of beating, amputation, or death did not quell the slaves' desire for literacy... There are stories of slaves who were hanged when they were discovered reading, and of patrollers who went around breaking up Sunday meetings where slaves were being taught to read... For the slaves, literacy was more than a symbol of freedom; it was freedom. To be able to read and write was an intrinsic good, as well as a mighty weapon in the slave's freedom. (Perry et al., 2003, p. 13)

In 1847, Missouri's General Assembly passed an act stating, "no person shall keep or teach any school for the instruction of negroes or mulattos, in reading or writing, in this State" (Missouri State Archives, 2014). Then in 1849, the Massachusetts Supreme

Court ruled that “segregated schools are permissible under the state's constitution” (Roberts v. City of Boston 1849). “The U.S. Supreme Court later used this case to support the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine” (“Brown v. Board Timeline,” 2017).

There were continuous limitations and constraints on how Blacks would receive quality education here in America. Compile this with the trauma of four hundred years of enslavement, reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, and the emerging Civil Rights movement: these all helped to create the notion of Black inferiority and the presumption of White supremacy here in America (Christian, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1998; 2006; 2013a; Perry et al., 2003).

Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

For Blacks in America, laws were enacted to keep them from exercising their rights as a people with one of them being a right to a quality education, and although there were separate schools for them, less was spent on those schools (Perry et al., 2003). “At the start of the Civil Rights movement, the now infamous Brown v. Board of Education (1954) ruling overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*’s separate but equal doctrine in American education” (Ricks, 2014, p. 12). Many believed this was a step forward in the fight for education for students of color across the nation especially Black students. “This was considered by many to be a major victory for Blacks in seeking equity and justice in the educational system. The ruling promised to repair or fix a faulty system of education and provide equal educational opportunities for all children” (Ricks, 2014, p. 12).

In examining important historical events that have affected African Americans’ access to education, Brown v. Board (1954) holds key significance. Although this was an

important ruling in the journey for equal education rights for African American students, it resulted in some damaging consequences. Derrick Bell (2004), one of the founding critical race theorists, civil rights activist, lawyer, and professor, reflected on the misgivings of the Brown ruling:

Its advocates expected that the Brown decision would cut through the dark years of segregation with laser like intensity. The resistance, though, was open and determined. At best, the Brown precedent did no more than cast a half-light on that resistance, enough to encourage its supporters but not bright enough to reveal just how long and difficult the road to equal educational opportunity would prove to be. Contending with that resistance made it unlikely that any of those trying to implement Brown, including myself, would stop to consider that we might be on the wrong road. (Bell, 2004, p. 19)

A prevalent concept in the school/civil rights legal battles was equal opportunity (Ladson-Billings, 1998). “This notion of equal opportunity was associated with the idea that students of color should have access to the same school opportunities, i.e. curriculum, instruction, funding, facilities as White students. This emphasis on ‘sameness’ was important because it helped boost the arguments for equal treatment under the law that were important for moving African Americans from their second class status” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.17-18). However, the emphasis on sameness still was not necessarily happening in schools attended by majority Black students especially when other intersectional challenges were present like gender, sexuality, or socio-economic status for example.

The ruling of *Brown v. Board* (1954) determined that racially segregated schools were not equal, nor constitutional, and mandated that schools be integrated. The ruling was not a complete resolution to unequal education for African American students though. African American students undoubtedly did experience segregated schools as inferior; however, the call to desegregate schools did not provide a complete solution to the negatives that students and schools experienced. Supply shortages, teacher reassignments, and overcrowded schools continued to be a problem in school communities just as they were during segregation (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The education of Blacks being illegal during slavery was clearly a way to oppress and marginalize this group of people but even when the education of Blacks was finally legal, the education system continued to marginalize them through school segregation. Students of color still struggled to have access to the same schooling opportunities as their White counterparts even once schools were integrated.

The Resegregation of Schools

The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) rulings offered the hope that public school segregation would be eliminated in the United States. Instead, over 60 years after the decisions, many students attend schools with racial/ethnic proportions that are all identical to those in the era of legalized segregation (Glenn, 2012; Kozol, 2005). In fact, some researchers argue that public schools are resegregating, meaning that the level of segregation is increasing (Glenn, 2012; NAACP, 2005; Orfield & Lee, 2004, 2006). In 2010, “more than 55 years after the *Brown* decision, the country’s public schools reflected an overall school segregation with about 74% of Black students and 80% of Latino students attending schools that were 50% to 100% minority. More specifically,

more than 40% of Black and Latino students were attending schools that were 90% to 100% minority (NCES, 2012)” (Thompson Dorsey, 2013, p.534). “Furthermore, approximately 15% of Black and Latino students attend schools that are 99% to 100% minority” (Thompson Dorsey, 2013, p.534). “Racial segregation remains a fundamental feature of the U.S. social landscape, leaving many people of color with the belief that the more things change, the more they stay the same” (Collins, 2000 p.23). “In other words, Black and Latino students are more segregated today in the 21st century than they were in the late 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement and prior to the implementation of desegregation plans in school districts across the country” (Thompson Dorsey, 2013, p. 534).

Diverse school communities are not the norm across the nation. Segregation still exists within racially diverse schools as advantaged White students often take very different classes from their Black and Hispanic peers, leading to the de facto creation of two schools on one site (Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

In the 21st century, Kozol (2005), Lee and Orfield (2004) continued to see a trend in the resegregation of urban school districts in states from New York, Michigan, Maryland, Washington, D.C., to Alabama, Texas, Virginia, South Carolina, California, Georgia, and New Jersey, amongst others. Because the South, West, East, and Midwest state schools have been resegregating, African American and Latino/a students have less exposure to classrooms with their White peers. (McPherson, 2011, p.478)

If nothing else, *Brown v. Board* (1954) brought forth the law that allowed students to go to any school of their choice, but with the ruling, choosing schools was not that simple for families of color especially Black families.

Today's Schools for African American Students

Although federal and state laws have changed regarding school segregation, “Around forty percent of Black and Hispanic students are attending schools that are at least ninety percent Black and Hispanic with very few White or Asian students in attendance” (NAACP, 2005). In contrast, “the average White student attends a school that is approximately eighty percent White with very few Black, Hispanic, or Asian students” (NAACP, 2005). Although many Black and Hispanic students are attending school with the majority of peers who look like them, some Black and Hispanic students do attend schools with majority White peers.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published a report titled “Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups” in July of 2017. It stated, “About twenty-seven percent of Black students were enrolled in public schools that were predominantly Black, while thirty-one percent of Black students were enrolled in schools in which less than a quarter of the students were Black” (NCES, 2017). The report also stated, “similarly, thirty-three percent of Hispanic students were enrolled in public schools that were predominantly Hispanic, while twenty-one percent were enrolled in schools in which less than a quarter of the students were Hispanic” (NCES, 2017).

Based off what I have read, seen in the news, and experienced, students of color attend predominantly White schools for different reasons. We can assume that some people of color live in White areas if that is what they choose to do and if they have

children, they attend those schools. My husband and I moved our children to the predominantly White school district where I taught students due to our not being satisfied with the curriculum and resources in the previous school district where my husband grew up. Our decision was similar to Sarah Roberts' family back in 1849 wanting access to a neighborhood school in proper condition with adequate resources. Maybe a family has elected to be a part of a desegregation program like I was as a student.

Something else that could have happened is the school district where a family resides has lost its accreditation, and by law, students can attend an accredited school district of their choice. The school districts in the St. Louis area that lost accreditation in the past few years have been predominantly Black while most (not all) of the school districts accepting students from districts with lost accreditation are predominantly White. In some cases, the school district that lost its accreditation earns it back, and some of those families go through the process of keeping their kids in the accepting district where they have been attending on a special assignment. In all these situations though, families of color have different reasons for choosing to send their children to predominantly White school districts. Whatever the reason for the decision, the student of color will likely encounter intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) challenges learning in the predominantly White space.

When students of color attend predominantly White schools, "the assumption is that the culture of the school is the dominant culture, the culture of White mainstream America" (Perry et al., 2003, p. 53). This means that the rules in schools that are predominantly White represent the culture and norms of society: White majority. This explains the need for many students of color to come up with different ways to navigate

the predominantly White school setting as a minority hence the need to do something like code switch, shift identities, and live in double-consciousness (Dubois, 1969/1994). It seems that people of color must constantly shift to fit societal norms to represent whatever White mainstream America deems appropriate and this socialization likely begins with the school experiences of students of color.

The Achievement Gap

“One of the most common phrases in today's education literature and discourse is the achievement gap. It has made its way into common parlance and everyday usage” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). The achievement gap “concept has been commonly used in American educational discourse in since the 1960s Civil Rights movement, but the concept traces back as early as post–Civil War era, the Great Migration, and the immigration boom in the 1920s” (Spires, 2015, p.1). “The word ‘achievement’ refers to the level of academic learning for students and ‘gap’ refers to the difference in the achievement levels between any two specific social categories such as two different ethnic categories or two different gender categories” (Anderson, 2010, p.2).

“According to the National Governors' Association (2005), the achievement gap is a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their White counterparts” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). “The term [achievement gap] is invoked by people on both ends of the political spectrum, and few argue over its meaning or its import” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). Even with the “racial desegregation of schools in the United States, there continues to be an academic achievement gap between White and Black students, as well as other marginalized groups, including Native American and Hispanic students” (Spires,

2015, p.1). “This achievement gap manifests in several ways, including significant differences between standardized testing scores in reading, math, and higher high school dropout rates for marginalized groups” (Spire, 2015, p.1). “Achievement gap language suggests that each individual is responsible for his or her own educational circumstance and Black and Brown students need to ‘catch up’ to their White counterparts without acknowledging the ways that catching up is made near impossible by the many structural barriers the society has imposed on them” (Ladson-Billings, 2013b, p. 105).

“The public and the education profession tend to focus on achievement gaps on standardized tests across ethnicity and gender” (Anderson, 2010, p. 2) instead of looking at how intersectionality adds disadvantaging factors (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Intersectionality impacts student learning on a daily basis and most certainly impacts how well students perform on standardized tests. While the achievement gap is typically measured with standardized testing intersectionality is not considered as a factor when the results reveal there are gaps in achievement. Those gaps in achievement “can and should be examined across different types of measures of student learning including measures of academic, social, emotional, and psychological development using performance assessments, portfolios, and other types of authentic assessments” (Anderson, 2010, p. 2). The achievement gap could also be examined “across different types of social categories including social class, special needs, and linguistic diversity” (Anderson, 2010, p.2) since these are also intersectional challenges too. We must remember that these categories, as well as other categories, cause intersectional challenges that affect student achievement (Anderson, 2010).

The impact of all the different intersectional challenges that exist in schools has helped to construct the achievement gap. The achievement gaps or “inequities initially were formed around race, class, and gender. Gradually, some of the inequities began to recede, but clearly they persist in the realm of race” (Ladson-Billings, 2006 p. 5). “The notion of the achievement gap seems to cast blame on individual students, parents, schools and teachers without looking at the structural inequalities that have been at work since the establishment of the nation” (Ladson-Billings, 2013b, p. 105).

“In the case of African Americans, education was initially forbidden during the period of enslavement” (Ladson-Billings, 2006 p. 5) and “for the slaves, literacy affirmed not only their individual freedom but also the freedom of their people” (Perry et al., 2003, p. 14). The American education system has not only undervalued Black people but it purposefully limited their access to education through the enactment of a variety of oppressive laws, and as a result, student achievement gaps exist- African American students in today’s society continue to struggle to advance in today’s schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

After emancipation, we saw the development of freedmen's schools whose purpose was the maintenance of a servant class. During the long period of legal apartheid [school segregation], African Americans attended schools where they received cast-off textbooks and materials from White schools. In the South, the need for farm labor meant that the typical school year for rural Black students was about 4 months long. Indeed, Black students in the South did not experience universal secondary schooling until 1968. Why, then, would we not expect there to be an achievement gap? (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5)

“There was a systemic denial and limiting of educational opportunity for African Americans just because they were African Americans” (Perry et al., 2003, p.51). In considering the different legal mandates and social constructions that allowed for the oppression of non-White people in the United States, an understanding of why there are performance discrepancies between Black and White students especially becomes apparent (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

“The philosophy of education that developed was informed by the particular ways literacy and education were implicated in the oppression of African Americans. It informed the role that education and schooling would assume in resistance and the struggle for freedom from the time of slavery to the Civil Rights era” (Perry et al., 2003, p.51). “Despite the laws [throughout history], Blacks continued to seek educational opportunities as a way up and a way out of slavery through the Civil Rights movement” (Ricks, 2014, p.12). Unfortunately, one of the long-term consequences of the systemic denial and limiting educational opportunity for Blacks and many others is the achievement gap.

The achievement gap is the result of ongoing marginalization in this country. “With approximately eight million Black students participating in the U.S. educational system (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013), tracking educational attainment and progress has been noted as one measure of academic and social success” (Ricks, 2014, p. 11).

In 2014, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that Black males experienced a major reduction in dropout rates (from 13% to 7%) between 1990 and 2011 in comparison to the 5% dropout rate for Whites and 14% drop out rates

for Hispanics during the same time period. Admittedly, dropout rates are only one measure and they do not accurately capture or reflect the complexity of the challenges facing students of color. In addition, these statistics largely ignore the experiences, performance, and outcomes of Black girls...For determining progress and achievement in regards to student outcomes, dropout and graduation rates have been used as markers however, the trends regarding these outcomes for Blacks continue to focus extensively on Black males. (Ricks, 2014, p. 11)

Why are Black females left out of this educational conversation when “by the year 2050, females of color will comprise approximately 53% of the U.S. population? (Center for American Progress, 2013). It does not seem to make sense to leave them out of a national conversation about student achievement” (Ricks, 2014, p. 11). It also seems wrong to be “asking them to subsume themselves under other group identities (by gender and/or race) [because this] is educationally unsound and inequitable. Yet, this is the situation in which Black girls currently and frequently find themselves” (Ricks, 2014, p.11).

“Because feminist epistemologies tend to be concerned with the education of White girls and women, and raced-based epistemologies tend to be consumed with the educational barriers negatively affecting Black boys, the educational needs of Black girls have fallen through the cracks” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 12). This proves that once again “when researchers examine marginalized groups in education, the focus is almost exclusively on Black males and White females, with little attention devoted to the unique experiences and needs of Black females” (Ricks, 2014, p.11). When Black girls’ educational experiences are not a part of the national discourse on the educational

achievement gap, this is indicative of a larger issue. This is yet another reason why this study focuses on Black girls.

Theoretical Frameworks

This section discusses the theoretical frameworks used in this study: Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism, and The Role of Voice.

Critical Race Theory

To analyze the systemic issue of Black girls excluded in educational conversations, we can look to Critical Race Theory (CRT) for reasons why they are overlooked. CRT is a “set of legal scholarship theories about racial inequality and how race functions in the society” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.88). The three tenets of CRT that show the significance of this study:

1. Racism as Normal- “the notion that racism is not some random, isolated act of individuals behaving badly... CRT scholars believe that racism is the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (Ladson-Billings, 2013a, p. 37)
2. Intersectionality and Anti-essentialism- Intersectionality refers to “particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and national origin. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (Collins, 2000, p.18). Intersectionality is multidimensional in how different experiences play out (Crenshaw, 1989) “The other side of intersectionality is essentialism. Critical race theory scholarship decries

essentialism. Essentialism is a belief that all people perceived to be in a single group think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways. Such thinking leads to considerable misunderstanding and stereotyping” (Ladson-Billings, 2013a, p.40).

Ladson-Billings (2013a) further explains:

On the one hand, there is a need for people to participate in group solidarity for social, cultural, and political purposes. Thus to identify as African American or a woman or an immigrant can be useful as a way to organize and garner political clout and social benefits. However, on the other hand, people do not relinquish their individual rights, perspectives, and lifestyles because they share group identities. (Ladson-Billings, 2013a, p. 40)

This means that people of color desire cultural belonging for a variety of reasons, but they do want to not be seen as individuals just because they are members of a group. A monolithic or single story about a particular group based on how the group identifies is an example of essentialism.

3. Counter-narrative- “Storytelling is one of the oldest human art forms. Ancient cultures maintained their histories and cultural sense of self through stories they told and retold. The African proverb says, ‘Until lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter.’ Stories reflect a perspective or point of view and underscore what the teller, audience, society, and/or those in power believe to be important, significant, and many times valorizing and ethnocentric” (Ladson-Billings, 2013a, p. 41-42).

Critical Race Feminism

Since Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used to examine the systems in this study, which are the predominantly White high schools, Critical Race Feminism, a branch of CRT, is also used to analyze the individuals participating in the study, the Black female students. Critical Race Feminism (CRF) is a division of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). “As a movement, CRT grew out of critical legal studies, which was dominated by the voices of White male legal academics (Wing, 1997). Those legal scholars who were a part of the CRT movement fore-fronted legal issues and strategies affecting people of color” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010 p. 19).

“CRF builds upon intersectionality to understand the anti-essentialist plight of women of color by looking at the intersection of their race, gender, and other identities” (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017, p. 10-11). Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010) state, “CRF in education is beneficial to investigation and theory building around educational issues impacting Black girls in the following ways” (p.20):

- “Critical race feminism as a theoretical lens and movement purports that women of color’s experiences, thus perspectives, are different from the experiences of men of color and those of White women;
- Critical race feminism focuses on the lives of women of color who face multiple forms of discrimination, due to the intersections of race, class, and gender within a system of White male patriarchy and racist oppression;
- Critical race feminism asserts the multiple identities and consciousness of women of color (i.e., anti-essentialist);

- Critical race feminism is multidisciplinary in scope and breadth; and
- Critical race feminism calls for theories and practices that simultaneously study and combat gender and racial oppression” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.20)

The blend between race, gender, and other intersections are what impacts Black girls’ education. “White feminists have tended to overlook or ignore Black girls’ experiences in schools. Feminism alone cannot address the educational concerns of Black girls” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.20). By using CRF in this study, I was able to examine the different experiences Black female students are having in the predominantly White school setting in a way that I would not be able to if I used CRT on its own or another singularly feminist framework (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017).

The Role of Voice

“Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group. This requirement often changes the meaning of our ideas and works” (Collins, 2000, p. vii). “The ahistorical and acontextual nature of much law and other science renders the voices of dispossessed and marginalized group members mute. In response, much of the scholarship of CRT focuses on the role of voice in bringing additional power to the legal discourse of racial justice” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.13). This means that people of color are often in situations where they have to shift the way they communicate to accommodate White people’s comfort levels when they interact with them. As a result, this makes people of color feel silenced or invalidated in their lived experiences because

they somehow are not allowed to show up as their true selves when they interface with White space.

“Delgado (1990) argues that people of color speak with experiential knowledge about the fact that our society is deeply structured by racism. That structure gives their stories a common framework warranting the term voice. The use of voice or naming your reality is a way that CRT links form and substance in scholarship. CRT scholars use parables, chronicles, stories, counter-stories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories to illustrate the false necessity and irony of much of current civil rights doctrine” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13).

Using voice or naming your reality is a way to affect the oppressor too (Ladson-Billings, 1998) since the oppressor likes to keep the ones being oppressed in silence so activating the voices of the oppressed can be a powerful tool of freedom and enlightenment. “Stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14). For example, the “slave narratives recount the intensity of the slaves’ motivation for literacy and learning, the dangerous obstacles they faced to become literate and the grave risks they endured to become literate” (Perry et al., 2003, p. 13). Those narratives symbolize the role of voice in the fight for freedom and choice for the enslaved people.

Literate slaves filed legal petitions, protesting and challenging their enslavement; they forged passes for themselves and others, thus allowing escape from the horrors of slavery. Literate slaves read newspapers and pamphlets and kept themselves and the slave community informed about the antislavery movement and the war...they denounced slavery and exposed the slave system. They read the

Bible interpreting the message in a way that supported resistance and rebellion.

(Perry et al., 2003, p. 13-14)

Becoming literate during slavery proved to be a very political way of using the role of voice. The slave narratives were a way for slaves' voices to be heard and their experiences told to others. Becoming literate as a slave and learning to document (write or tell) their stories to be passed on for future generations to read (or hear) those lived experiences is an example of how powerful the role of voice has been for society. Even now, the role of voice maintains its ability to shed light on issues that continue to marginalize people across the world, especially people of color.

The civil unrest in Baltimore, New York, Ferguson, and other cities across our nation marks the emergence of the Black Lives Matter Movement, a committed force of activists and communities devoted to rejecting post-racial ideologies and uplifting Black people. The Movement is among the most significant developments in decades, representing a collective voice against police brutality, racial profiling, and the criminalization of Black bodies. Yet, the key issues upon which the Movement is operationalized focuses, almost entirely on Black men and boys. The experiences of Black women and girls remain marginalized, despite the fact that the rates of police brutality, state surveillance, and predatory enforcement of regulatory laws are deployed disproportionately against Black females as well as Black males. (Patton, Crenshaw, Haynes, & Watson, 2016, p.194)

Should we be saying “Black Women’s Lives Matter, too” or “All Black Lives Matter” to ensure the voices of Black women and girls are included in the matters that concern them too?

The Black female voice is continuing to be left out when issues impact Black people, the focus tends to shift to Black males and when issues impact women, the focus tends to shift to White females leaving Black females out of conversations for and about them too (Patton et. al, 2016; Watson, 2016). “The function of feminism was found to be insensitive for many Black women as it privileges Whiteness and fails to acknowledge the intersections of gender and race” (Watson, 2016, p.239). Interestingly enough, Gloria Steinem, a White feminist, political activist and former editor of *Ms. Magazine*, has maintained that Black women are the real originators of the feminist movement every time that she is asked and many would consider Steinem herself to be one of the founders of the [feminist] movement (Tisdale, 2015). The issues of Black women being discounted and unacknowledged goes back even further than women’s liberation in America. Black women and girls being scorned, silenced, and subordinated has reigned throughout history.

Enslaved Black women and girls were subjected to a form of socially sanctioned dehumanization (hooks, 1981) for economic benefit that involved ridding them of their human dignity by withholding clothing readily keeping them naked in bondage; changing their names to eliminate any sign of African heritage and subjecting them to physical abuse, including rape and extreme beatings. These dehumanizing acts were aimed to make Black women and their children docile, accommodating to a slaveholder’s desires. Moreover, the subordinate status that

Black women have been assigned is firmly established in racist and sexist oppression that has successfully attributed Black womanhood with little value in the American consciousness (Harris-Perry 2011; hooks, 1981). The racist and sexist structural inequality that Black women experience was designed to provide them with very little access to political power (Haynes, et al., 2016, p. 382).

“The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed, controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group’s interest in maintaining Black women’s subordination” (Collins, 2000, p.72).

“Despite that, Black womanhood remains a publicly traded-on commodity that has defied time and space. The master narrative has imposed sexual inferiority on Black women’s bodies, allowing our spirit, likeness and essence to be objectified, sexually abused, stereotyped, and culturally appropriated in unmitigated servitude to White men, White women, and Black men alike (Collins, 1986, 2013; hooks, 1981). It is, as if, Black womanhood is an enviable accessory to be bought, worn, or sold at their pleasure. By legitimizing the manipulation of Black womanhood, the master narrative constructed in slavery also endorses Black women and girls’ disposability. The master narrative that has shaped the construction of Black womanhood in slavery has influence today. Black women and girls still have to negotiate the pejorative assessments that are imposed on our bodies, which permeate the social world in which we live and learn” (Harris-Perry, 2011). (Haynes, et al., 2016, p. 382)

Since the master narrative has been such a prominent voice in socializing the American people on who Black women and girls are over time, the role of voice becomes even more inherently important for Black women and girls to tell their own stories on their own terms. In her book *Understanding the Black Flame and the Multigenerational Education Trauma toward a Theory of the Dehumanization of Black Students*, June Cara Christian (2014) explains what happens with Black women's experiences in the larger context of oppression when she asserts:

Black women's experience of and resistance to oppression mirrors the struggles of both White women and Black men...There is no hierarchy of oppression, yet Black women are often cast off and cast out of the struggle for sex and racial equality independently. The feminist movement continues to ignore, and thereby reinforces, the realities of racial oppression and class exploitation of Black women while the antiracist and civil rights movements overlook and personify sexism. (Christian, 2014, p.11)

Black women's voices are continuously minimized when we examine systems of oppression. Ladson-Billings (1998) says "CRT focuses on the role of voice in bringing additional power to the legal discourses of racial justice" (p.13). "The voice component of CRT provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step in understanding the complexities of racism and beginning a process of judicial redress" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14).

Ladson-Billings (1989, p.13) also quotes Delgado (1989) as suggesting that there are at least three reasons for naming one's own reality in legal discourse: "1. much of reality is socially constructed; 2. stories provide members of outgroups a vehicle for

psychic self-preservation; 3. the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help overcome ethnocentrism and the dysconscious (King, 1992) drive or need to view the world in one way” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13).

“Being Black and female in the United States continues to expose African-American women to certain common experiences” (Collins, 2000 p. 23). One of those common experiences is being left out of many conversations on issues that impact their lives. This is something that Black girls are experiencing in school too. This is another reason why the role of voice is so important in this study. “Black girls have much to offer in the way of understanding how schools work to marginalize students based on race, class, and gender” (Edwards, McArthur, & Russell-Owens, 2016, p.436). “Much of what we know about young Black girls consists of bits and pieces of fragmented knowledge. The history of the study of Black girls has a cyclical pattern of excluding her experiences or simply suppressing her story within (White) feminist or Afrocentric (Black male) led studies” (Evans-Winters, 2011, p. 9).

“Black girls are typically excluded from research on Black educational narratives- since they focus on Black males- and are excluded from research on girls- since that research often focuses on White females” (Edwards, McArthur, & Russell-Owens, 2016, p.436). Considering the complex history of how Black women and girls have been subordinated, forgotten, and harmed in this country and how those ideals translate into today’s society, I was compelled to have Black girls’ voices represented in this study. “Black girls relaying their perspectives of their own experience, naming their own challenges and triumphs” (Edwards, McArthur, & Russell-Owens, 2016, p.436) is why I am included their voices directly in this study. The world needs to hear their stories from

them especially since they are not typically included in educational discourse. They need to name their own realities and explain what they are experiencing in PWHS and what they are doing to navigate that particular space.

The Crooked Room

This section discusses Harris-Perry's (2009) concept of the crooked room.

“Crooked environments or crooked rooms (Harris-Perry, 2009) represent an unlevelled plane where misrecognition or lack of acknowledgment” (Jackson & Winfield, 2014, p. 9) exist for Black women and girls in America. “Young women of color have educational experiences that are simultaneously similar to, albeit divergent from, the needs and experiences of White girls and boys of color” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010 p. 19). The fact that the challenges that Black girls face in education go unacknowledged and overlooked makes parts of the crooked room. Part of what makes the room so crooked is that the problems Black girls face in schools are hidden from the conversations about what is happening in schools. The challenges that Black girls face in school are discussed in this section: misrepresentation, stereotypes, and harsh discipline policies.

Misrepresentation

This section is called misrepresentation to encapsulate the combination of ways Black women and girls are invisible, misrecognized, sparsely recognized in positive ways in conjunction with only being seen in ways that make other people comfortable. All these ways make space crooked (Harris-Perry, 2013). One of the ways schools are a crooked space for Black girls is the way they have to battle feelings of invisibility. “For Black women and girls, invisibility stems from being reduced to the one-down position (Parham, 1999) in a master narrative that situates White femininity as far more desirable,

placing Black women lowest on a raced and gendered hierarchy, behind White men, White women and Black men” (Haynes, et al., 2016, p.383).

“Invisibility is an inner struggle with feeling that one’s talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized (Franklin, 1999, p. 761). Furthermore, invisibility is the outcome of the racialized sexism that Black women experience daily (Collins, 1986, 2013)” (Haynes, et al., 2016, p. 380). “Black girls have learned to alter themselves by learning to become invisible—to be seen but not heard” (Ricks, 2014, p.15). This was one of my strategies, as an eighth grade student, and it did not last long before my pretense of quietness was tested. “In an American society that promotes self-hatred among Black women, the cloak of invisibility we experience forces us to adjust, cope, and adapt to a presumed inferior status instead of exercising liberation in the classroom and beyond (hooks, 1981)” (Haynes, et al., 2016, p. 380).

The Invisibility Syndrome Paradigm is comprised of seven tenets (Haynes, et al., 2016, p. 383). “Those tenets are:

- (a) One feels a lack of recognition or acknowledgment
- (b) One feels there is no satisfaction or gratification from the encounter
- (c) One feels self-doubt about her or his legitimacy
- (d) One feels no validation from the experience
- (e) One feels disrespected
- (f) One’s sense of dignity is compromised and challenged
- (g) One’s basic identify is shaken, if not uprooted” (Haynes, et al., 2016, p. 383).

Another way that invisibility may present itself is some “Black girls have learned to survive in school is by adopting a race-less persona which is the absence of behavioral

and attitudinal characteristics related to a particular race” (Ricks, 2014, p. 15). There are “societal norms that can influence Black identity development to reveal the inherent tension between one’s choice to be visible, and society’s comfort with that visibility (Franklin & Boyd- Franklin, 2000). When Black women and Black men perceive their treatment by White people as racially motivated (based on stereotypes of Blackness), feelings of invisibility can intensify” (Haynes, et al., 2016, p. 383).

In essence, if Black girls deny who they are and adopt the characteristics of the majority culture, they can be successful as Black girls in education. This logic is problematic in that it teaches Black girls that in order to be successful, they cannot be who they are organically. Moreover, it challenges and influences academic success, as it is challenging and difficult to excel in environments that fail to value every aspect of one’s identity or identities. (Ricks, 2014, p. 15)

In July of 2017, in Cleveland, Mississippi, Jasmine Shepard became her high school’s first Black valedictorian (Al-Sibai, 2017). Jasmine was not the only valedictorian at the ceremony, a White student with a lower GPA than hers, was valedictorian too instead of the salutatorian, the second highest GPA (Al-Sibai, 2017). Jasmine’s family has insisted that she be given the sole honor of the award retroactively and this has led to racist attacks against them (Al-Sibai, 2017).

This story is an example of invisibility. Jasmine was made to share the honor of valedictorian with the White male student when the community grew uncomfortable with her being the first Black student to earn such an award (Al-Sibai, 2017). This girl worked hard to achieve this high honor only to share it with someone who did not meet the same standard she worked hard to meet as a high school student. To make matters worse, she

and her family were attacked for speaking up about what happened (Al-Sibai, 2017).

Jasmine's story is also an example of the misrecognition Black girls receive in schools.

“Craving recognition of one's special, inexchangeable uniqueness is part of the human condition, and it is soothed only by the opportunity to contribute freely to the public realm” (Harris-Perry, 2009, p.38) Harris-Perry (2009) explains more about the layers of misrecognition when she says:

As members of a stigmatized group, African American women lack opportunities for accurate, affirming recognition of the self and yet must contend with hypervisibility imposed by their lower social status. Recognition is a useful framework because it emphasizes the interconnection between individuals and groups. Individuals from disempowered social groups desire recognition for their group but also want recognition of their distinctiveness from the group. Thus, many African Americans bristle at the idea of color blindness because it suggests that race is irrelevant to identity. They want to be understood as Black and this tied to a history and culture associated with Blackness. At the same time, they do not want to be reduced to their racial identity alone. Just recognition means being neither blind to nor blinded by identity differences. (Harris-Perry, 2009, p.39)

In other words, Black women want to be seen as individuals as much as they want to be seen as members of a group. It is a both/and kind of concept. Harris-Perry (2009) further states,

Misrecognition has been a central theme in African American intellectual traditions. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois describes the experience of living behind a veil and asks, ‘How does it feel to be a problem?’ This

formulation of Black life in America emphasizes both the physical barriers imposed by segregation, which make it difficult for Black people to be seen, and the dispositional racism that views Black life as problematic for the nation... The misrecognition experienced by Black women who attempt to engage in the public sphere is what I mean when I speak of the crooked room. (Harris-Perry, 2009, p.39- 40)

Being misrepresented, invisible, and rarely recognized in school creates crooked space for Black girls to learn in and navigate each day.

Stereotypes

Another way schools are a crooked space for Black girls is the way stereotypes about them play a role in them being there. Harris-Perry (2009, p. 96) explains the specific ways Black women are stereotyped when she states:

Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire are the angles in the crooked room where Black women live. They do not reflect Black women's lived experience; instead, they limit African American women to prescribed roles that serve the interests of others. It is physically painful to hold an image of yourself knowing that others hold a different more negative image of you. At the turn of the twentieth century W.E.B Dubois named this painful duality double-consciousness. 'It is this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.' Dubois did not anticipate how Black women's experiences would further complicate this duality...he did capture the political relevance of this psychic experience. (Harris-Perry, 2009, p.96)

Dubois (1969/1994) explains:

This American world yields the Negro not true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. Sadly, the double life every American Negro must live as Negro and American leads inevitable to a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy, which is fatal to self-confidence. The result is a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes and worse, hypocrisy or to radicalism. (Dubois 1969/1994 p. 2; 2007, p. xiv)

At the time of Dubois' writing about double consciousness, he was primarily speaking to Black males, but his thinking on double consciousness is something that resounds with how Black females navigate today's world.

“Women of color are required to hold on to their own beliefs and values, while also being aware and conscious of the state of mind of the oppressor [dominant culture]. Many young Black women are able to survive in schools also because of this multiple consciousness” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.21). This explains what I was experiencing as an eighth grade student attending a predominantly White school for the first time. There were many assumptions being made about me as a Black, female student from St. Louis City attending a predominantly White school in the county. The other few Black students in the school were residents of the district, and I was one of the few bussed in everyday, which carried its own stigma at that time and unfortunately still does

for some students who currently experience this now. I had to figure out how to shift my identity so that I could make the different spaces I was living and learning in work for me. “For many Black girls, their identities shift between their personalized identities (shaped by their socialization in their immediate families and neighborhoods) and the perspectives of White male or female middle class school administrators and teachers” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.21). These shifts occur every day in the school setting for Black girls.

The "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood" (2017) study revealed “that adults view Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their White peers, especially in the age range of 5–14. The researchers from Georgetown examined a national survey of 325 adults from different racial and ethnic backgrounds to assess adults’ perceptions of race and gender, focusing on girls” (Epstein, et al., 2017, p. 1; “New Study Finds,” 2017). “Compared to White girls, adults view African-American girls as older than they truly are; in less need of nurturing, support, comfort or protection; more independent; and more knowledgeable about adult topics, including sex...Black girls are viewed as more adult and needing less protection than White girls do” (Epstein, et al., 2017, p. 1). “These findings show that pervasive stereotypes of Black women as hypersexualized and combative are reaching into our schools and playgrounds and helping rob Black girls of the protections other children enjoy” (“New Study Finds,” 2017).

These results are profound, with far-reaching implications. [These] findings reveal a potential contributing factor to the disproportionate rates of punitive treatment in the education and juvenile justice systems for Black girls. These

perceptions, referred to as adultification, might explain why African-American girls face a greater level of discipline when compared to their peers.

Adultification bias is especially prevalent for girls ages 5–14. African-American girls ages 15–19 are also subjected to these preconceived notions, but to a lesser extent than their younger counterparts are. No bias differences were found for girls aged four and under. The study also showed that Black girls are suspended at five times the rates of White girls. In addition, they are actually suspended at twice the rate of White boys. (Epstein et al., 2017, p.1)

When faced with similar stereotypes in schools, Black males are not affected in the same ways Black girls are affected. In other words, people seem to be able to see beyond race when it comes to Black boys but not Black girls.

“Megan M. Holland, a professor at the University of Buffalo and a recent Harvard Ph.D., studied the social impact of a desegregation program on the minority students who were being bussed to a predominantly White high school in suburban Boston” (Ndiaye, 2013). “Holland’s study reported the following:

- Minority boys, because of stereotypes about their supposed athleticism and ‘coolness,’ fit in better than minority girls because the school gave the boys better opportunities to interact with White students.
- Minority boys participated in sports and non-academic activities at much higher rates than minority girls did.
- Structural factors in the school as well as racial narratives about minority males resulted in increased social rewards for the boys, while those same

factors contributed to the isolation of girls in the diversity program” (Ndiaye, 2013).

These findings about minority boys in comparison to minority girls (Ndiaye, 2013) show that people consider gender first when it comes to Black boys but not Black girls. Black males fare better than Black girls do when it comes to stereotypes. Stereotypes about Black girls can manifest in the school setting in different ways.

Research shows that African American girls are more likely to be reprimanded or praised for social behaviors in the classroom as opposed to academic pursuits. Teacher expectations are lower for Black girls than White girls. Black girls are more likely to experience racist remarks from peers (Scott-Jones, 1987). Also, research shows that young Black women’s bodies are simultaneously policed, controlled, and heckled, while at the same time a site of spectacle (Roberts, 1997; Collins, 2005). Such beliefs and practices about Black women’s bodies, spills over into the school system, with young women reporting strict dress codes and negative remarks about their presumed sexual innuendos (Evans-Winters, 2005). In addition, coping with stereotypical beliefs about their attitudes and behaviors from teachers and peers, Black girls also face harsh disciplinary actions in schools. (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010 p. 20)

Harsh discipline policies

Facing harsh or unfair school discipline is another way Black girls encounter crooked space in school. In 2015, Kimberle Crenshaw, Priscilla Ocen, and Jyoti Nanda published a report titled “Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected” through a partnership with the African American Policy Forum and the

Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies that stated that girls of color face much harsher school discipline than their White peers but are excluded from current efforts to address the school-to-prison pipeline (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015).

“Although males are suspended in greater numbers than females overall, race and ethnicity turn out to be substantial risk factors for Black girls when they are compared to their white counterparts. Data released by the Department of Education for the 2011–2012 school year reveal that while Black males were suspended more than three times as often as their White counterparts, Black girls were suspended six times as often” (Crenshaw, et al., 2015, p. 16).

In 2015, a school resource officer was videotaped throwing a 16-year old Black girl, who was seated at the time, across the classroom through excessive force, in front of her classroom and teacher (Fausset, Perez-Pena, & Blinder, 2015). This act of violence, which drew national attention, was surely not the first time that a Black girl had been subjected to socially sanctioned dehumanization in schools, nor is it the last. The inferiority imposed on Black women’s bodies likely permitted the resource officer to interpret her silent response to his demand for compliance as combative, disobedient and confrontational (Haynes, et al., 2016).

Black girls are more likely to be punished for talking back to a teacher, cursing, or being “loud” in ways that are interpreted as disruptive to the classroom. Black girls are also on the receiving end of school-based sanctions associated with who they are as Black girls—whether or not they have behaved “badly” (Morris, 2018, p. 84).

Black “girls face school suspension twice as often as White boys and five times as often as White girls. Even though African-American girls only make up 16 percent of the entire female school population, they are given 28 percent of referrals to law enforcement and account for 37 percent of arrests” (“New Study Finds,” 2017). “White girls, who make up 50 percent of the female school population, only account for 34 percent of referrals and 30 percent of arrests. These numbers do not add up” (“New Study Finds,” 2017). Something is wrong systematically with numbers like these.

Summary

This chapter provided background information on the history of schooling for African Americans. It also explained the current realities of schooling for students of color, particularly, Black girls. The three specific tenets of Critical Race Theory: racism as normal, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, and counter-narrative, that are connected to this study were detailed to examine the system that impacts Black girls’ education. Critical Race Feminism was also discussed in this chapter since it was used to frame how the system impacts Black girls as members of the system. This chapter also focused on voice and the role it plays in this study about African American girls since they were interviewed and their stories and experiences are used as qualitative data. This chapter also examined the specific challenges Black girls face in schools due to misrepresentation, stereotypes, and harsh discipline policies which all make for crooked space in the education of Black girls.

Chapter Three: Methodology

“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”

Zora Neal Hurston

Introduction

Chapter three describes the methodology and procedures that were used to collect and analyze data for this study. This study used qualitative methods to better understand the experiences and challenges of African American girls attending predominantly White high schools (PWHS) and how they navigate that particular space and make it work for them. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used to examine how the system impacts individuals as members of the system with the system being the PWHS and Black girls as members of the system. Critical Race Feminism (CRF) was also used as a lens and framework to help analyze the experiences of the girls since interviews were used as qualitative data. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?
2. What might they say about navigating that particular space?

The research questions were developed after preliminary research was conducted during the researcher’s time in the doctoral program at a Midwestern university. The researcher also conducted a review of literature on the experiences of African Americans’ schooling experiences and this revealed that there is historical context related to the issues Black girls face in schools. The preliminary research conducted by the researcher also revealed that there was a primary focus on Black male students’ schooling

experiences, but there were gaps on what Black female students experience in school. Even more rare was research presented from the Black female student point of view.

Further literature reviewed illustrated that there were three specific tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT): racism as normal, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, and counter-narrative were connected to this study and they helped to examine the system that impacts Black girls' education. Critical Race Feminism (CRF) was also discussed in this study since it framed how the system impacts Black girls as individual members of the system. The role of voice was especially important in this study since Black girls were interviewed and their stories and experiences were used as qualitative data in this study.

The literature reviewed by the researcher also revealed that there were specific challenges Black girls face in schools due to misrepresentation, stereotypes, and harsh discipline policies, which all make for a crooked space in their educational experiences. "The overall purpose of qualitative research is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.15). This study is qualitative to show "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.15). The researcher was interested in the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools, what they say works for them, and what does not work when navigating that particular space. I wanted to know how the girls were making sense of their world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Design

A basic qualitative study was used in this study. “Qualitative studies aim to provide illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues and are most useful for answering humanistic ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ questions” (Marshall, 1996, p.522).

All qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed and how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. A basic qualitative study focuses on meaning, understanding, and process in which purposeful sampling is utilized and data is collected through interviews, observations, and or documents. The data analysis for a basic qualitative study is inductive and comparative and the findings are richly descriptive and presented as themes and categories. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 25)

Qualitative research focuses on understanding why individuals think or behave in certain ways (Minichiello & Kottler, 2010). It tells a story from the perspectives of the participants that provides descriptive details as data (Roberts, 2004). The goal of this study was to understand the experiences of Black girls in predominantly White high schools and find out how they are navigating that particular space. The data collected came from the student perspective.

Role of the Researcher

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that “the following four characteristics are identified by most as the key to understanding the nature of qualitative research: the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive” (p.15). As the primary researcher in this study, I was interested in how Black

girls were making sense of the worlds (spaces) they navigate as Black females attending predominantly White high schools. My curiosity on this topic stemmed from the world around me. At the time of the study, I taught in a predominantly White school district. I experienced and observed the crooked space that exists in this large suburban district as a Black female educator in a variety of ways- even as a parent of Black male students in the same district. The goal in researching about the experiences and challenges of Black girls in PWHS was to explore and understand more about how Black girls navigate a space not originally intended for them. I wanted to find out how they navigate that particular space and make it work for them. I wanted to hear their stories directly from them in their own voices. This is why interviews with the participants were used as qualitative data for this study.

I asked Black girls directly about the experiences and challenges they face attending a PWHS and this study reflects their voices. I also acknowledged that I am a Black, female educator who was once a Black girl attending a predominantly White high school as a student in a desegregation program and my personal experiences may also serve as data for this study.

Participants

During this study, I conducted qualitative interviews as data. Two specific criteria were used to identify participants:

1. The first criterion was that participants have to self-identify as African American or Black females.
2. The second criterion is that participants have to be currently attending or have attended predominantly White public school districts. For the purposes of this

study, predominantly White is defined as a district where both the staff and student population is more than 60% White. Since this study is focused on the distinct experiences of African Americans in a setting in which they are in the minority, this is a key aspect of the selection process.

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. According to Marshall (1996), purposeful sampling happens when “The researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question” (p. 523). This means gathering information from the purpose and research question that are specific criteria that participants could be, like occupation, gender, age, etc. (Marshall, 1996). In addition, Patton (2002) argues that “Purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230). When purposeful sampling is used, the researcher would choose individuals who are directly related to the research question, specifically because of their expertise is related to the topic being researched. Merriam (2009) described purposeful sampling as being appropriate for research studies in which the researcher seeks to “discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77).

Invitations were extended to prospective participants via person-to-person contact, phone, and email. I had access to four high schools in a predominantly White school district once I got permission from the school district to conduct the study. The sample was composed of participants who responded to the invitation to participate in the study. In serving as both researcher and a participant who identifies as a Black female educator, I acquired personal and professional knowledge and some experience related to

the research topic for this particular study since I had access to students working in a predominantly White school district.

In conjunction with the initial invitations I extended to recruit participants for the study, snowball sampling was used to reach additional research participants. “Snowball, chain, or network sampling is perhaps the most common form of purposeful sampling. This strategy involved locating a few key participants who easily met the criteria you have established for participation in the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016 p. 98). As girls expressed their interest in participating in the study, I asked them to ask girls they knew who fit the criteria for the study to see if they might be interested in participating in the study too. I anticipated that between 10 and 15 participants would be involved in this study based off the collaboration with my doctoral committee. This number of participants was projected based upon the concept of saturation. “In purposeful sampling, the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units. Reaching a point of saturation or redundancy means that you begin hearing the same responses to your interview questions or seeing the same behaviors in observations; no new insights are forthcoming” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016 p. 101).

A total of 14 girls responded to the request for participation that was circulated throughout four high schools in the predominantly White school district. Of those 14 girls, initial introductory conversations were had with 13 of the 14 girls to provide more context and background information about the study for the interested participants. Ten interviews were scheduled, but only six interviews were conducted. Three of the six

participants had recently finished their first year of college while the remaining three participants were students currently enrolled in grades 10-12. All participants previously attended or were currently attending one of the four high schools in the predominantly White school district during the time the study was conducted.

Prior to the interviews, I responded to the participants who emailed, called, and/or text messaged me of their interest to participate in this study. I either emailed, called, and/or text messaged them back in response and even had one to two phone conversations with them and/or their parents to discuss information about the study, consent details, meeting time/place, and any other questions they had. When two of the participants' parents and I met in person, we went over the details of the study, the interview process, and then they signed the consent and assent forms along with the minor participant and the interview was conducted immediately after. All six of the participants in the study connected with me instantly likely due to the previous contact we had prior to the actual interview being conducted. Every participant was excited that a research study was being done about Black girls, and they wanted to help with the research.

Rather than real names, pseudonyms were used for the participants in this study to promote confidentiality and the specific demographic information about participants is shared in non-identifiable manners in chapter four. As a researcher, I documented the experiences and challenges of the high school girls, and as a participant I included a few of my own personal experiences as a Black female student attending a predominantly White high school and a field journal was used to document such information. These accounts are shared in the analysis of results in chapter four.

Data Collection

The data collected in this study is from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the participants and the researcher's fieldwork journal. The University of Missouri- St. Louis Institutional Review Board approved this study along with a cooperating school district that fit the demographics for the study. The data in a qualitative study is not numbers or concrete facts because the data involves dealing with people and their understanding, memory, or experience of a given situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers are turning to individuals as the data points in their research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Roberts, 2004) In a qualitative study, "data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). In this study, data collection came from interviews with Black girls who attend predominantly White high schools.

During the initial contact, I introduced the topic of my research interest and allowed time for any questions the participants had regarding the nature of this study. Upon receiving notification that any potential participant was interested in participating in this study, I planned with the participants a convenient time and place for the interview to take place. Participants were allowed to choose the location of the interviews. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable sharing their stories.

When I met with each participant to conduct the interview, I reviewed the informed consent for participation in research activities. After agreeing to the terms of the study, the researcher and participants signed two consent forms- one was given to the participant and the other is being kept in a secure location with other artifacts from this study. The consent form explained the expectations for the participant's role in the

research. These expectations included the expected time commitment involved and addressed the possibility that time may flex to accommodate participant's storytelling. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Minor participants signed an assent form along with a parental informed consent form due to their being under the age of eighteen. The participants that were eighteen years of age or older signed a general informed consent form.

Semi-structured interviews were used in order to enhance the inquiry of issues related to the research question with participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Flick (2014), "semi-structured interviews are based on a set of prepared, mostly open-ended questions, which guide the interview and interviewee" (p. 197). Semi-structured interviews have a combination of structured questions and unstructured questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used semi-structured so that I would have the structure of posing the same questions to all the interview participants, but I also wanted the flexibility to ask questions that would naturally occur during each of the individual interviews. The semi-structured interview questions that were asked of all participants during the qualitative interview process can be found in Appendix A which contains the revised version of the interview questions used during the actual data collection process with the participants.

The questions in the qualitative interview were set up to flow in the following format:

- Beginning: casual questions about the participant (interests, activities, school information, etc.) to build rapport with the participant

- Middle: profound questions about identity, belonging, assumptions, stereotypes/micro aggressions, race, etc. to find out the lived experiences of the participant
- End: introspective questions for the participants to end the interview on a high note with the girls feeling positive and hopeful about the things that were working well for them and feelings/thoughts of what is right about them as students/Black girls (Ladson-Billings, 2009a).

Besides the questions funneling into deeper topics, the questions were set up for the participants to move through internal and external perspectives of themselves specifically how they see themselves and the world around them; their lived experience involves dealing with double consciousness (Dubois, 1969/1994) intersectional challenges (Crenshaw, 1989) and the crooked room (Harris-Perry, 2009). Because one of my identities is a Black female educator, I am consciously aware of these things; I intentionally created interview questions that were meant to tap into different facets of the participants' metacognitive thinking process to evoke reflective narratives about their lived experiences. Any follow up questions I asked were for the purpose of clarity to ensure I understood the responses that were provided to me.

All interviews conducted were audio recorded on two different devices (digital recorder and I-phone audio recording) in case of damage to the original audio file. When participants signed their consents prior to the interviews being conducted, I asked if it was ok for me to reach out if I needed clarification or to know anything else about their high school experiences. I also asked them to reach out to me if they thought of anything else they wished to share with me regarding the nature of the study. If there was anything

left lingering after this first draft of the transcript was developed, I reached out to the participant and asked any questions I had. I did reach out to the first two participants to ask questions about discipline in school because the third participant shared about this specific thing happening with her school experiences, and I realized that unless I asked directly, I would not find out what I wanted to know. I did not want to take a chance on unfair or harsh discipline not coming up during the rest of the interviews that were scheduled. This was also something pointed out to me by my committee; if there was something I wanted to know while collecting data then I needed to ask it while conducting interviews.

I transcribed all recordings prior to data analysis and this allowed for added familiarity with the interviews and content of the data collected. Transcriptions were hand-coded by the researcher along with any notes in the researcher's fieldwork journal. The transcription process serves as pre-phase one of thematic analysis which requires the researcher to get familiar with the data (Braun & Clark, 2006; 2012).

Data Analysis

“Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read- it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.202) According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), “During analysis, researchers are moving rapidly between the abstract and the concrete. They are constantly asking questions and making comparisons. While managing the details of the data, they are simultaneously looking for relationships and trying to identify patterns” (p. 86). In this study, I simultaneously collected the data from participants and analyzed it

as I went along to make the analysis of the data more manageable. I transcribed and coded the interviews as I collected it and this continuous process allowed me to see patterns as they emerged during the data collection and analysis process since they occurred concurrently.

According to Chenail (2012), “one of the biggest challenges in conducting qualitative data is deciding on what piece of data constitutes a meaningful unit to analyze. A meaningful unit is a phrase or term that the researcher uses to represent the data” (p. 266). As I read over the transcripts, I applied my interpretation of the data and created a word or phrase to provide meaning to the data. I then took the meaningful units and generated a list of codes from the meaningful units (Appendix B). Charmaz (2012) states that “...codes consist of short labels that we construct as we interact with the data. Something kinesthetic occurs when we are coding; we are mentally physically active in the process” (p. 5).

Findings can be in the form of organized descriptive accounts, themes, or categories that cut across the data or in the form of models and theories that explain the data. Each of these forms reflects different analytical levels, ranging from dealing with the concrete in simple description to higher-level abstractions in theory constructions. (Merriam, 2016, p.202)

According to Braun & Clarke, (2006) “Thematic Analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p. 79).

Thematic Analysis (TA) systematically identifies, organizes, and offers insight into the patterns of meaning called themes across a data set. By focusing on the

meaning of the themes across a data set, TA allows the researcher make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences collected as qualitative data.

(Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.57)

To analyze the data collected during this qualitative study, I went through the six phases in the thematic analysis process of Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012). Before beginning the first phase of thematic analysis, the interviews with the participants were transcribed by the researcher. Then I started phase one which was familiarize myself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012). I listened to the audio of the transcripts again while reading them and annotating them as I read along. I underlined and circled words and phrases that repeated or seemed meaningful according to the topic and research questions. I then began phase two: generate initial codes to find out what the data is revealing (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012). I read each of the transcripts again with the purpose of annotating words and phrases that seemed significant according to the two research questions for the study. Phase three of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012) required the researcher to look for themes. I searched for themes by sorting the data according to the research questions. I then began combining/connecting the words and phrases that appeared to match one another or are synonyms of one another. After reviewing the overarching themes, I noticed that some of the patterns overlapped/were similar. After combining/connecting themes, I noticed two overarching themes emerged.

After reviewing the overarching themes in phase three, patterns began to emerge amongst the themes and a few new themes revealed themselves; this required for more sorting to happen and this part of the process is phase four (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012). Something that Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest about thematic analysis is that “ideally,

there will be a number of instances of the theme across the data set, but more instances do not necessarily mean the theme itself is more crucial” (p.82).

The patterns of meaning that TA allows the researcher to identify need to be important in relation to the particular topic and research question being explored. Analysis produces the answer to a question, even if, as in some qualitative research, the specific question that is being answered only becomes apparent through the analysis. Numerous patterns could be identified across any data set—the purpose of analysis is to identify those relevant to answering a particular research question. (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.57)

For phase five of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012), I needed to define and name themes based off the findings in the data. The order in which the themes are presented is important too (Braun & Clarke, 2012). “The writing and analysis are thoroughly interwoven in qualitative research” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p.58). Phase six of thematic analysis was producing the report on what was specifically found in the data; this phase falls under the findings section in a qualitative study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012). I was hoping to uncover themes that were relevant to how Black girls navigate predominantly White high schools. This is detailed in chapter four.

Reliability and Validity

This study about the experiences and challenges of Black girls in PWHS does not claim to be a generalization for all Black girls in the same situation. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) state that “Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. In other words, if the study is repeated, will it yield the same results?” (p.250)

Replication of a qualitative study will not return the exact results, but this does not discredit the results of any study since there can be numerous interpretations of the same data. What matters more for a qualitative study is whether the results are consistent with the data collected. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.251).

“External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 253). The findings in this study are applicable to other issues in education as they pertain to Black girls especially since there is much more research available related to Black boys schooling experiences. The findings may also be applicable to girls of color or any other marginalized groups of girls dealing with the challenges that the blend of intersectionality might bring. The findings show how important the role of voice is when analyzing qualitative data from students when they present issues that influence their daily lives.

Ethical Considerations

Over course of this study, it was important to note other identities/lenses that I viewed the data through as a practicing educator who is also a Black female and how these biases might affect the interview process or even how I interpreted the data. It was important to ask for clarification throughout the interview to make sure I understood exactly what the participants shared with me if I was unsure about something they shared so that I did not assume I knew what they meant when they shared their experiences with me. I needed to be sure that I got what the participants shared on tape.

I disclosed my identity as a student in a doctoral program at a Midwestern university seeking to understand the experiences and challenges of Black girls who attend predominantly White high schools and how they navigate that particular space to the

participants in the study. Overall, I believe my identities helped me notice the subtleties in the different things the participants shared during the interview process and the data analysis process.

Participants were given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions about their participation in the study. Specific steps to increase participant privacy were enacted: potentially identifying information were masked, all field notes and interview data is being kept in a secure, confidential file that is password-protected, and handwritten notes are also being kept in a secure location. Although little risk was expected to be involved for participants, it was shared as part of the IRB consent protocol that there might be a risk for potential uncomfortable feelings that might come from answering certain questions regarding their experiences of being African American females attending predominantly White schools. “In-depth interviewing may have unanticipated long-term effects” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.262) A resource was shared with all participants (and their parents if the participant was a minor) to reach out for additional help in case the nature of this study around race affected them outside the study.

Maintaining confidentiality was important to encourage participants to speak candidly about their experiences without fear of consequences or retaliation. Additionally, given the sensitive nature of this research topic, I explained the efforts I was taking to increase participants’ confidentiality such as the use of pseudonyms and removing potentially identifying information. Participants and parents (if required) were asked to read the consent form and given time to ask any clarifying questions before signing the consent forms. The participants were given a copy of the consent forms for their records and I kept a copy for my records. As the researcher, I am required to keep

copies of the consent form on file for three years and the audio recordings of the interviews for one year.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the methods I used to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?
2. What might they say about navigating that particular space?

This basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) focuses on meaning and understanding and used purposeful sampling with data collection via interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Detailed findings and interpretations of the data are detailed in chapters four and five.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Results

“The wounded child inside many females is a girl who was taught from early childhood on that she must become something other than herself, deny her true feelings, in order to attract and please others.” bell hooks

Introduction

As stated in chapter one, this qualitative study revolved around the challenges Black girls face when they attend predominantly White high schools (PWHS). They are learning in crooked space and are finding ways to navigate that crooked space each day and make it work for them. Chapter four is organized in terms of the two research questions posed in chapter one:

1. What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?
2. What might they say about navigating that particular space?

Chapter four first reveals the experiences and challenges Black girls have in PWHS. It then reveals what the girls are doing to make that particular space work for them.

Demographic Description: The Predominantly White School District

Approval was also obtained from the predominantly White school district (PWSD) where the researcher was employed as a teacher. The PWSD is very large covering over 60 miles of St. Louis County. It has 18 elementary schools, five middle schools, four high schools, and one alternative high school. It is an award winning, high performing school district in the state of Missouri. Below are some quick facts about the PWSD from a report titled “District Demographic Data” from the Missouri

Comprehensive Data System on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website (DESE, 2018):

District Demographic Data

PWSD	2014	2015	2016	2017
Total Enrollment	17,147	17,229	17,302	17,434
Asian Percent	11.10	11.40	11.90	12.30
Black Percent	15.20	15.60	15.30	15.50
Hispanic Percent	*	*	*	5.3
Indian Percent	*	*	*	*
Multi-race Percent	*	*	*	*
Pacific Islander Percent	*	*	*	*
White Percent	64.30	63.40	62.70	61.20
Free/Reduced Lunch (FTE) Percent	20.5	20.3	19.8	19.9

* - Indicates the number/percent has been suppressed due to a potential small sample size

(DESE, 2018)

Demographic Description: The Participants

This study is about the experiences and challenges Black girls face as they navigate predominantly White high schools so who better to collect data from than the girls themselves. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from the University of Missouri- St. Louis prior to conducting any participant interviews. The study was approved to include 10-15 Black female participants in grades 10-12 along with Black

female participants who have been out of high school up to one year. Two specific criteria were used to identify participants:

1. Participants had to self-identify as African American or Black females.
2. Participants had to be currently attending or previously attended a predominantly White high school in a predominantly White school district. For the purposes of this study, predominantly White is defined as a district where both the staff and student population is more than 60% White. Since this study is focused on the distinct experiences of African Americans in a setting in which they are in the minority, this was a key aspect of the selection process.

A total of 14 girls responded to the request for participation that was circulated throughout the four high schools. Out of those 14 girls, initial introductory conversations were had with 13 of the 14 girl to provide more context and background information about the study for the interested participants. Ten interviews were scheduled, but only six interviews were conducted. Three of the six participants had previously finished their first year of college while the remaining three participants were students currently enrolled in 10-12 grade. All participants previously or currently attended one of the four high schools in the PWSD during the time of this study. Four of the girls were resident students in the school district meaning they resided in the neighborhood(s) where the district was located while two of the girls participated in Voluntary Inter-District Choice Corporation (VICC) program.

VICC oversees the implementation of the metropolitan area desegregation program, with responsibilities for facilitating transfers of city students to suburban

school districts and suburban students to city magnet schools. Currently about 4,000 city students are transferring to participating suburban school districts and about 150 county students are transferring to magnet schools in the city.

(Choicecorp.org, 2018)

Prior to the interviews, I responded to the participants who emailed, called, and/or text messaged me of their interest participating in this study. I either emailed, called, and/or text messaged them back in response and had one to two phone conversations to discuss information about the study, consent details, meeting time/place, etc. I also had a few phone conversations with a few of the participants' parents if the participant was a minor prior to conducting the interviews to go over the details of the study, what to expect during the interview process, and to answer any questions they had. Three of the participants' parents and I met in person, and we went over the details of the study, the interview process, and then they signed the consent and assent forms along with the minor participant and the interview was conducted immediately. All six of the participants that agreed to the interview connected with me instantly likely due to previous conversations we had prior to the interview being conducted. Every participant was excited that a research study was being done about Black girls and they wanted to help the research. I used pseudonyms to keep the participants' identities confidential and to humanize the girls with an actual name in the study. I was compelled to do this because so often, Black women and girls are subordinated when they are discussed, and I wanted to be intentional about them having actual names in a study about them. The pseudonyms used for the participants are Kelly, Dana, Zara, Brittany, Malena, and Diana.

Thematic Analysis

To analyze the data collected during this qualitative study, I went through the six phases in the thematic analysis process of Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012). According to Braun & Clarke, (2006) “Thematic Analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p. 79). First, I familiarized myself with the data; second, I generated initial codes according to the two research questions; third, I looked for overarching themes; fourth, I looked for patterns amongst the themes; fifth, I named themes based off the findings in the data. Braun and Clarke (2012) suggest the writing and analysis are thoroughly interwoven in qualitative research and this led to the sixth phase of thematic analysis where I analyzed the research findings of the study.

Research Findings

The research findings are presented in Appendix B which shows the process I went through with the six phases of thematic analysis along with the themes that emerged in this study from the qualitative data collection process. Below is the table displaying the themes that emerged from this study. The themes are in order of the ones that had the most data (codes) from the qualitative interviews with the participants.

Table of Themes

<u>Research Question 1:</u> What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?	<u>Research Question 2:</u> What might they say about navigating that particular space?
Overarching Themes	
Experiences/Challenges	Navigating White Space
Themes	
Issues with race	Issues with Discipline
Identity	Words of Advice
Search for Affinity	Support System

Overarching Themes

The two overarching themes that emerged from the data were Experiences/Challenges and Navigating White Space. The overarching theme of Experiences/Challenges was named in that combination because initially I had it separated based off research question one: What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools (PWHS)? As I analyzed the data, it became harder and harder to distinguish between an experience and a challenge and a lot of the things that the participants shared could be either one depending on the context of a situation, as they learned more about themselves personally, and as a student in the PWHS, so I put those themes together as one overarching theme named Experiences/Challenges. For example, all six participants noted in the first few minutes of the interview where they lived either in the district or if they were bussed in from the city. They all shared that this was a consistent question they

were asked by administrators, teachers, peers, and the parents of other students in the PWHS.

They all stated how annoying of a question this was to be asked so often. One participant, Diana stated, “There’s this standard because they are White and they live out here where the school is because they have more money than us (lines 223-224) ... It feels like I’m less of a person because I don’t have a big fancy house and I don’t live out here. I have to remember that my mom is working her hardest and I’m working my hardest. As long as I go to college and get my education I am fine. I have to say ‘Don’t let them get to you’ and I have to keep myself in check on it” (lines 226-230).

Another participant, Kelly shared that she grew up in the predominantly White district all her life and she said, “I would feel bad when I would see other Black students and would wonder if they live in the city or the apartments” (lines 287-288). Kelly most often would be one or two Black students in a class at school and did not see a lot of Black people in her neighborhood either. She said, “I would see them get off [the bus] in the neighborhood where there are all houses. I’m like I’m such a bad person for thinking that” (lines 289-290) [in reference to where she thought a Black student typically lived]. This was an example of an internalized racial attitude that was Kelly said she developed from “growing up with it and hearing people say things like this and seeing it on TV and in movies” (lines 292- 294). Kelly, like many others, was socialized to think this from living and learning in White space so long. “You just don’t realize you are thinking like this because you grew up thinking it about your own people and then you kind of get put in check about it not realizing you were even thinking this in the first place” (lines 297-298) Kelly further explained.

Four of the girls wondered if the White, Asian, Indian, Pakistani, or Hispanic students were asked where they live like the Black students in the district do. Diana remarked that, “They think they are better than everyone else. They really believe they are better than us. They are like, ‘We matter the most, and you all are in our area.’ It’s about us not being White and about money” (lines 231-233). Whether the question about where the girls live is intentional or unintentional implicit bias, it is a slight towards them attending school in the district. That particular question being asked in a predominantly White school district is meant to judge whether these minority students deserve the resources, services, activities and programming opportunities that the school’s zip code has to offer students enrolled in the school community. From my lens as an educator and parent of two Black male students in the PWSD in this study, I have experienced this question being asked as often as the participants in the study stated.

In this particular district, over 90% of the school funding comes from taxpayers (DESE, 2018) and when people ask the girls where they live, they are trying to assess whether the girls are as privileged as their children or are they taking from their children. What these parents are not aware of is this: if a Black student is a part of the VICC program (getting bussed from the city to the county to attend school), the school district gets double per pupil rate for the student. In fact, the student is not taking anything away from anyone. The district gets a financial benefit to have VICC students enrolled as well as students who enroll from unaccredited districts.

The overarching theme of Experiences/ Challenges fit with the data better with the combination label versus me choosing one or the other because it is a both/and situation for the girls constantly being asked about where they live. It is a common

experience the girls are having and it is a challenge to constantly answer a question that they have no control over, for their parents have decided where they live. The girls are also members of the student body and they are getting a message that somehow they don't belong there and this creates tension and a challenge for the girls in school. The issue about where the girls live is about race, but it is also about socio-economics too which makes the issue layered in intersectionality. This is why this overarching theme is called Experiences/Challenges because the patterns that emerged in the data have layers and intersections to them. The overarching theme of Experiences/Challenges had three themes emerge from the data: Issues with Race, Identity, Search for Affinity and these themes are in order of the amount of patterns that emerged while the data was coded.

Navigating White Space is the other overarching theme, and it was named that specific phrase due to the patterns of themes that emerged from the data collected from the interviews with the participants. Something that all six girls stated at different times during their interviews with the researcher was that they were moving towards their future and going to the predominantly White high school was a way to make that happen. The girls and their families saw the PWHS "as a way up and way out" (Ricks, 2014, p.12) of their current circumstances. All six girls commonly said their PWHS was a stepping stone to meet their goals. Because of the academic offerings and activities available in the PWHS, the girls felt they would be better prepared for college. Even my fresh start as a deseg student as a teen held the same sentiment. Four of the girls' parents had attended predominantly White schools in their schooling experiences, and they helped their Black daughters navigate the different experiences and challenges that were unfolding while attending school in White space. All six girls' families were aware of

how tough it was for their daughters as minority members of the student population at these PWHS but felt the pros outweighed the cons especially since lots of schools have problems.

Three of the six girls interviewed for the study recently finished their freshman year of college, and they all currently attended predominantly White universities. Two of those three girls both got full rides because of their GPAs and the sports they play. Overall, the overarching theme of Navigating White Space directly correlated with research question two since the girls stated how they specifically navigated that particular space. The overarching theme of Navigating White Space had three themes emerge and they were Issues with Discipline, Words of Advice, and Support System, and they are in order of the amount of data collected during the interview process.

Themes Related to Research Question 1

This section is about themes related to the first research question: What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools (PWHS)? The overarching theme was Experiences/Challenges and it is defined as the lived experiences and/or challenges that Black girls have attending PWHS. These Experiences/Challenges are occurring when the girls interact with peers (and peers' families), administrators, teachers, and the participants' own families in the context of attending PWHS. The three themes related to this research question are: Issues with Race, Identity, and Search for Affinity and they are in order of the amount of data connected to that theme.

Research Question 1 Theme 1: Issues with Race

The most prominent theme related to research question one was issues with race. All six participants detailed a variety of issues with race that they had been experiencing and had been challenged by in different ways in the PWHS setting. One of the patterns that emerged when analyzing this theme was examples of overall issues with race in the school that define this particular theme. Regarding her attending a PWHS, Diana shared, “You are going to encounter some things especially if you are Black or Muslim or any other race or religion other than White. You are going to encounter some stuff. Overall, you’re going to get a good education if you just focus” (lines 40-42). Later in her interview she said “One of the issues with race at school is White people are not used to being around different people. It is so hard (lines 216-217) ...It is not even just towards Black people. It’s Muslim, or anyone that is different (line 220). There’s a lot of [racial] problems. I don’t even know how to explain it. People are always like, no it’s fine. We [school personnel] are handling it (lines 247-248). They’ll make an announcement to the school on the P.A. [intercom]. They’ll say something like ‘this is an inspiring quote ...’ I feel like that doesn’t help at all” (lines 250-251).

Brittany who attends a different PWHS in the district from Diana, provides in-depth details about the issues with race at her school. I asked her about how different groups were treated at school (line 228). Brittany breathed in audibly and there is a 4-5 second pause while she collected herself before answering. Her inhale can be heard on the recording. I rewound it several times to make sure of what I was hearing. “The White people are treated so well and the Blacks are just treated like trash. That’s my honest opinion. I feel like it’s so unfair” (lines 232-233). I asked her what does that look like

being treated like trash? (line 235). Brittany continued, “It’s not even about how it looks-it feels terrible” (line 236). Later in the interview with Brittany, she elaborated more about the issues with race at her school when she said, “I just feel like the Whites have more authority or more control and opportunities. And I understand the Blacks they have to, and this will always happen, but the Blacks will always have to put in more effort while the Whites get it so easily. And me and a lot of other people have this perspective that because we are Black, we can’t do what they can or we can’t achieve what they can achieve when we really can” (lines 267-271).

When Dana was asked how different groups were treated at her PWHS, she said, “It was students who did not know how to react to an African American being in their class (lines 223-224) ... It is just certain people who have not been exposed to a smart African American or the African American is above them in that ranking of intelligence, they [White students] feel like they are attacked and so they don’t know how to respond. So they don’t look at you, they don’t respond, and so you just kind of go about your business and just avoid them” (lines 227-230).

Another pattern that emerged from the theme of issues with race was the use of the n-word in the PWHS. All six participants brought up the use of this particular racial slur during their interview. Dana gives background on the n-word when she says “From hearing stories from my mom and other teachers who are African American, that the n-word is a derogatory term used by White people during slavery times. It is very negative and has that very negative connotation that makes me feel uncomfortable” (lines 373-375). Two participants, Malena and Diana, stated that White students say the n-word all the time. Malena stated, “White boys say the n-word all the time” (line 338). She further

explained, “Sometimes it will be them talking and the word gets used or it’s in a song-nigga not nigger. I don’t like that. And that’s their type of relationship. My [Black] friend and I agree to disagree and we keep things separate when it comes to his White friend who uses the n-word” (lines 340-343).

Diana said, “Oh my God, they [White students] use the n-word so much. And I’ll be like, don’t say it around me. I’m not that type of person. I’m not nice like that. I’ll tell you off in front of everybody. It just makes no sense” says (lines 252-254). “They [White students] say things like ‘I got three Black friends and they said I could say it.’ No don’t use that word because even I don’t use that word. I just feel like the word has very negative connotations and even when people say ‘we’re Black, we need to take that word back’ and I’m like you can take it back, but I’m not going to use it. I actually did talk to a couple people and I said don’t say that word around me” (lines 340-344). Diana shared one of the reasons why White students use the slur so freely when she stated, “There’s this thing like a card or pass like ‘n-word pass’ to give a White person to say it like they are cool enough to say it and I be like no because it could backfire and you end up arguing and they use it on you then what you gonna say? You gave them a pass. Some boy came up to me and I heard him say it and I said ‘what!’ He said so-in-so gave me a pass and I said I don’t care. If you see me, don’t say it” (lines 256-261). She further stated, “I feel like some of the Black students do it [give White students the ok to use the n-word] to feel accepted by them even though they are really not. I just be like no. You are Black still and if you try to be like them, they will correct you on it” (lines 263-267).

All six girls said that White students are using both versions of the n-word even though the pass is for ‘nigga’ the White students still could call you a ‘nigger’ if it comes

down to it. Dana (line 276) and Diana (line 272) have both been called a nigger at PWHS by White peers just as I was as a Black girl attending a predominantly White school.

Malena recalled “A favorite class was where we debated the n-word. I forget the name of the class but it was the best class I’ve ever taken in high school. It was a huge discussion class where we would talk about culture, stereotypes, religion, and life stuff and we would come to class and just talk for a credit” (lines 345-348). Although an effort was being made on behalf of a few teachers to educate about the word, in that very same PWHS, Diana got called a ‘fucking nigger!’ for accidentally stepping on the back of a White boy’s shoe in the hallway during passing time in the hallway (lines 280-281). She responded by yelling at the boy and her friends held her back and a White teacher came out of a classroom and told her to calm down (lines 285-292). “The teacher was trying to get me to calm down and I was like what if I called him a cracker or colonizer or something else over the top, I would be penalized. So I said [to the teacher] you’re making me feel like I can’t say nothing, nothing’s going to be done...She [the teacher] kept asking does this happen often and I was like yes and nothing is done about it. I always get pulled in a classroom or the counselor’s [office] or the principal’s [office]. They always say calm down. You’re going to be fine. We are going to handle the situation, but it never gets handled (lines 292-304). The use of the n-word remains a regular part of Black girls’ lived experience in PWHS and certainly presents some challenges for the girls to manage while learning in that particular space.

Besides the use of the n-word emerging as a pattern for the theme of issues with race, another pattern connected to that same theme was micro aggressions. Micro aggressions are comments or questions usually delivered in everyday conversation that

insult people and reinforce negative stereotypes about someone's race, gender, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, etc. The six participants shared how they constantly interface with micro aggressions while learning in a PWHS. They also talked about how they deal with the micro aggressions when they happen at the PWHS. Appendix C is titled "Micro aggressions and How Black Girls Deal with Them" and it shows the common micro aggressions aimed at the six Black girls who participated in this study. It also shows how each girl personally deals with micro aggressions when they occur. Each girl consistently deals with micro aggressions about their physical appearance, the way they dress, and their hair. Some of the micro aggressions had to do with what people assumed about them regarding stereotypes that exist about being Black and what people assumed their behavior to be because of the color of their skin. Some of the other micro aggressions had to do with where they live and people making assumptions about that too.

Malena stated "I'll snap immediately. If you are saying something about me personally, especially about my race, who I identify with. I'm going to snap and it's not going to be in an educational way. I'm going to get mad. I'm going to try and go off. If it is one of those situations where you are like I didn't mean it that way, I will calm down immediately. I'm not going to keep attacking you and then it will be more of a learning moment" (line 331-335). Her thoughts demonstrated how burdensome micro aggressions are and how they weigh on a person. Overall though, all six girls had some clever strategies in dealing with micro aggressions. Some of the girls would consider the relationship they had with the person and decide if the person was worth the conversation of a teaching moment or if they should just ignore the comments the person said. Some of

the girls admittedly would get upset and have to deliberately do something like leave and walk away to keep themselves calm. A couple of the girls would engage the person saying the micro aggression with sarcasm or humor. As a whole, all six girls seemed to be well versed on how to deal with micro aggressions, but that did not make dealing with them any easier when they occurred.

Along with me asking the girls about micro aggressions and how they deal with them during the interviews I conducted, I also asked how micro aggressions had affected them and what has been done to repair/restore the harm. When sharing about the use of the n-word by students, Diana told a story about being called a ‘fucking nigger’ by a White boy in the hallway at the PWHS she attends (lines 280- 301). Diana is clear on the student walking away (line 288) and that a White teacher kept asking if this sort of thing happened often (line 299). Diana stated, “And they never do anything about it. They always say, ‘calm down. You’re going to be fine. We are going to handle the situation’ but it never gets handled” (lines 302-304). Diana also shared (line 306) that the student had never apologized to her. Not only that, throughout the incident, the staff handled her after she was verbally attacked. When asked whether anything happened with the other student Diana said no (line 306). When she and the other student cross paths on campus since the incident, she stated, “He just looks away from me. He has never apologized. I’m waiting for my apology” (line 306).

Diana sought support on her own in this racially charged incident. She explained “I usually talk to a teacher named Ms. B about it and these kinds of situations or Mr. P or Dr. M. [two Black teachers and one Black administrator] They tell me to ‘get them back with my education or volleyball [she’s a star player on the varsity team and the only

Black girl too] because you will always get penalized because you are Black. You are tougher. You can make bigger moves. If you would have knocked him out, then you would have gotten suspended.’ I was like I understand what you are saying” (lines 309-312). Later in the interview, I asked Diana how have micro aggressions affected her and what has been done to restore that damage? “Nothing. Nothing has happened. I feel like it’s the norm now. You’re a Black kid in a White school- stuff is going to happen to you” (lines 345-346). Diana was describing how “the needs of Black girls are often overlooked” (Ricks, 2014, p.10).

Brittany said “A lot of the time I talk to my parents about it because they have their own ideas and their own thoughts and we share like at dinner or in the car and we say how we feel about certain things and then say sometimes they’re at work and they don’t have the time, I will go and I will vent to my friends about it and they’ll just be like ‘Yep! I get what you mean’ or something like that. And as long as I get what I need to say out not like mean or dark towards someone else. I just say, ‘I’m about to release myself some type of way’ Maybe I just need to go take a walk, listen to music or just vent and then I’m good” (lines 312-318).

Malena said, “I guess I don’t. I hear these things. I get upset. How can you tackle something so big? [micro aggressions/ racial issues] I mean you can start to break down the issues but the problem will never really go away” (line 324-327). Dana offered a thought on repairing the harm of micro aggressions when she shared “I lost a couple of friends. I still don’t talk to some of the people. I actually restored the damage by talking to them and them actually sitting and listening and them offering an apology. And how sincere they actually were rather than the ones that were like ‘I’m sorry’ but the ones that

are actually a sincere apology like ‘I apologize for my ignorance and I understand where you are coming from now’ and actually change the behavior and change what they were saying too. And some of them drop saying the n-word. When they change the behavior, that’s what really restores the behavior” (lines 365-371).

In connection with the theme of issues with race, another related theme surfaced: discerning critical moments. The participants shared stories about current social issues regarding race in the news and how those issues played out in the PWHS environment. Discerning critical moments is a part of the everyday lived experiences for people of color here in America and it definitely makes things challenging for Black girls attending PWHS. A few of the moments the girls brought up during their interviews with the researcher were the Michael Brown shooting, the Parkland Shooting, Philando Castillo, Black Lives Matter vs. White Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter debate, and the Trump presidency. Discerning critical moments is in direct connection to the literature reviewed about Critical Race Theory (CRT) which is one of the frameworks used in this study, but I did not specifically review that particular aspect of CRT. I will include what the girls shared in connection to discerning critical moments in chapter five in the unexpected findings section.

Research Question 1 Theme 2: Identity

The second theme that emerged related to research question one was identity. There were three patterns that emerged from that theme: how you identify, how others see you, and identity shifts the girls made. For the first pattern of how you identify, all six participants identified themselves as Black or African American females. Kelly said (lines 105-107) “I’m just Black. I’m not mixed with anything. I don’t know my roots

from Africa. I don't know if I'm like Nigerian or anything. I'm not light skinned. I'm just African American." Another participant, Dana said, "I'm an African American female. I am, what I would say, a very huge minority because of the LGBTQ community and I am an African American female in what is a White man's world" (lines 6-8). One participant, Zara talked about her personality as part of her identity when she said, "I'm a real smiley person because I try not to be mean and mad all the time. I'm known for being happy and goofy" (lines 177-178). Later in the interview, Zara said, "My identity is the funny girl. I can make you laugh. One time I went into the bathroom and this girl is crying and I said 'Are you ok? Do you want a hug?' And she just fell into my arms. I'm very caring and I have a kind heart but don't take it for granted cause if you do, you'll never get it again" (lines 315-318).

How others see you is the second pattern that emerged from the theme of identity. Zara said, "Everybody knows me as cheerful even though when I walk down the hall, I may look mad, but I'm not mad. I just be trying to get to my class" (lines 173-174). Brittany said, "A lot of people say that I'm really bright and I'm really nice. They say I'm smart and just this outgoing person. Um...no one really says anything bad about me. A lot of people tell me how they feel about me and I respect that but if they were to say something bad about me, I don't know about it, but I would prefer not to know because I like to stick to positive thoughts in my life and a lot of people say the same thing" (lines 60-64). Dana said "Apparently everybody knew I was Gay before I came out. I'm not exactly sure how that happened but oh well. I remember freshman year that I finally decided that I was going to actually come all the way out. And this was after I had already told my mom. I went up to one of my friends and as I was about to say guess

what and she was like yeah, I already know. I was like how do you know this?" (lines 142-145). Diana said, "My Black friends see my potential. They know that my mom doesn't play. They know I focus on my books and my volleyball. They know that I'm a great participant [student] and I'm involved. I'm very friendly and I have White and Black friends a few Hispanic. They know that. The White people think that I'm very social and that's something I have going for me and that I'm an athlete and when I speak differently in front of my teachers they be like oh! I've never heard you talk like that. I say it's because I'm around an adult," (lines 125-130). All six girls seemed to be very aware of how others viewed them and were intentional about what they presented to other people because they were aware of perceptions people might make about them for the most part.

The last pattern related to the theme of identity is called identity shifts meaning depending on the situation, the six participants knew they may have to shift their behavior and actions for a particular reason in the PWHS and were careful with their interactions with others depending on the relationship they had with them. All six participants shared times when they were being quiet or shy in a new setting or situation in school because they were trying to figure out what to expect in that environment. Dana said, "I feel like I didn't want to look stupid. I know in some different instances when you are in school and you're talking about certain topics and you're talking about something African American, everyone in the room will look to you to answer for the entire race and I can't do that cause we're all different. There's no way I could answer those questions for everyone so basically, I'd just be quiet" (lines 206- 210). Dana also said "I feel like I have had to conform to everything else that is going on around me. In

most other situations, I tend to voice my opinion more. When I say ‘shy’ I don’t know, I’ve always been outgoing but I guess in some certain instances I sit back and just observe and listen to other people” (lines 248-251). An example of observing and listening for Dana was when “I had never been in Honors English so I’d sit back and listen to what other people were saying before I would actually participate in class. I think it also had to do with how interested I was in a class or how comfortable [I felt]” (lines 262-2640.)

Diana said “I code-switch with my teachers. When I am with my friends, I speak slang. When I’m with my White friends, I might do half and half (lines 186-187). Kelly also said, “It depends on who I am around. If I’m in a new group of people, I’m generally quiet and keep to myself. If I’m around my friends and people I know, I’m really funny. I’m a caring person, and I’m really goofy. I’m loud too which is like another stereotype like all Black girls are loud but in my family, everybody is just loud” (lines 121-124). Along with Kelly saying it depends on who she is around, Dana took that notion a step further when she said, “I bounced around to my different friend groups. I kind of feel like I was wearing a mask. It wasn’t a mask- it was different pieces of a mask that are me. For my nerdy friends, I put on my nerd mask. When I was with my track friends, I’d put on my track face and I guess it was kind of just ‘alright I’m with this group so I’ll be doing this’ it’s all a part of identity and I’m going to put on this mask for right now and then when I’m with my other friends I put on my other mask. There are also a couple people who, like my best friend, I just put on all my masks [for] and I’m like you are getting all of me. I guess it’s just like putting on different parts of my personality at different times” (lines 308-315).

For three of the participants, their shifting identities happened prior to them being in the PWHS setting; they recalled instances in middle school, predominantly White middle schools, that feed into the high schools they attend. Zara describes what led to her shifting identities “In middle school, I was bad. I was horrible. I got ISS a lot. [For] being bad, fighting. I was bad in class. [I was] being a very loud disruption to the class so I got in trouble a lot. A lot of disrespect. That was my thing in middle school when I was going through my phases. So going into high school that’s what I was known for. I feel like those other teachers I had [in middle school] gave my new teachers [in high school] the word... I can catch an attitude fast. But [going into high school] I didn’t want to be known as that mean girl and that I could act up. Going into high school, I wanted to try to be good. I have an older sister, Dana, who is good and people didn’t even know we were sisters until parent teacher conferences. I could tell that people were shocked or something when they would find out that we were sisters when I would act out and stuff” (lines 322-336). I asked Zara if she became funny to make up for being bad (line 337). She said, “I’ve always been funny. I’ve gotten more calm. I’ve learned to control my attitude and not be disrespectful with my teachers and stuff. I had a good long talk with my momma and with myself about who I want to be at school and that school is supposed to be fun. And high school is supposed to be your glory days or whatever so I knew that I did not want to be in trouble all the time in high school and I did not want that on my record cause now we are getting ready for life and I can’t be acting like this when I am grown. I knew I had to get it together” (Lines 338-343). Zara continued about how she had intentionally changed when she said, “Being a big Black girl everybody thought I was going to be a bully and be mean and stuff and I did not want that because even

though I did portray myself that way when I was younger, that's not what I wanted to happen [for] me in high school. I just want to be a fun person and not have people look at me like uh and stuff like that. I just try to keep it calm and walk around with a big smile on my face so they know that I'm not like who they thought I was" (Lines 359-363). Zara had given her identity changes lots of consideration so she could start PWHS on the right track. She believed if she changed herself, this would make things easier for her at school.

Diana shared how her identity shift started to take effect (lines 314-316) "I have in the back of my mind, don't fight, don't do anything. Cause I used to fight really bad and I'm glad I changed my life. This was in middle school. I was a good kid and everything. I would say come out of school and meet me and I'd fight, but not in school." She said she would fight because she had a lot of anger and aggression (line 318). "I was feeling tired. Tired of feeling like people think they can walk all over me just because I am nice. [This was from] school stuff. I just hated it. I had a lot of anger at the time. I decided that I was going to high school and I had to change myself. I was like they going to end up beating you up or you will beat them up really bad and [end up] getting suspended and getting a felony. So I started changing and then in 8th grade, people were like who are you? I was changing" (lines 314-326) A follow up conversation with the participant revealed that the school stuff that was making Diana angry had to do with her having to ride the bus over forty minutes each day from the city to the county and then getting to school and pretending to keep calm when bad and unfair things were happening to her and her peers at school. She revealed that she was ready to move on and leave middle school behind in hopes that high school would be better but it had new challenges

to worry about. She thought if she changed herself, it would make things a little easier for her.

Brittany said, “I molded my true self in 8th grade. I went through a hard time um I think it was the summer after 8th grade. It was pretty tough for me. It was also a pretty challenging time for me to figure out what I wanted out of life and what I wanted to do. And so I basically found out who my true friends were and I made changes to myself as well. And um, I just let people know the truth of how I feel about everything and in the process I did lose some friends and it was pretty hard but I still held on to those people that were true to me and so now to this day I think I have a really good, I don’t know the word for it, ‘look’ for people to accept me I guess” (lines 136-144). Overall, the girls were doing a variety of things to change and shift their identities for different reasons, and this showed the level of self-awareness and double consciousness (Dubois 1969/1994) the girls have about how they interact with others in the PWHS with its variety of crooked spaces (Harris-Perry, 2009).

Research Question 1 Theme 3: Search for Affinity

The previous theme of identity in connection with research question one was more about the participants as individuals as they move through the PWHS. The example of Brittany figuring out who she was as a person, seeking acceptance from her peer group (136-144) connects to the third theme that emerged in connection to research question one: search for affinity. The theme of search for affinity is about how the girls are looking for people with things in common with them at the PWHS; this could include race, interests/activities, and/or values. The patterns that emerged from the theme of search for affinity were belonging/fitting in and representation.

The pattern of belonging/fitting in emerged from the theme of search for affinity. Zara said, “When you come to my school, they tell you about how diverse it is and the district is proud about the diversity at our high school [24% Black in this high school compared to 8-15% Black in the other three high schools (DESE, 2018)] and in this area of the district but they don’t really do anything with it. When you think about it, we are still with the groups we are labeled in. The White people be with the White people, the Black people stay with the Black people, the Indians with the Indians, the Asians with the Asians. We are not doing anything to try and mix it up so I feel like ya’ll proud [of diversity] but you’re not doing anything to back up your proudness. We understand, but we all still in our pie shapes” (lines 439-445). Malena said, “As far as social groups and all that, I usually clung to those friends at school who looked like me of course. I never honestly had a White friend at my high school. I don’t know that I purposely went out of my way to find people that looked like me. I think you click with some people and some people you don’t” (lines 47-50).

Five of six of the participants were frequently in classes where they were the one, two or few Black students. One of the reasons this would happen would be because the girls were taking honors or college credit courses. Diana explained, “It’s like being one star in night sky. Ok all of the Black people hang together cause I feel like we gravitate towards each other so we all hang with each other. And I feel like when I’m in class, I have to change the way I act or else I’ll be looked at as stupid or ghetto” (lines 95-97). Dana said “I think about sitting in geometry class knowing the answers to the questions but not feeling comfortable to raise my hand being the only African American in that class” (lines 216-218). She also said, “It is just certain people who have not been exposed

to a smart African American or an African American is above them in that ranking of intelligence, they feel like they are attacked and so they don't know how to respond. So they don't look at you, they don't respond and so you just kind of go about your business and just avoid them" (lines 226-230). Dana was taking the higher math coursework as a freshman and being the only Black student was pretty normal for her, but she never got used to how some of her peers would treat her like she didn't belong there because of what they assumed about smartness and race and she could feel that in class each day.

Besides the academic coursework, some of the activities the girls participated in were traditionally White spaces in their high school. An example is Diana was the only Black student involved in volleyball and theater (lines 11;25;132). I asked the participants if there were any spaces at the PWHS where there were a variety of people present? Zara said, "Key club is very diverse because everybody is trying to get in their [community] service hours" (lines 446-448) and her response matched the other five girls' responses to that same question as well. All four high schools had inclusivity groups sponsored by the school where students met up with a staff sponsor and the conversations were geared towards social justice themes. "We all meet up and talk about race and different things going on in the world, things we need to improve on. Things like race, religion, stuff like that" explained Diana (lines 26-28). All six girls said of these groups that anyone could be a part of these kinds of groups but mostly Black students and very few Whites participated.

Zara participates in a group geared towards African American girls and the group is led by two African American female teachers (line 67-68). "We talk about racism a lot. How we feel about some of the stuff happening here at school and in the world. We talk

about politics, TV shows, it doesn't matter. We talk about anything that we want to. It's like a safe space for us and we won't be judged- that's like one of the number one rules is that we will listen to each other, you can't judge. It's a very good place for African American girls to go and talk without feeling like they are saying too much" detailed Zara (lines 73-77). She signed up for the group her freshman year and helps the group recruit new members (lines 79;81) and she describes this group as a family (line 101). Earlier in her interview, Zara mentioned she did not feel a part of the school like [she thinks] others do (line 31) so I asked her if the group she participates in helps make her feel a part of the school. "Yeah, but it's not really a part of the school. I feel a part of this group. This group is not a whole school thing. I feel like the school doesn't even know this group is happening" (lines 83-85) ...It's not a high level activity. Everybody knows there's a soccer, a football, basketball, chess club, the math club. [Name of the group], I feel like hardly none of the teachers even know except the African American teachers or African American students because it's not a thing that everybody just knows about it or that we are having our own meetings" (lines 87-90). I asked Zara whether she thought this was done on purpose or was it a coincidence and she said, "I think it's just a coincidence cause we also don't want everybody to know our business. This is a place we go with people who look like us and feel like we do about certain things in class. It's like we don't want them invading our personal space- like the only space we have in our own [school] building" (lines 82-95).

One participant, Dana figured out that she could belong and move through different spaces for different reasons. She said, "I kind of just bounced around group to group like I was with the athletes, I was also with the nerds, I was with the Black people,

I was with the Gay people. I was just bouncing around through all my groups of friends even from when I was in choir and it was just like alright, I fit in all of these groups but there's no group that actually fits all of me. Um, so when I would go with my track girls, it's alright, time to run! Time to compete and because I was one of the team captains junior/senior year, it's leadership, competition, helping and guiding them. Then I would leave and go with my nerdy group, the engineering group, so we'd talk about math and then bounce to honors English and then there were my groups of friends who were at my technical high school for part of the day" (lines 279-287). Dana identified her intersecting identities regarding race, gender, and sexuality early in her interview (line 7) and freshman year feeling lost and not knowing herself (line 97) and having figured it all out by senior year (line 115). She stated, "I bounced around to my different friend groups. I kind of feel like I was wearing a mask. It wasn't a mask- it was different pieces of a mask that are me" (lines 308-309)

Weaved throughout the interviews with all six participants was how involved they were in a variety of groups in their schools. Four of the girls were athletes and the sports they participate in cross country, track, and volleyball. Two of the six girls were in choir. All six were mentors to new students, school ambassadors, leadership groups, involved in social justice and community service. Zara is the head of the Black History production where she helps write and produce the show during the school year (line 7). Kelly was involved with Project Gearbox who sends supplies to soldiers, does community clean ups, and she managed the groups social media accounts (line 37). She also volunteered at the Humane Society (line 38). Four of the six girls also had part time jobs. Brittany noted that "Even though we have many problems with race at school, there's always a way to

get involved” (404-405). Although the girls were very invested in their school community, it did not exempt nor protect them from issues with race and micro aggressions as the data revealed throughout each interview.

Another pattern in the theme of search for affinity is representation. All six girls talked about the lack of diversity in the teaching staff at their PWHS and the need for teachers who look like them. Zara said, “We only have two African American female teachers in our whole school. It’s all about representation just like superheroes and Black Panther [a fictional Black superhero from Marvel comics]” (line 545-547). She also said she is most comfortable at school talking to the Black teachers she mentioned because she knows they listen to her, give her feedback she wants and needs to hear, and make sure she’s on the right path/mindset (lines 141-147). She said she knows they care about her and they have had a relationship since her first day of high school (lines 142-143). Kelly and Dana attend this same PWHS and name the same two teachers as watching out for them too. Dana also appreciated having an openly Gay, female guidance counselor on staff at her PWHS, and this helped with representation for her as well (line 83). Overall, all six girls were clear on the need for representation. Diana reiterated this need when she said, “I feel like if there were more Black teachers more Black students could relate to them and they could connect more. I bet the suspensions would be low and grades would be high. They [Black students] could have somebody to come and talk to- somebody who acts like their dad or mom then they’d probably be on track” (lines 336-340).

Themes Related to Research Question 2

This section is about themes related to the second research question: What might they say about navigating that particular space? The overarching theme was Navigating

White Space meaning that while Black girls attend PWHS they have come up with ways to navigate that particular space and make it work for them. They have also figured out things that do not work in that space. The three themes related to this research question are Issues with Discipline, Words of Advice, and Support System and the themes are in order of the amount of data (codes) connected to that theme.

Research Question 2 Theme 1: Issues with Discipline

All six participants have experienced or observed something being unfair in the discipline processes at their PWHS. One pattern related to the theme of issues with discipline had to do with surveillance or the girls feeling like they are always being watched at PWHS. Diana said, “When I’m with my Black friends, I notice that the principals are like on us. They are always like right there monitoring us. I mean like there is other stuff going on, and they’ll be like right there” (lines 199-201). Brittany said, “They [administrators and staff] treat us like we are doing something wrong (lines 238-239) ... The White people, they will get away with things a lot easier” (line 246) than Black students since the Black students were always being watched by the staff at the PWHS.

Brittany explained her thoughts overall about what was unfolding with student discipline at her PWHS: “I feel like they have this image of us just because one Black kid did this [something wrong] everyone else is like that and so they’ll put the rest of that pressure and trouble on us. And so if we do one little thing wrong or we look suspicious they treat us like we are doing something wrong. And the White people, they don’t get in trouble you know because they don’t- I guess they’re not as ‘brutal and violent’ as us since we act on things a lot” (lines 236-242). I asked, “Out there? Even at school?” [I

asked that question because I was taught not to fight out there in the White school, and I observed working in a predominantly White school for over nine years, students rarely fought, so I was surprised by her statement] (lines 243-245). Brittany continued, “Sometimes, yes. The White people they will get away with things a lot easier and they walk around school with their head held high. And... they try to be us actually at school. You know, they’ll change their clothing, try and talk like us and it’s just, I don’t like it. [she shakes her head with disapproval] So they are definitely treated separately” (lines 246-249). I was sure to clarify what she meant by all this. I asked, “So there’s this negative perception of the Black students but the White students will appropriate things about the Black students, and they’re still treated well but the Black students are not treated well?” (lines 250-252). Brittany concludes this thought by saying, “And it’s not, it’s not even from the kids that will treat the Black students wrong. It’s the teachers, the administrators and like the principals and stuff” (lines 253-254).

Zara said, “I’m not a rebel or anything but I can just sit in the corner and do nothing and that would cause me and my teachers to bump heads (lines 221-224). This has led to her being sent to the office at times (line 253). When asked why, she explained “For not participating and just sitting there... I could just be like ‘I don’t understand it’ [the assignment] They’ll say, ‘Why aren’t you asking any questions?’ I could get very irritated and my tone changes” (lines 255-258) and she would end up in the office. Zara explained how one such situation was resolved: “I end up getting moved out of that class and there were a lot of problems with that teacher and we had meetings and stuff” (lines 266-267). When asked if she was the only student being sent out of class or involved in that particular situation, she said, “No there was another student. This boy who I like to

call my play cousin cause he's Black too, and there's not that many of us in this class" (lines 285-286).

Another pattern that emerged from the theme of issues with discipline was unfair consequences. Brittany recounted an incident where she and her friend, a Black male student were playing around and she accidentally hit him in the face and he got mad and/or embarrassed and told on her (lines 161-162) and she was punished with a two-hour detention since the principal said the school does not allow violence (line 161) and the other student got no consequences even though he was involved in the horseplay too (line 175). Brittany reflected more on the incident and said, "She [the principal] was like I'm giving you a detention because you were the one who hit him. And I'm like, we were both playfully hitting each other. But I guess it made a difference since mine was like with more force or something. But it doesn't make any sense. We both should have taken it [the detention/consequence] together to make it fair. Even him, when I talked to him, he said he thought it was unfair that I got detention. So it's like sometimes, when you get in trouble, the principals or whatever will make it unfair and it's like really unbalanced. I just, I have a problem with that" (lines 177-183).

Malena recalled a situation when she received unfair consequences because the teacher overreacted and assigned her a detention (line 181). "I had a teacher keep playing with my grade giving me an A minus on everything and when I asked her about it, she said basically 'because I can' and things went downhill. I was like, 'that's not going to work,' so we went back and forth about it and then she was like she has to go get a principal [because] we were arguing. Yeah and, I guess she felt like it was escalating" (lines 171-177). I asked Malena was the arguing loud? She said, "No. We were... I

honestly don't feel like it was escalating. There wasn't even anyone in the classroom except me and her and she was like let's go down to the office and I was like, let's go. And she ended up giving me a detention" (lines 179-181). When asked what the relationship was like after that, Malena shared, "We didn't speak. I still had her in class the rest of the semester. And anytime I had a question, I'd ask somebody else or I'd have somebody else go ask her. She didn't speak to me and I didn't speak to her. We just did not speak. She did not go out of her way to try to recover the situation and neither did I cause I didn't do anything wrong. You [the teacher] were taking points off of my grade just because you can" (lines 183-187). Malena did not find the circumstances around this discipline event to be fair; she felt the teacher over-reacted (line 195). Malena was assigned a detention as a short term consequence, but she was also being punished everyday thereafter by being ignored by the teacher for questioning her grade.

Another pattern that emerged from the theme of issues with discipline was feeling like things were unbalanced in regards to school rules specifically the dress code. Zara said, "When President Trump was elected, there were students in my academic lab class wearing 'Make America Great Again' hats in class" (lines 369-370). "I had never seen someone wearing the Trump hats [in person]. I was just shocked that nobody said anything because I remember in middle school, I wore my 'Stop Killing Us' shirt in 8th grade the time of the Mike Brown shooting, and I had to go change my shirt, and teachers were the ones telling on me. I went the whole day wearing my shirt, and I got to my last period and I had to go change my shirt" (lines 408-412). The White teacher in Zara's last period class had reported her to the office because of the shirt she was wearing. The teacher had not said anything to Zara about the shirt directly (line 414). "And that's even

when we had a Black principal at the middle school too. She asked me my thoughts about the rallies and asked me if I went to any [rallies] and I said yes, and she asked me how I felt about everything, and I said I agree with the messages about the brutality and oppression against Black people but not the riots. She said she understood. Then she said she saw my shirt and said that my t-shirt could make some people feel uncomfortable, and she's been getting some complaints about it. So she said I had to go get me a shirt and change it" (lines 414-419). Zara further explained. "I was mad cause I feel like that [wearing the shirt] was how I was expressing myself because this was something that was happening and I didn't want to hide it. I was very irritated that I had to hide it, but I knew that her as a Black principal, she was probably getting it more, like all these teachers coming and yapping more than they should have. I could have worn a spaghetti strapped shirt even though that's breaking the dress code, and I would have made it the whole day instead of this shirt with words and a target that's going to hurt some feelings. My feelings were hurt [over the Mike Brown shooting/what was happening in St. Louis with the protests and just overall with the police]" (lines 421-427).

I asked Zara if she shared about her feelings being hurt. "No at the time I didn't express myself like I should. Now I can tell you all about it- yeah I'm upset. I can feel that. But I wish I did [tell the principal my feelings]. I would have just sat in the office all day with my shirt. I should have said I'm not changing my shirt. I probably would have gotten in trouble, probably could have had ISS, but that could have been me standing my ground. This is how I feel and I'm not going to hide it" (lines 429-433). Zara was still feeling she had been treated unfairly and it was still stirring in her as she told the story to

me as she shook her head thinking and expressing what she should have done when confronted about the shirt.

Overall, Diana, Malena, Brittany, and Zara felt the treatment of Black students was unfair when it came to issues with discipline at PWHS.

Research Question 2 Theme 2: Words of Advice

Throughout each of the interviews with the six participants, the girls shared stories that could be used as words of advice about navigating the PWHS based off what they had experienced. Some of the advice was regarding tips about what classes or activities to get involved in like Kelly suggesting taking summer courses to free up your schedule senior year (lines 75-78) or Zara suggesting a variety of tips for students about which teachers/counselors to talk to or offering a welcoming space to eat at lunch (lines 135-137). All six girls had similar advice about getting involved in the activities and/or sports at their schools and how this had helped them connect with others at the school; they all stated this made navigating a PWHS much easier than staying to yourself.

One pattern for the theme of words of advice was direct advice. Brittany offered advice about how to interact with peers at the PWHS. She said, “Getting along with everyone I would say is like one of my strengths cause in my school, if you get along with everyone, then you’re in a good spot. And if you know who to mess with and who to not mess with then you are good. As long as you don’t let it interfere with your school, your homework and stuff, then you’re good” (lines 323-326). Diana offered this: “Be cautious and try different things and they [White people] are going to talk down on you a lot but you just gotta push through it. You can do it though. Being educated and Black is a big threat,” (lines 377-379). Her words definitely spoke knowing who you are and how

you show up in this particular space along with knowing your audience and preparing yourself to interface with the challenges that you will inevitably face regarding race in a PWHS. Diana's words of advice were simply to acknowledge your existing state as a Black girl in the PWHS. Zara stated, "It's like this: I know who I am and I know how I am supposed to be and I just smile and say thanks and go on with my day [when bad things happen at PWHS]. I try not to make a big deal out of it because they don't know nothing and they just look at what they want to look at and I'm looking at the bigger picture" (lines 488-491) I asked what her bigger picture was (line 492) and she said "That we are not who they think we are" (line 493).

Another pattern connected to words of advice was the indirect advice. Some of the words of advice the girls offered were about keeping up with the day to day schedule of a high school student. Dana's method of managing her schedule was to infuse motivation and inspiration into her day to keep her going (lines 167-169). She said, "Driving to the technical school, I listen to gospel music just to get me in good spirits before I go, especially to help me knowing I had to go through the long day I know I had for me. I listened to gospel music while I was driving there and really music was my thing. I always had headphones on headphones in. I did sneak and wear headphones in classes sometimes and then I'd get caught, and I would just put [them] away" (lines 168-171).

Dana also talked about planning ahead. "I guess just knowing what my schedule was for the day because I know I would go from getting up at 5:30am catching the bus if I didn't drive, catching the bus, going to school, clinicals or to class and doing my thing there. I would also wear a watch for Junior and Senior year plus the watch would help me

in clinicals taking vital signs just watching the time to make sure I was on time for everything. Um, taking my nap on the bus on the way back to the other school and going to class and knowing that right after class, I was going to practice. Then right after practice, I could go home, shower and depending on whether or not I had to go to work, and then just knowing it [her schedule] would repeat every Monday-Friday and Saturdays were usually track meets and Sundays I would go to church and spend time with my family or study because I knew I had all the things I need to do. So being on that schedule and just knowing it was all pretty much going to stay the same and consistent other than a few times when things pop up. But the consistent schedule, I always had a different playlist and music for different activities,” (lines 173-183). In this instance, her advice seems to be to plan ahead but be prepared for the unexpected things that may happen and draw from a source to keep yourself moving forward and her way of staying motivated was with the music. Dana enjoyed the opportunities at school and wanted to take advantage of all of them at PWHS. She had a very full schedule and enjoyed the opportunity to take advantage of the different opportunities offered there (lines 11-16).

While Dana thought about her day to day time at PWHS in a practical way, Kelly was thinking about how her day to day time at the school would lead to her life’s next steps. She was visualizing where she wanted to be after high school to help her get through the day to day and this was good advice too. She said, “Mostly what helped get me through high school was just like thinking you know in so many years you’ll be in college,” (lines 134-135). Visualizing her goals helped her deal with the parts of her life that she did not prefer to deal with (lines 136-137). With laughter she said, “During my

senior year, I was thinking that in nine months I will never have to see any of you again” (lines 219-220).

Early in her interview Brittany said, “I see myself as one of those people who goes to school, gets things done and then I go home. And then I just do the same thing over again the next day and I do this because I know I want something for myself in the future. And I know in order for me to do that I have to get through this even if it’s tiring or painful but it is going to get me to what I want out of life so I’m just going to keep pushing through,” (lines 52-56). Near the end of the interview after reflecting on the different issues of unfairness, stereotypes, and various micro aggressions like constantly being told she talks White (lines 440-449), she said, “I have no choice, but to ignore it or to push through to get where I want to go because if I give up now, who knows how long it’s going to take me to get back to where I want to be, so I’m stuck in this place where I just have to ignore the negativity and just keep going” (lines 456-458).

Brittany’s words of advice to Black girls in similar school situations to hers is this: “You’re the one who has to keep moving. You’re the one who has to keep trying no one else does- it is up to you to keep pushing through no matter what the struggle is” (lines 467-469). Knowing how your current activities transfer you to your next steps is sound advice to put time at the PWHS in perspective.

Research Question 2 Theme 3: Support System

All six participants agreed that a Black girl must have a support system in place while attending a PWHS. Malena said her support system included her family, her school counselor, one administrator, and her friend group (line 380). Zara named the same set of people supporting her with the addition of two Black female teachers, her

sister, and a lady at church that she calls grandma (lines 524-525). Dana said “My mom. Mom was big help pushing me toward my goals” (line 158) and later in the interview she reiterated again “My mom is one of my biggest supporters, she is my support system. My mom is my rock” (line 412). Dana also said “My dad has always been a big support when it comes to my sports and academics,” (lines 412-413). The other four participants had similar people supporting them with the addition of teachers and coaches.

Brittany said “Some of my teachers I’m more close with than others. Of course, my cross country and track coaches; I have a good relationship with them,” (lines 66-68). Dana also mentioned her track coach helping her with [self]-discipline and dedication (lines 158-159). Zara noted teachers being part of her support system, and she even had ways to tell if a teacher was a part of her support system when she said, “I would feel comfortable asking them questions or staying after or getting extra notes and extra help with my peers. When they know I’m trying, then the teacher might come over and help or do the steps to help me understand,” (lines 242-244). Diana said there were ways for her to tell if she had a connection with her teachers at school when she explained, “There are some teachers who believe in me and some who don’t and it’s easy to pick those out,” (lines 161-162). When asked how to tell if a teacher believed in her or not she explained, “They have high expectations for me and they hold me accountable. If I need help, they help me,” (lines 164-165). Kelly said, “I think getting close to teachers helped because many of them were parents, and if I was having problems with my parents, that helped put things in perspective” (lines 426-427).

Having teachers as part of your support system at a PWHS school has also been instrumental for Zara. She said, “If you have a problem or an altercation you can go talk

to them and they will listen to you, and they will make sure you understand the rights in the room. So you know that you might feel like your side is right, they'll say here is this side and here is this side. They understand how you are feeling, but they'll also help you understand the other side and there's this, this, and this. And then with school, they understand that some people [students] have to work and other stuff going on at home, so they'll help you around the school like you might just want to get out of a class so you can just breathe, and they'll have a secretary come get you out, and you can come to the office to just sit and chill before you go back, and they'll talk to you or have someone talk to you before you go back to class" (lines 160-168). And of course, when racial issues like micro aggressions occur at school, Diana was clear on her support system when she stated, "I have some teachers I can trust," (line 336). These teachers who were always there when she needed them as part of her support system in school.

While all six participants shared the importance of the support system in school, they also shared about their support systems outside of school contributing to how they navigated the PWHS. During the interview with Brittany, she shared that she was a VICC student, but she and her mom referred to the program as deseg just like I did growing up as a student who participated in the same program being bussed from the city to the county each day to attend school.

Brittany and her siblings had been bussed out to the predominantly White district their whole k-12 experience. Her mom was too. "A lot of the time I talk to my parents about it [race and being Black] because they have their own ideas and their own thoughts, and we share like at dinner or in the car and we say how we feel about certain things" said Brittany (lines 312-313). Since her family regularly discussed racial issues, the

conversations helped her cope and remain calm when racialized incidents happened to her at school. Brittany stated that she makes herself calm to keep her temper from blowing up when confronted with racial issues in school and she also tries to ignore them (lines 290; 310; 443-446) and this is something she and her family consistently talk about. Brittany explained that “Having a support system plays a big part, no a huge part. Cause if you don’t have anybody behind you supporting you, you’re not going to know what decisions to make, what’s wrong and what’s right. You gotta keep doing you and don’t mess up especially with the police and stuff. Black kids. Some of them, their parents aren’t telling them how [to navigate situations] This is a big part of how to not get killed by the police. It’s a lot of the same rules as being out here in school. You gotta comply and follow the rules to get to where you want to get to. You can try to revolt, but the real way to get them is to get higher than them and just like be smart (lines 348-355). The experiential knowledge that Brittany’s family shared from having attended White schools themselves seemed to play a significant role in supporting Brittany’s time at the PWHS.

Like Brittany, Kelly’s family talked with her about racial issues too. “She [mom] brought up major things like sundown time,” (line 401) Kelly shared that her mom told her this when she started driving and the notion of not driving in particular areas after the sun would go down because as a Black person, she may not be safe or treated fairly by police if she gets pulled over especially living in the neighborhood of the PWHS. The other five participants shared that their families discussed how to conduct themselves when interacting with police and staff members/administrators at the White school as part of their support system. Overall, a viable support system while attending a PWHS as a

Black female student seemed to play an important role in navigating that particular space according to the six girls.

Summary

This chapter provided an analysis of the results for this study. The demographics of the predominantly White school district and participants were detailed in this chapter along with the thematic analysis process. Two overarching themes related to the research questions for the study were Experiences/Challenges and Navigating White Space. The three themes that emerged for Experiences/Challenges in connection with research question one were Issues with Race, Identity, and Search for Affinity. The three themes that emerged for Navigating White Space in connection with research question two were Issues with Discipline, Words of Advice, and Support System. The results for this study were reliable and valid in that they “were consistent with the data collected” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p.251) and “the findings can be applied to other situations” (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016, p.253). Chapter five will specifically discuss the findings related to the literature reviewed, unexpected findings, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five: Discussion

“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.” Maya Angelou

Introduction

This qualitative study is about the experiences and challenges Black girls have while attending predominantly White high schools and what they are doing to navigate that particular space. They are learning in crooked space and are finding ways to navigate that space each day and make it work for them. The research questions were:

1. What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?
2. What might they say about navigating that particular space?

The goal in researching about the experiences and challenges of Black girls in PWHS was to explore and understand more about how they navigate a space as minority members of a system that was not originally intended for them. I wanted to find out how they navigate that particular space and make it work for them. Through semi-structured interviews, Black female high school students were asked directly to share their lived experiences. I also wanted to illuminate and amplify the voices of Black girls in this doctoral study. This chapter discusses why this topic was chosen by the researcher, findings related to the literature, unexpected findings, educational considerations, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks from the participants and the researcher of the study.

Why this topic?

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you.”

Maya Angelou

Initially, I wanted to stay away from selecting a dissertation topic about race for this doctoral study. Researching about race in education and knowing the origins of education in this country, more specifically Black education, would mean that I would be intentionally looking for problems, gaps, and inequities in the system. Racial discussions can be uncomfortable, sad, painful, maddening and at the same time those conversations can be affirming, joyous, and triumphant: discussing race is complex. To look beyond the surface when discussing race is deeply personal. I was afraid that if I started digging into a topic about race, I might lose my inspiration, hope, and efficacy as an educator; these are a few of the qualities that keep me motivated as an educator (and as person really). Throughout this study, I realized that I had been socialized to compartmentalize my Black femaleness meaning I have to put myself to the side so that I can take care of others, educate others, and do whatever needs to be done for others at school, at home, at work and wherever I am. Through this study, I also found out that just as I had been putting myself to the side for the comfort of others ever since I was a little girl, each of the six girls I interviewed revealed similar things about themselves too.

I avoided choosing a topic about race because I did not want to unravel the feelings of being misrepresented, stereotyped, and shamed; these feelings are a part of my everyday reality as a Black woman who is a parent and educator too. I knew something would be unraveled if I chose a topic about race, and I was afraid of not being able to put it back because there were spaces I navigated daily in different ways. One of the spaces I

spent a lot of time in was the predominantly White school district where I was a Black female educator. I thought if I had to defend/present about race, it would be too tough emotionally especially having to talk about the different barriers and injustices that happen to Black students that I see institutionally. There are many barriers and injustices that I have worked to break down and re-imagine for student learning as a teacher and teacher leader, and on most days, it was enough to accomplish change for students if only in small ways. I thought if I chose a safer, more neutral topic than race, I could still help young people which is what I feel called to do as an educator. I am compelled to find ways to make the work being done on behalf of students meaningful, and I aimed for my dissertation research to be utilized for the good of all students however, I was not sure yet how that might look.

My doctoral advisor and I had several heated discussions about why I was avoiding a topic about race. Since I see the world through the lens of a Black female, I was concerned that if I wrote about race, my work would not be viewed as credible, but biased instead. I was concerned that people would overlook my research, and I wanted it to be valued, recognized, and something good for student learning. Would that be possible if my dissertation was about race? Talking about race can be complicated and makes some people so uncomfortable, and I imagined people saying things like, “of course she wrote about a Black topic” and “of course she wrote about Black girls- she’s one of them too.” I also had a lot of thoughts about protecting myself as an educator working in a predominantly White district who also attended a predominantly White Midwestern university. I was not sure I had the strength for the battle of choosing a topic about race. I was already in enough battles as a Black female educator with a triple track

agenda of taking care of students, leading teachers, and my own learning and lived experiences especially as a parent of Black sons in America who also attend school in the same predominantly White space. A topic about race would be a battle for sure.

My doctoral advisor and I went back and forth about all of this. I noted one particular conversation in my research journal and I can quote what he said. “If you don’t write about issues of equity, who will? There’s not enough people writing and working for these things.” He meant that if I and other people of color did not take the time to write about race, who would write about it then? I and other people of color need to be writing about topics that affect us and we need to tell those stories. He also said that we should not depend or wait for White people to write about the topics that impact our lives. His passionate fury and candor as a White male professor has always intrigued and delighted me- he is very open about one of his callings as an ally in the fight for racial justice and his primary battle ground is at the university level. What he said about fighting resonated with me (probably because of my rules for fighting as a young person). I had not ever considered the idea that scholarly academic people were fighters too! My topic could be a way to fight for equity? My battle ground could be the public school? Who says a dissertation topic about race is not credible, valued, or important, and somehow inferior? Really though, why would choosing a Black topic not be a worthy topic to study at the university? There were a lot of ideas ruminating in my brain as I zeroed in on my topic. Things were truly unravelling for me.

When I reflected on that particular conversation I had with my advisor, what surfaced was the realization that I had internalized Black as bad or less than on a subconscious level to survive in the different White spaces I interfaced with and surely I

was dealing with racial trauma. I thought the plan to avoid a dissertation topic about race would keep me safe, docile, and compliant and this is one of the ways I had learned to navigate a predominantly White university and workplace. I learned this by attending and working in predominantly White schools. If you know me in regular life, you know that I do not usually hide from anything and teaching in a predominantly White school district, as one of the few teachers of color, I am a fierce advocate for students and am very vocal and action-oriented about issues of equity- I am known to make things happen for kids. For me to admit here in writing why I did not want my dissertation to be about race because it would be easier and safer for me should tell you how tired and defeated I had become at that particular time as an educator.

What I do for kids as an educator is my ministry and I wanted to stay empowered and inspired about what I do; I also knew how real critical race theory is and plays out in educational policies and systems and this is enough to make someone like me depleted and powerless in creating equity in student learning working in a predominantly White school district where I help make up the 3-5% of the staff of color. I could not afford to feel like things could not be changed. Being a Black female who is a wife, mother, educator, and all kinds of other things to all kinds of other people is tiring and the last thing I wanted to do in a doctoral program is make waves. This was my plan to navigate this last degree at the university level. I planned to finish my doctorate quietly. This obviously did not happen, for my doctoral advisor would not let me off the hook, and of course, this caused more things to unravel and shift for me.

Because my advisor held me accountable as my ally, I learned about intersectionality, the crooked room, critical race theory, and critical race feminism.

During my preliminary research, one of the first things I noticed when reading about the educational needs of students of color was the research was slanted towards Black boys and what they need to be successful in school. I also noticed as an educator, when we discuss students' needs, colleagues are comfortable addressing the needs of Black boys and have all kinds of resources and strategies for them, whether some of them used the resources or not, they know the buzzwords. I also noticed that Black girls are not really mentioned in these meetings. When they are mentioned, it is likely to do with behavior, attitude, or appearance. If the girl is viewed as a good girl, then she has potential but she is not discussed as being good in the present moment. This led me to researching about stereotypes and perceptions of Black women and girls in America. This inquiry caused me to re-examine how I interacted with Black girls and what role I was playing in shaping them- I wanted to help them feel worthy and valued- more and more things were really unravelling for me.

I ended up attending the first annual Crooked Room Conference in 2017 about the educational experiences of Black women and girls in America prior to my comprehensive exams; through the process of these exams, I would need to make a declaration of a dissertation topic. One of the speakers at the conference said, "Unpacking your feelings about your Black femaleness is a path to liberation." Her words helped me realize that I was in the process of healing some things that I had internalized long ago- shame about my traumatic childhood and guilt about being one of the ones who made it out of those circumstances. I also had been working very hard at not perpetuating stereotypes and not becoming more of a statistic. I was keeping all of those things wound and raveled up inside and it was limiting me and making me feel unworthy and less than. I internalized

those thoughts and feelings in a variety of ways and only shared when I felt safe to share. The constant thinking and probing about a dissertation topic on race was bringing many of my unresolved feelings to the surface.

These unresolved feelings were no longer in the neat compartments in my mind that I had created to help me navigate the day to day working and learning in White space. A topic about race was demanding my attention though no matter how I tried to elude it, a topic about race existed in my everyday reality in every space I navigated. Those unresolved feelings and racialized experiences had officially overflowed, but I found there was peace, healing, and freedom on the other side of all of that. My neat compartments were “myths of self-protection that hold us separate from each other and breed harshness and cruelty where we most need softness and understanding” (Lorde, 1984/1997, p.168). I had been experiencing a skewed reality as a Black girl in school albeit a doctoral program at a Midwestern university. I have since learned that there is no need to internalize those thoughts and feelings nor hide them anymore. I now know, that no matter what dissertation topic I would have chosen, people would judge it and say what they want to say about it. A topic about race is a valid, worthy topic. Talking about race can be legitimizing (Lorde, 1984/1997). Somewhere along the way, I started to bury these truths.

Someone recently sent me three articles I wrote my senior year of high school and it reminded me of who I am. I was 17 at the time, and I no longer lived at home. I still attended the PWHS and traveled from the city to the county each day for school sometimes on the Bi-state bus, school bus, or rides from friends depending on what I had to do before or after school. I worked a full time job and was determined to graduate high

school and live my life more peacefully than it had been up to that point. Over the course of my high school years, besides writing for the school newspaper, I was involved in a few other school activities like choir, debate, teen health consultant (for St. Louis County Department of Health), and I was also very active in the youth group at church.

One of the articles I wrote was about my experience in the deseg program in St. Louis and the threat to discontinue the program and use the money for state infrastructure. The other two pieces were about a bond issue that finally got passed on behalf of the school district and the other about a Black female educator that I felt was overlooked and worthy of recognition. Reading what I wrote as a high school girl and remembering how I argued to cover particular topics in the classroom newsroom showed me that over time, the ways I navigated White space had become more methodical with practice as a student in public school, as an educator in a predominantly White school district, and then as a graduate student attending a predominantly White university; I knew exactly what I needed to do to survive nearly twenty years later working on my doctorate. Choosing a dissertation topic about race would surely bring challenges for me as a Black female graduate student interfacing with a predominantly White faculty.

Reviewing the three articles that I wrote as a teen gave me glimpse of what I aimed to capture with the girls that participated in this study. My young, Black, female voice back then was looking to be heard and offer representation to others that had been overlooked, and I saw that same wish in the voices of the girls who participated in this study. It has been a restorative experience for me to illumine the experiences and challenges of the girls and amplify their voices in my work.

I now realize that feelings of unworthiness manifest themselves in different ways and I think this is what unfolded with me as I worked to select a dissertation topic. Many of the Black women and girls I know have dealt with similar feelings and something needed to change, and I needed to be a part of bringing that change. Realizing this compelled me to study the experiences of Black girls in school. I initially thought researching about race would impede my hope, inspiration, and efficacy for what I do for students, but in the process of all of this, I found healing and restoration.

Findings Related to the Literature

Although “Black girls are not seen as experts on their own experiences” (Edwards, et al., 2016, p. 427) this study saw them as experts in their lived experiences and provided them a platform to share their experiences attending PWHS. The research questions for this study were:

1. What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?
2. What might they say about navigating that particular space?

These questions allowed the researcher to analyze the experiences and challenges of Black girls attending the PWHS. This literature review in chapter two discussed the History of Schooling for African Americans, Theoretical Frameworks, and The Crooked Room. The findings related to the literature are discussed in this section in terms of the Theoretical Frameworks and the Crooked Room with the History of Schooling for African Americans blended in.

The interviews with all six participants revealed evidence that the experiences and challenges the girls faced in the PWHS setting were connected to the frameworks of

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF). The researcher used both to interpret and analyze the qualitative data collected during the interviews with the participants. The tenets of CRT reviewed for this study: racism as normal, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, and counter-narrative all showed up in the themes. When each of the girls stated that they knew they would have to deal with racial issues in the predominantly White high school to gain access to their future goals, this revealed a direct connection to racism as normal as part of CRT. This also connected to the history of schooling for African Americans and the lawful denial of their education in this country. When African Americans were allowed an education, the access they were granted did not compare to what was being offered to White students in White schools, for many of the Black schools were inadequate in resources and even the buildings themselves were subpar in structure and upkeep. Like Sarah Roberts, Elizabeth Eckford, and my schooling experience, the girls and their families saw their attending a PWHS “as a way up and out” (Ricks, 2014, p.12) of less desirable schooling situations and as a way to set them up for better opportunities in school and life. And just like me, Sarah and Elizabeth, the girls in the study faced a variety of challenges in their school experiences likely due to the PWHS not originally being meant for them as the historical context of this study in chapter two explained.

Critical race feminism was closely tied to intersectionality and counter-narrative in CRT because the data collected, put the girls’ voices in the center of the study by utilizing the role of voice. The role of voice is part of both CRT and CRF, and it was the prominent lens of the study since the participants shared their own lived experiences from each of their individual viewpoints. Through their stories, the data revealed that the girls

had “racialized experiences in common” (Collins, 2000, p.23). This directly connected to CRT, CRF, and the role of voice since they are built on including voices that have been left out the dominant conversation. The role of voice in this study was having the participants share their lived experiences as minority members of a majority White student body and this was the girls offering counter-narratives about attending school in this specific White space; counter-narratives are tenets of both CRT and CRF. Overall, the combination of CRT, CRF, and the role of voice were weaved throughout the patterns of data that emerged in correlation to the research questions for the study.

The study also revealed that the participants were dealing with intersectional challenges (Crenshaw, 1989) and the crooked room (Harris-Perry, 2009) while attending the PWHS. The girls consistently talked about race, class, and sexuality creating challenging experiences for them. Religion was also mentioned. The girls wanted to be seen as individuals, and this had to do with the theme of identity. The girls wanted to be seen as individuals in a larger group too; they wanted people to see them as who they are as individual Black girls and this was connected to anti-essentialism. The girls all wanted to be connected to others and have a sense of belonging and they would find this through representation in the staff, having friendships with students who looked like them, and participating in different school activities and sports with other students with common interests as them and this all had to do with their search for affinity which was a theme that emerged from the study. Many of the experiences the girls were having in school had lots of layers to them and were truly multi-dimensional and intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989) in nature.

This caused the girls to navigate the space in a variety of ways depending on the situation. “Women of color are required to hold on to their own beliefs and values, while also being aware and conscious of the state of mind of the oppressor [dominant culture]. Many young Black women are able to survive in schools also because of this multiple consciousness” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.21) and each of the participants shared stories that revealed that they were constantly aware of the norms of the White space and they knew they were “subject to scrutiny, especially by those in positions of relative power. They feel the gaze. They intuit its presence. They live with this knowledge in their bodies and subconsciously wrestle with every personal critique of how they navigate their environments” (Morris, 2018, p. 34-35). For example, when the girls talked about code switching to speak more formally with their teachers and speaking more relaxed with their friends so they would not be seen as stupid or ghetto. Another example is when each of the girls shared about being quiet to kind of blend in to the background especially because they were one or two Black students in class. One of the girls stated she wore different pieces of a mask depending on who she interacted with and this connected living behind a veil (Dubois, 1969/1994) regarding hiding different parts of who you are in certain spaces you navigate depending on who you are interacting with. Several of the girls shared about being seen as a threat in honors or college credit courses because some of the White students were not used to seeing Black students in those honors or college credit course with them. The threat seemed to be related to Whites wanting to keep Blacks inferior and seeing them that way for so long yet these girls had gained access to a space in school that had been traditionally White. One of the ways the

girls navigated these situations was to be quiet in those situations too until they felt comfortable to participate in those settings.

The pretending to be quiet was connected to invisibility in which “Black girls have learned to alter themselves by learning to become invisible—to be seen but not heard” (Ricks, 2014, p.15) and this is something that I did too as a young girl navigating White school and the participants each shared they pretended to be quiet too. “Black girls learn adaptive behaviors- ways of responding to oppressive conditions defined by race, sexuality, class, and gender” (Morris, 2018, p. 35) and this is precisely what the girls were doing to navigate the PWHS. Even the code switching the girls did was connected to identity shifts and them figuring out how to make school work for them and this aligned with the “shift between their personalized identities (shaped by their socialization in their immediate families and neighborhoods) and the perspectives of White male or female middle class school administrators and teachers” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.21) and this was the girls having “multiple consciousness” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p.21) every day at school.

When the girls shared about micro aggressions and how they deal with them (Appendix C), the data revealed the misperceptions and misrepresentation they felt from others daily, along with them working to not fulfill stereotypes about being a bad Black girl (Morris, 2018). This also showed that “Black girls are more likely to experience racist remarks from peers (Scott-Jones, 1987) ... In addition, [they are] coping with stereotypical beliefs about their attitudes and behaviors from teachers and peers” (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010 p. 20). The girls shared their words of advice about navigating

the PWHS and how they typically deal with things like micro aggressions, this is how we know that the girls have learned to adapt to oppressive conditions (Morris, 2018).

The issues with discipline that the girls shared revealed that there is something unfair happening in PWHS regarding discipline and students feeling surveilled when they are in a group of Black students. There was a lack of protection for the girls and the data had several examples of this especially regarding the incident in which one Diana was cursed out and called a racial slur and how she was handled versus the White male student involved. The incident in which Brittany was punished for hitting/horseplay and the Black male student was not reveals that Black males have an easier time navigating White space since race is be set aside and gender is prioritized (Ndiaye, 2013). Although there were no serious consequences mentioned by the girls regarding discipline, several of the girls were punished for “talking back to a teacher” (Morris, 2018, p. 84) when they asked questions about their grades or about the classwork and one of the girls mentioned several instances of being sent to the office for sitting quietly when she did not understand the work and this was perceived as her being “disruptive to the classroom” (Morris, 2018, p. 84) or her silence as disrespect or non-compliance (Haynes, et al., 2016).

The literature reviewed in this study related to critical race theory, critical race feminism, the role of voice, intersectionality, and the crooked room were all related to the research questions. The findings related to the literature revealed that the research questions of this qualitative study were adequately addressed. Because specific literature was reviewed for this study, we were offered a glimpse into the experiences and

challenges Black girls face when navigating PWHS and should start understanding things from their perspectives.

Unexpected Findings

The best part of working on this study was the interview process with the six Black girls who participated. It was important for them to be represented as a way to help straighten some of the crookedness (Harris-Perry, 2009) they experienced in their schooling experiences. It was also important to amplify their voices and empower them, and in order for this to happen, I needed them to tell me their stories. The questions I posed about the experiences and challenges they were having as Black female students attending a PWHS caused them to share and express their lived experiences for the good of educational research, but it also caused them to relive some of the challenges and harm they had endured. I asked them to be vulnerable and open with me, and they did.

There were times during the interviews where I interrupted my line of questioning to validate the girls' feelings. It was important to acknowledge their existing state as they told their stories because so often, as they all revealed, they have been taught to squelch those feelings or calm down, and when someone is told to do this with their thoughts and feelings so often, it starts to change into feeling unworthy like you do not matter and maybe you even feel "straight up crazy" (Zara, line 468). I wanted the participants to know that I believed them, those feelings are real, and yes, I too, have been there. A few times I shared a story from my lived experiences to let them know they were not alone in those experiences, and that as Black females here in America, we do unfortunately "have these racialized experiences in common" (Collins, 2000, p.23). It was important to validate the girls in a world that they are often dismissed and subordinated in. As they

shared their stories with me, it was important for them to feel heard and to know that this was a safe space to express themselves. This was my way of showing the girls care, comfort, support, and healing in a world that “presumes them more adult needing less nurturing and protection” (Epstein, et al., 2017, p. 1). I needed to play a role in making these girls know they matter and are worthy.

At the conclusion of the interviews, I wanted the girls to feel like they were moving forward in their journeys and not stuck even though it had been tough living life as a Black girl for a variety of reasons that they themselves identified. This proved to be crucial foresight likely from my own lived experiences, and this confirmation came after each interview was conducted. I heard every girl share a variety of racialized experiences that occurred throughout their lives, not just in their school experiences, not just at their predominantly White high school. The predominantly White high school is just one crooked room, and it is the particular space involved in this study and many of the narratives shared during the data collection happened in that specific setting. Ending the interviews with a look forward to the future for the girls was a small way that I could help repair some of the harm the girls endured and let them know how valuable they truly are.

During the study, something unexpected happened with me too though while I transcribed the interviews. The transcription process took much longer to transcribe than I anticipated based off the pace I worked before on previous studies in this doctoral program. I was having a lot of racialized feelings about what the girls shared about their school experiences. I felt anger, sadness, a need to protect the girls, and the urge to fix it all while transcribing the interviews, and I had to take frequent breaks because of all the re-living of the racialized harm. Analyzing Brittany’s interview was particularly tough on

me; she was a mirror for me in many ways in how I had learned to navigate White space in school. I learned to always remain calm no matter what because the cost was much too high if I did not at least pretend to be calm. Although all the girls shared about remaining calm in times that they were being harmed especially through micro aggressions, Brittany's calm was on another level from the other girls. After her interview was over, her mom and I talked more with her about allowing others to support her, and we were open with her about us still learning to allow others to support us too as grown Black women. We laughed about trying to reject the superwoman stereotype (Harris-Perry, 2009) and how we needed to take the "S" off our chests. We wanted her to know that she was not alone. We wanted her to know that she was not alone.

Once I finished each of the transcripts though, I began to feel this overwhelming healing and hope knowing that I played a role in empowering and amplifying the voices of Black girls. The six girls that participated in this study are far more remarkable and knowing than many think and even more than they themselves know. They have been severely underestimated, and when I finished with all the transcriptions and analyzing data I realized that I get to show people just how great the Black girl is!

These girls do it all: school, activities, sports, work, family, church, friendships- yet, they all alluded to not being enough or not doing enough and this too was an unexpected finding in this study except I know the feeling all too well. After every interview concluded and the tape (recording) was stopped, I thanked the girls for helping me with my dissertation study. I made a point to tell them that they were good not 'bad.' Every participant described themselves trying to be good throughout their interviews and this surprised me because none of them reported any significant discipline issues in high

school. A few girls brought up issues in elementary or middle school though. Somehow, the notion of being a bad Black girl was getting into them and they were all aware of what it meant to be perceived as bad. I needed the girls to know there was nothing bad about them that they were good right now in the moment.

A few times, when we wrapped up the interview, moms arrived to pick their daughters up and we would all talk together. I would tell the girls how impressed I was with all they were doing after summarizing the things they shared with me regarding school success and life and their caring about the world around them. I would say, “You should be proud of yourself. You really are shining out here. Wow!” Sometimes the girls would cry, and I would ask, “What do your tears mean?” One girl said, “You don’t even know me and you say this stuff to me. There are teachers and people I know...people I see every day who don’t say this stuff to me.” I told her again. “You are good.” Her mother joined us after a few minutes, and I told her mom how amazing her daughter was and that she should be proud and I thanked her for the opportunity to hear her stories. The mom cried too that day. I cried too. Another time I said to one of the girls “Girl, you got it together!” and her eyes beamed and she smiled brightly and asked to give me a hug. Later that evening, I reached out to her mom to thank her and let her know what a great daughter she has and she too is good.

Besides the interactions I had with the participants and their moms happening unexpectedly, something else surfaced in the data. With the theme of issues with race, another related theme surfaced: discerning critical moments. The reason it is included here is because I did not ask about this particular topic in the interview questions nor did I include anything about it in the literature review; it surfaced in the data unexpectedly.

Discerning critical moments is a part of the everyday lived experiences for people of color here in America (Bell, 2004) and it definitely makes things challenging for Black girls attending PWHs- it has made things challenging for me as a Black female educator in a predominantly White school district. The participants shared stories about social issues regarding race that happened in the news and how this impacted them in the PWHs environment. A few of the moments the girls brought up during their interviews with the researcher were the Michael Brown shooting, the Parkland Shooting and why students were allowed to protest at school for this issue in the predominantly White school district, but they were not allowed to protest for the Michael Brown or Stockley verdict. The girls also brought up the Black Lives Matter vs. White Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter debate, Philando Castillo murder, and the Trump election/presidency as issues in the news that affected them at school. Discerning critical moments is connected to the literature reviewed about Critical Race Theory (CRT), but since I did not specifically review that particular aspect of CRT, I did not want to include it in chapter four with the results. I think that the fact that it surfaced on its own revealed its validity in the lives of people of color and their ability to discern the impact of racialized incidents in the larger narrative of how we are socialized in systems of oppression and White supremacy and the girls saw it and can name it readily.

Educational Considerations

One educational consideration for this study is for educators everywhere: the value of student voice in school is unmatched, and this study showed the need to listen to voices of Black female students. We need to learn to listen to them and ask them questions about who they are instead of allowing stereotypes, misconceptions, and

assumptions to dictate our interactions with them and what we offer them. Putting them in a box based on monolithic socialized depictions of them is not helpful and is a continuation of old master narratives about them that are not true.

Another thing to consider about this study is its historical aspect since it reminds educators that we are not that far removed from legal segregation in schools and that the educational system is still rebounding from the system of oppression that bred Black inferiority. This study is a glimpse into how people of color, particularly Black people, did not always have equal access to education and it was not that long ago in this country's history. And even now in 2018, access to quality education remains an issue for many families across the country; educational access is not a human right around the world in many places and women and girls are the one who primarily are the targets for this inequity. This study is centered around the educational experiences of Black girls and it reminds us to stay vigilant in understanding the role Black girls have played in helping shine the light on the inequities in schools especially when we take time to remember girls like Sarah Roberts and Elizabeth Eckford and what they endured to pave the way for girls like me and the six girls interviewed for this study to attend school.

Something else this study reminds educators to do is be intentional about including Black female voices in the curriculum. I created a video synopsis of this dissertation (Billingsley, 2018a) and a few teachers in my building used it to end a book club on a novel called *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2018) to show a nonfiction version of what it meant to navigate different spaces as a Black girl. In the novel, the main character, Starr, a Black high school girl from the inner city attends an affluent White private school in the suburbs and she frequently talked about living two versions of

herself depending on where she was and who she was interacting with (Thomas, 2018). Besides the character shifting identities due to intersectional challenges in her neighborhood and at school, she faced complications as she discovered how to use her voice to bring change to the world around her (Thomas, 2018). Starr's experiences navigating different worlds in the novel are similar to the real life experiences I had as a Black girl attending a predominantly White school which is presented in the video synopsis of the dissertation. My colleagues saw the connection between my doctoral research and Thomas' novel (Thomas, 2018) and used it to show students the abstract concept of navigating different spaces/worlds as the character Starr experienced in the text. Students were provided an opportunity to explore what they were reading in class through another format with a video, but students were also exposed to qualitative research while in high school.

Overall, educators who serve schools in any capacity, whether it be teachers or administrators, should consider students from an intersectional lens when we make decisions about them to avoid further marginalizing them due to the blend of challenges they face due to race, gender, sexuality, socio-economics, religion, and/or abilities. We need to remember that students have layers and are not monolithic beings. I heard it said somewhere before that schools are only as good as their most marginalized learner. A good question for schools to ask when they are creating, amending, and maintaining systems is who does the system bring in and who does it push out? This may help schools consider how students show up in a myriad of ways in which bring intersectional challenges to the school setting and how this impacts student achievement. This study and its focus on Black girls attending predominantly White high schools offers us a

glimpse into what Black girls face in that particular space, but also it provides insight to what might be unfolding in other spaces Black girls navigate. This study also provides insight to what many other girls of color might be experiencing as they live and learn in any space not just in predominantly White space.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on some of the things that surfaced during the research, data collection, analysis, and writing process involved in this study, I have a few ideas for future research. One idea is about the effect of micro aggressions on Black students. There were enough micro aggressions mentioned in this study that they could have become the entire focus of the study so instead, I created Appendix C to show what was being said to each participant and how they each dealt with them.

All the participants in the study had strategies about remaining calm when racialized things happened to them in school. Why be calm? Where does this originate from? How might calmness be connected to the angry Black woman stereotype? This notion of remaining calm during racialized incidents would make an excellent research topic along with stereotype threat since stereotypes were mentioned in connection to micro aggressions and the girls shifting and code switching to avoid fulfilling negative stereotypes about Black girls.

Another idea for future research would be to replicate the study with younger Black female students. Middle school girls and upper elementary school girls in third through fifth grade would make for an interesting study on this same topic. I would like to know what younger Black female students might say of their school experiences in a

predominantly White school and what age girls start to be aware of racialized experiences.

An additional idea for future research related to the study would be to study the implications of race according to the four quadrants in the same predominantly White school district featured in this study. The participants involved in this study noted that one area of the district was more diverse than the other areas. I observed this as well as a teacher in the district and know there is data to support the inquiry. Besides the student population being more diverse in a particular quadrant, the majority of the teachers of color employed by the district also work in that particular quadrant of the district as well and it would be interesting to see the experiences and challenges the staff face as people of color in that same district too as a study. It would also be interesting to see how the Black teachers/principals in that district support the Black students as they navigate that particular space since the participants talked about their support systems in school and said they seek these people out because of representation. I would want to know some of the common qualities that lead them to support Black students the way they do? I would also want to know what it might mean to offer healing and restoration for youth of color when they experience racial trauma because this was something that surfaced in this study too. I have experienced racial trauma as an educator in a predominantly White district and know that dealing with racial incidents and micro aggressions is a daily occurrence for many students of color and really any student who has intersecting identities. It can be tough on educators of color to take care of themselves while taking care of students while dealing with micro aggressions, misrepresentation, and misconceptions occurring in that space daily.

A few last ideas for future research related to this study are to compare Black girls' experiences across districts (rural, urban, suburban, charter, private) to determine what is similar and different across the board. We could look at the experiences of girls of color versus White girls across the country in the elementary and secondary settings. This section on educational considerations is in no way a comprehensive list of research ideas that emerged from this study. It is merely a spark of my possible research ideas related to this study about Black female students navigating predominantly White high schools.

Concluding Remarks

“Black women have had to develop a larger vision of our society than perhaps any other group. They have had to understand white men, white women, and black men. And they have had to understand themselves.” Angela Davis

In chapter one, I stated that there was a need for a study that allowed Black girls' voices to be heard and included in research about them. I hoped to humanize them, tell their experiences, liberate their voices, and dismantle stereotypes and perceptions about them. I hoped to help straighten the crooked space where they learn. I feel that I was able to do all these things with this study if only in a small way but something else unfolded too. This study became a part of bringing forth some healing for the girls and even their mothers informally. I got to help repair and restore some of the racial harm they have endured in school and let them know that they are good and not what the world has socialized them to believe about themselves. Unknowingly though, that same racial harm the girls revealed began to be healed in me too through the research and work I was doing in this doctoral program. This has been some of the most powerful work I have had the opportunity to be a part of, and I am grateful for the battle that I first backed away from.

For Girls Between Worlds: Their Last Thoughts

“In an ideal world we would all learn in childhood to love ourselves. We would grow, being secure in our worth and value, spreading love wherever we went, letting our light shine.”

bell hooks

One of the last questions I asked the girls that participated in this study was ‘What do you most want people to know about being a Black female student at your school?’

The comments the girls shared exposed their ever-present double consciousness (Dubois, 1969/1994; 2007). Here are a few of their last thoughts about being between worlds as a Black female student in a predominantly White high school:

Diana said, “You gotta work hard. It’s not going to come easy at all. The finish line feels like it is always being pushed forward” (lines 372-373). Dana said, “It’s hard but you can do it. If you put forth the effort and the drive, then you can do it. I feel like sometimes as an African American female we kind of sit back and don’t go forth all the way. You need to actually put yourself out there for what you want. It’s hard to put yourself out there and go for what you want” (lines 429-432). Malina said, “Just a statement in general: We are coming for it all! Just because we have been assumed for so long that we couldn’t, I think we are trying now more than ever. We are getting our names out there, taking the extra mile- we are trying to get it in and trying to get it done. And I know that diversity is a big thing now at jobs or whatever but I don’t want you to hire me because it makes your company look good. I want you to look at my stuff and know what I’ve done. We [Black women/girls] are definitely putting in the work. There is nothing we can’t do and nothing you should assume just because of my color that I can’t do” (lines 385-391).

As the researcher, I wanted the girls' voices to be a part of concluding this study since it was about them. Their words should illumine and inspire others to see them and Black girls everywhere in a new view.

The Researcher's Last Thoughts (For Now)

"I am not anywhere God doesn't want me to be." Oprah Winfrey

While conducting this study, I went from teaching in a predominantly White school district to becoming an assistant principal in a predominantly Black school district in St. Louis County. Some would describe the district as an urban district or an inner-ring suburban district since its location is in the county but on the edge of a metropolitan city. The student population is predominantly Black and one hundred percent free and reduced lunch. On first glance, one might think the students are all the same because of their skin, but if they would take a deeper look they would see what exists amongst this seven-hundred-member student body is a range of voices, interests, talents, and abilities. I am delighted to learn about my students each day and watch them offer counter-narratives to the many misconceptions and stereotypes about them. I am also intrigued by how double consciousness, intersectionality, the role of voice, and the crooked room present in the lives of my new high school students. The teaching staff at my new school is predominantly White, and they are in different places on the continuum of social justice as are the people of color on this same staff. My role and responsibilities as an educator have officially changed from middle school classroom teacher and teacher leader to high school administrator where I am one-third of an all-Black female administrative team, and working with them has been a pivotal moment in my career as an educator.

Both of these Black female administrators have been called exceptional in a variety of ways throughout their careers and luckily, I have worked just as hard in mine

and have been called the same, so we are definitely a match in that way, but know being called exceptional as a Black female educator comes with lots of expectations, challenges, and yes, baggage. My administrative team called me something else too: sufficient. While conducting the study, I felt the need to let the girls know that they are good right now because I could see how the skewed reality that misrepresentation, stereotypes, and issues with unfair discipline bring. My administrative team observed that I too had been dealing with a skewed reality, and they wanted me to know that I am sufficient, for someone had encouraged them similarly because Black female leadership is no easy path. Their revelation gave me a sense of belonging and let me know I was safe and accepted in this new space with them as we lead and serve our school community together.

Once more, I am navigating a new school in a new community in a different role than before. Considering the different spaces I have had the opportunity to navigate, I am grateful; I am better for all those experiences. “How do I define my impact upon this earth?” (Lorde, 1984/1997, p. 161) One of the many ways is in the lives of Black female students, and I am truly excited to work with high school students as a whole because I see what happens with this age group as one of the last opportunities for educators to help prepare students for life. My desire to improve and re-imagine systems for student learning continues. A while ago, I heard Oprah Winfrey say, “I am here. I am ready. O.k. Now here we go. Because when I walk into any room, when and where I enter, I am already more than I was.” I know this now. I am sufficient. My wish is for all the girls between worlds to know this too.

What about us? For girls between worlds: poem by Cryslynn C. Billingsley

You matter.

You are here.

You have value.

You are sufficient.

You are beautiful.

Your voice is powerful.

You are good right now.

You may go anywhere you choose.

Black girl, yes you.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide (Revised 6/3/18)

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your school.
3. What activities are you involved in at school?
4. How do you navigate your time in the school (on a day-to day basis or overall)?
5. When new students come to your school, what do you share with them about the school?
6. What do others say about your school?
7. How do you see yourself as a student in the school? (Describe your identity.)
8. How do others see you as a student at the school? (What would others say of your identity?)
9. In what ways have you experienced success at your school?
10. What has been challenging for you at your school?
11. How are you treated in class by peers? How are you treated by teachers?
12. What assumptions have others made about you at your school?
13. What assumptions have you made about others at the school or about the school as a whole?
14. What does it mean to fit in/belong at your school?
15. How have you crafted your identity to fit it/belong at your school?
16. Have you ever been disciplined in school? What did that look like (detentions/ISS/OSS/other)?
17. Did you find the circumstances surrounding the discipline incident(s) to be handled fairly? Explain.
18. Are there groups at school that are treated better than other groups are treated? Explain.
19. Do you feel there are issues with race at your school? Explain.
20. Micro aggressions are comments or questions usually delivered in everyday conversation that insult people and reinforce negative stereotypes about someone's race, gender, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, etc. Describe any stereotypes/ micro aggressions that have affected your time at this school.
21. How do you typically deal with stereotypes/micro aggressions?
22. How have stereotypes/ micro aggressions affected you? What has been done to restore the damage in you?
23. What is working well for you at the school? How do you know?
24. What is not working well for you at the school? How do you know? How might this be changed?
25. Describe your support system in school. Describe your support system outside school.
26. What do you most want people to know about being a Black female student at your school?
27. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your high school experiences?

Appendix B. Data Analysis using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012)

Before beginning the first phase of thematic analysis, the interviews with the participants were transcribed by me, the researcher.

Phase 1: Familiarizing myself with the data

Then I started phase one which was familiarize myself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012). I listened to the audio of transcripts again while reading them and annotating them as I read along. I underlined and circled words and phrases that repeated or seemed meaningful according to my topic and research questions.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes to find what the data is about

I then began phase two: generate initial codes to find out what the data is revealing (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012). I read each of the transcripts again with the purpose of annotating words and phrases that seemed significant according to the two research questions for the study.

<p><u>Research Question 1:</u> What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?</p>	<p><u>Research Question 2:</u> What might they say about navigating that particular space?</p>
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Phase 3: Looking for Overarching Themes

Phase three of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012) required the researcher to look for themes. I searched for themes by sorting the data according to the research questions. I then began combining/connecting the words and phrases that appeared to match one another or are synonyms of one another.

<p><u>Research Question 1:</u></p>	<p><u>Research Question 2:</u></p>
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What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?		What might they say about navigating that particular space?	
Experiences	Challenges	What works	What does not work

After reviewing the overarching themes, I noticed that some of the patterns overlapped/were similar. After combining/connecting themes, I noticed two overarching themes emerged.

<u>Research Question 1:</u> What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?		<u>Research Question 2:</u> What might they say about navigating that particular space?	
Experiences	Challenges	What works	What does not work

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lots of opportunities to get involved -Good education -Getting disciplined -Belonging/fitting in (finding your tribe/ not fitting in) -Knowing your identity -Shifting identities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Not belonging/ fitting in (lack of finding your tribe/ not fitting in) -Shifting identities (making other people comfortable/ being quiet/wearing a mask vs. true self/code switching) -Micro aggressions/ stereotypes (types/dealing with them) -Perceptions/ assumptions (how others see you) -Racial incidents in the news 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Having a plan/schedule/next steps (short term/long term) -Support System (home, school, staff/peers) -Getting involved (sports; leadership groups; service) -Making good choices -Seeing themselves in the staff -Using your voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Poor choices -Lack of representation -Drama -Taking care of other people over yourself -Getting in trouble -Unfair consequences/ discipline issues

Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes

After reviewing the overarching themes in phase three, patterns began to emerge amongst the themes and a few new themes revealed themselves; this required for more sorting to happen and this part of the process is phase four (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012).

<p><u>Research Question 1:</u> What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?</p>	<p><u>Research Question 2:</u> What might they say about navigating that particular space?</p>
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Experiences	Challenges	What works	What does not work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lots of opportunities to get involved -Good education -Getting disciplined -Belonging/fitting in (finding your tribe/ not fitting in) -Knowing your identity -Shifting identities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Not belonging/ fitting in (lack of finding your tribe/ not fitting in) -Shifting identities (making other people comfortable/ being quiet/wearing a mask vs. true self/code switching) -Micro aggressions/ stereotypes (types/dealing with them)-Perceptions/ assumptions (how others see you) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Having a plan/schedule/next steps (short term/long term) -Support System (home, school-staff/peers) -Getting involved (sports; leadership groups; service) -Making good choices -Seeing themselves in the staff -Racial incidents in the news -Using your voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Poor choices -Lack of representation -Drama -Taking care of other people over yourself -Getting in trouble -Unfair consequences/ discipline issues
Experiences/Challenges		Navigating White Space	

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

For phase five of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2012), I needed to define and name themes based off the findings in the data. The order in which the themes are presented is important too (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

	<u>Research Question 1:</u> What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?		<u>Research Question 2:</u> What might they say about navigating that particular space?	
	Experiences	Challenges	What works	What does not work
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Good education -Belonging/ fitting in (finding your tribe/ not fitting in) -Knowing your identity -Shifting identities -Micro aggressions/ stereotypes (dealing with them) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shifting identities (making other people comfortable/ being quiet/wearing a mask vs. true self/code switching) -Perceptions/ assumptions -Racial incidents in the news -Lack of representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Having a plan/schedule/next steps (short term/long term) -Support System (home, school staff/peers) -Getting involved (sports; leadership groups; service) -Making good choices -Seeing themselves in the staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Poor choices -Lack of representation -Drama -Taking care of other people over yourself -Getting in trouble -Unfair consequences/ discipline issues -Lots of opportunities to get involved -Using your voice
Overarching Themes	Experiences/Challenges		Navigating White Space	
Possible	Identity		Discipline	

Themes?	Belonging Micro aggressions Stereotypes Voice Representation	Support System Planning Choices School involvement Coping Advice Goals
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I named the themes based off the findings in the data (codes).

<u>Research Question 1:</u> What are the experiences and challenges of Black female students who attend predominantly White high schools?	<u>Research Question 2:</u> What might they say about navigating that particular space?
Overarching Themes	
Experiences/Challenges	Navigating White Space
Themes	
Issues with Race	Issues with Discipline
Identity	Words of Advice
Search for Affinity	Support System

Phase 6: Producing the Report

Phase six of thematic analysis was producing the report on what was specifically found in the data; this phase falls under the findings section in a qualitative study.

Appendix C. Micro aggressions and How Black Girls Deal with Them

Participant	Micro aggressions used against participant	How the participant typically deals with micro aggressions
Kelly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Being loud Black folks (line 245) -Being quiet and told about her resting bitch face (lines 246-251) -White friend who listens to more rap and hip/hop than her says who is really the Black one/ (lines 276-279) -Being asked why she wears her hair certain ways all the time (lines 282-286) -Is that your real hair? Can I touch your hair? Is it horse hair? Do you ever wear your natural hair? (lines 323-329) -You speak too proper (lines 332) -You are an Oreo; Black on the outside, White on the inside (lines 336-339) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How stupid are you! (line 311) -Think about the comment before it happens then pretend not to hear it when it happens (lines 313-315) -No you cannot touch my hair. I'm not a doll or some toy. That's not really socially acceptable; I'm not an object (lines 383-387)
Dana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Called a threat (221-224) -You're the only Black person in a class and people act like you are not there (lines 228-230) -Short hair and sports attire must be the reason or sign she is bisexual (lines 396-405) -People assuming all she is a member of the LGBTQ community like she's nothing else (lines 409-410) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Get mad and want to punch someone but decide to just get up and leave class before things escalate/ ask to leave class (lines 225-227) -Avoid people sometimes /go about my business (lines 229-230)
Zara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -When I'm quiet, people think I'm stuck up and mean (lines 176-177) -Comments about me being a big black girl/ kids call her Rasputia from Norbert-big, black, beating up boys (lines 452-454) -Oh your hair grew overnight! (line 478) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Since I was taunted about it, I would play the part (lines 455-456) -I try to remember that White people don't have the knowledge we have so I just say they're just stupid and I know who I am and who I'm supposed to be and I just smile and say thanks and go on with my day... I try not to make a

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -When people are shocked that you look cute (line 479) -People think that Black is one way or we act the same (line 484) -They act like we live in huts in Africa or we are not all ghetto and living in the hood (lines 484-491) 	big deal out of it... I try to focus on the bigger picture (lines 487-491)
Brittany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -That Blacks are all alike (line 283) -We are all stupid (line 284) -Black folks are so great at sports (lines 284-285) -We aren't capable of what White people can do (line 286) -Hey, can I ask you a question about Black people? (line 291) -Questions about hair (line 292) -Questions about skin complexion/ Don't you ever get dark? (line 293) -Speaking proper/ Is that how you talk? You sound really White (lines 435-440) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Put in more effort to prove them wrong (line 287) -Depending on the relationship, ignore it or answer it as best I can (lines 289-290) -Sarcasm (line 292) -I can, [get darker], but I take care of my skin (line 294) -Staying calm (line 299-300) -Stay calm/ignore/stay quiet to avoid blowing up (lines 443-446)
Malena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Call her bougie because she lives by the school (line 29; 35) -When she's quiet, people think she's mean/unapproachable (lines 113-114) - You're pretty and you're your body is intimidating (line 116) -The loud Black girl (line 292) -I'm not allowed to be upset (line 292) -It's a look that people that don't look like you give you like you are in a zoo exhibit (lines 292-293) -Call me county brownie (lines 294-295) -Obsessing over my hair (line 372; 374) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Thought snapping and the impression it would give and decided to ignore (line 299-300) -I see myself as myself. Whatever I want to do or dress or wear my hair, that's what I will do (line 372)
Diana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -That I'm mean because I don't let people push me around (lines 167-168) 	-Let them know their questions are rude cause what if I fall off

	<p>-Someone told me my face is scary because I don't smile a lot (line 169)</p> <p>-Since I'm Black from the city they ask do I hear gunshots around my house (lines 210-211)</p> <p>-How many times have you washed your hair? Is that a weave? (line 212)</p> <p>-Do you know any drug dealers? Do drugs? In a gang? Gang affiliated? What set do you rep (lines 237-238)</p> <p>-Your hair is nappy (line 252)</p>	<p>and slap you, I'd be wrong and faulted for that (line 213)</p> <p>-Let people know I don't want to be bothered sometimes (lines 214-215)</p> <p>-I say I rep the volleyball set [she is a star volleyball player] (lines 240-241)</p> <p>-I pretend I don't know what people are talking (lines 238-239; 242)</p> <p>-try to stay calm (line 336)</p>
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