The Impossibility of Being "Perfect and White": Black Girls' Racialized and Gendered Schooling Experiences

Dorinda J. Carter Andrews
Tashal Brown
Eliana Castro
Effat Id-Deen
Michigan State University

The African American Policy Forum and the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies states, "The risks that Black and other girls of color confront rarely receive the full attention of researchers, advocates, policymakers, and funders." The limited awareness of the challenges that Black girls face perpetuates the mischaracterization of their attitudes, abilities, and achievement. Thus, school becomes an inhospitable place where Black girls receive

DORINDA J. CARTER ANDREWS is professor and chairperson of teacher education at Michigan State University. 620 Farm Lane, Room 318, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA; e-mail: *dcarter@msu.edu*. Her research broadly focuses on issues of racial equity and justice in teacher education and P–21 educational contexts. She utilizes qualitative methodologies and critical race and gender frameworks to examine race and racism in schools, urban teacher preparation, and Black education.

TASHAL BROWN is a doctoral student in curriculum, instruction, and teacher education at Michigan State University and a former middle and high school teacher. Her research interests focus on critical civic literacies, Black feminist epistemologies, and interrogations of power and identity within teacher education and K–12 classrooms.

ELIANA CASTRO is a doctoral student in curriculum, instruction, and teacher education at Michigan State University. Her research interests center on the teaching and learning of race/ethnicity and racism in P–12 classrooms, as well as the experiences of students and teachers of color in schools. She also investigates the inclusion of Black and Latinx identities and communities in history and social studies curriculum.

EFFAT ID-DEEN is a doctoral student in curriculum, instruction, and teacher education at Michigan State University and a former middle school teacher and community-based social worker. Her academic and research interests broadly focus on race, culture, and equity in schools and spaces of education. She also examines the racial understandings, racial identity, and racialized experiences of Black male youth in middle school contexts.

mixed messages about femininity and goodness and are held to unreasonable standards. This study explores how Black girls describe and understand their school experiences as racialized and gendered and the ways a conversation space allows Black girls' meaning making about and critical examination of individual and collective schooling experiences.

Introduction

The notion that Black boys are in crisis, facing dismal outcomes in and out of school, is regularly explored in media, literature, and research. Yet "the risks that Black and other girls of color confront rarely receive the full attention of researchers, advocates, policymakers, and funders" (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015, p. 8). This lack of awareness of the challenges that Black girls face perpetuates the mischaracterization of their attitudes, abilities, achievements, and overall existence. Much of the literature on Black girls centers on their disproportionate share of the blame and punishment for perceived school infractions (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darensbourg, 2011; E. W. Morris, 2007; E. W. Morris & Perry, 2017; M. W. Morris, 2016) and the high rates of poverty, sexual harassment, and interpersonal violence that they endure (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Building on how these works contribute to our knowledge of the social challenges many Black girls face, we seek to address the school culture and environment in which they are expected to learn. For many Black girls, schools are toxic, traumatizing places where they receive mixed messages about who and what is valued. As we seek to understand Black girls and their schooling experiences, "research and policy frameworks must move beyond the notion that all of the youth of color who are in crisis are boys, and that the concerns of white girls are indistinguishable from those of girls of color" (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p. 9).

In this article, four Black women researchers examine the racialized and gendered schooling dynamics for high school–aged Black girls attending public schools in the greater metropolitan area of a large, predominantly Black Midwestern city. While the city's economic troubles and social challenges have been documented and have received media coverage, few efforts have been made to integrate the voices of students of color, particularly girls of color, into the public discourse on addressing issues concerning school culture and environment. The present study sought to do this, specifically looking at the relational dynamics between adults and students, relationships among peers, and the attitudes and expectations that are conveyed through these interactions. Given the unique educational and life circumstances facing Black girls in the United States, the state of public

education in and around this particular city, and the dearth of research about Black girls' schooling experiences from their perspective, we sought to answer the following questions: *How do Black girls describe and understand their school experiences as racialized and gendered? In what ways does a critical conversation space allow for Black girls' meaning making about their individual and collective schooling experiences?*

We first review the literature on Black girls, whiteness, femininity, and school discipline. We then describe the concept of critical conversation spaces (CCSs) as necessary for Black girls. Our choice to utilize this methodology for gleaning girls' narratives aligns with the theoretical influences that we used to analyze the data. We discuss four themes that illuminate how Black girls experience the impossibility of embodying perfection and whiteness. This impossibility manifests as racialized and gendered discrimination from adults and peers. A fifth theme describes supportive structures that enable Black girls to navigate the challenges of their school environments. We conclude by arguing for CCSs as a necessary means for countering Black girls' epistemic oppression and exclusion (Dotson, 2014) in school contexts.

Literature Review

Black Girls, Whiteness, and Femininity

In the United States, normative constructions of femininity have been—and remain—associated with White women and girls. As with most race-based constructions, Black and White women are viewed as extreme opposites in discourses pertaining to femininity. Deliovsky (2008) argues that the entanglements between whiteness and normative ideas of femininity are "founded on European imperialism and colonialism, [and] normative femininity is never signified outside a process of racial domination and negation" (p. 52). In these societies, femininity is anchored by White supremacist ideologies that center on European standards of beauty as well as on attitudes and behaviors that appeal to patriarchal ideas of modesty, virtue, and fragility and are considered worth protecting (Deliovsky, 2008; Mendez, 2015; Roberts, 2003). Thus, normative notions of femininity are positioned as belonging solely to White women. Black women and girls are portrayed as hypersexual or sexually deviant and are not afforded the care and consideration given to White women and girls. Through interrogation of hegemonic femininity or femininity as portrayed through dominant social narratives, Collins (2004) concludes that "Black women, by definition, cannot achieve the idealized feminine ideal because the fact of Blackness excludes them" (p. 199). Exclusion has material consequences in the lives of Black women and girls. Richardson (2013) posits, "Patriarchal hegemonic ideologies dominate Black female sexuality in the public sphere and

construct it as a target for immorality'' (p. 329), which normalizes and decriminalizes psychological and physical assaults on Black women and girls.

According to a 2014 report, "African American girls report higher rates of sexual harassment and assault and dating violence than their white counterparts'' (Smith-Evans, George, Graves, Kaufmann, & Frohlich, 2014, p. 3). These findings are alarming considering a 2001 report that stated, "Black girls are more likely than Hispanic or white girls to be touched, grabbed, or pinched in a sexual way'' (Lipson, 2001, p. 24). Despite over a decade of data documenting their risk of exposure to sexual harassment, the gender-based harassment and assault of Black girls are often ignored due to teacher perceptions of students based on race, gender, and class (Rahimi & Liston, 2009, 2011; Tonnesen, 2013). Teachers may position Black girls as sexually available and view harassing behavior as an accepted cultural norm within the Black community. This is reflected in this statement from a teacher participating in a study about perceptions of sexual harassment in schools:

> The majority of our black students are free lunch. . . . I see within that community, just a global acceptance of open sexuality, you will see it in the way they dress, they are the ones who always wear low-cut shirts . . . and the ones you can see their panties, if they have them on. (Rahimi & Liston, 2011, p. 804)

In this teacher's view, Black girls' alleged propensity to seek sexual attention makes them less likely to be believed victims of sexual harassment. Similarly, teachers are likely to judge Black girls based on their body type. In the same study, another teacher stated, "These little girls are so developed, you know, you can't help but notice their bodies and their breasts when they are wearing three sizes too small'' (Rahimi & Liston, 2009, p. 518). These statements reinforce the notion that Black girls are to blame for their own sexual harassment and assault. As a result of Black girls' simultaneous invisibility and hypervisibility, attacks on them go unnoticed, and the severity of these assaults is minimized. In the absence of support, Black girls are left to defend themselves against unwelcome verbal and physical assaults. Furthermore, they are often punished for taking matters into their own hands, leaving them with no viable forms of protection (Evans-Winters, 2017). The lack of empathy toward Black girls facing harassment is rooted in perceptions of Black girls as loud and aggressive, in contrast with behaviors that are deemed feminine and "ladylike'' (Lei, 2003; E. W. Morris, 2005, 2007). Constructions of femininity that center on and normalize whiteness penalize Black girls for speaking and acting in defense of their well-being. This definition of femininity casts Black girls as unworthy of the compassion and protection given to White girls and women. Ultimately, Black girls are not only vulnerable to sexual harassment and gender violence, but they are

also held responsible for it and punished for reacting to it. Their resistance to Eurocentric constructions of perfection and femininity results in their demonization and dehumanization.

Black Girls and School Discipline

The literature on Black girls and school discipline underscores the erasure of Black girls' childhoods (Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017). Studies reveal Black girls' overrepresentation in school discipline data (Blake, Butler, & Smith, 2015; Blake et al., 2011; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Mendez & Knopf, 2003; E. W. Morris & Perry, 2017; Taylor & Foster, 1986; Wun, 2018). Their experiences with sexual harassment, violence, and excessive disciplinary action are predicated on White supremacist desires to exercise "social control over black girls' bodies and actions" (Wun, 2016b, p. 743). Racist perceptions of Black girls problematize their behavior and ways of being, placing them at risk, especially in schools with zero-tolerance disciplinary policies (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017). Recent research has uncovered how

> school discipline has been used as an instrument for spirit-murdering Black girls, and it is the intentional death of the Black spirit that can result in a lifelong imprisonment of the mind and soul even when there are no visual bars present. (Hines & Wilmot, 2018, p. 63)

Research shows that Black girls are subject to adultification in school and are seen as less innocent and feminine than non-Black girls. By being perceived as more adult-like in schools, Black girls experience disproportionate exclusionary discipline outcomes (Epstein et al., 2017). Edward Morris's (2005) work illuminates the intersections of race, gender, and school discipline in finding that discipline directed toward Black girls in school is aimed at making them more "ladylike." Wun's (2018) research underscores how Black girls are framed as problems and are subjected to discipline as structural violence in the form of criminalization, brutalization, and control in school spaces. Black girls are more likely to experience suspension and expulsion for subjective reasons, such as disobedience, defiance, talking back, and causing bodily harm (Epstein et al., 2017; E. W. Morris & Perry, 2017). The presence of school resource officers, as well as referrals to law enforcement and arrests at school exacerbate the school-to-juvenile justice system pipeline for Black girls, constraining their abilities to maximize their full potential. One study found that the higher a school's population of color and proportion of students participating in free-and-reduced lunch programs, the more likely it is to report school offenses to the police (Torres & Stefkovich, 2009). This finding points to the reality that Black girls' encounters with police are heightened by racial and economic segregation in schooling.

Our study builds on the literature by providing an analysis of Black girls' schooling experiences beyond school disciplinary policies and practices. We offer an examination of the racialized and gendered experiences of Black girls as it pertains to schooling in its entirety. Central to these experiences are Black girls' interactions with peers and adults within and across classroom settings, extracurricular activities, and other formal and informal spaces. Furthermore, our study takes place across multiple high schools, providing insights into varying contexts. We argue the need for formal school spaces where Black girls can critically reflect on their schooling experiences in ways that are affirming, healing, and conducive to school positive reform.

Critical Conversation Spaces for Black Girls

Black girls are silenced when ideas about who they are or should be are projected onto them without their consent. Dotson (2011) locates silencing as an epistemic violence, affecting Black women and girls' ability to be heard. She states, "To undervalue a black woman speaker is to take her status as a knower to be less than plausible" (p. 242). The silencing of Black girls in school spaces makes their experiences appear isolated from White supremacist narratives that position their knowledge and ways of being as antithetical to "appropriate" behavior.

CCSs for Black girls provide discussion opportunities that support storytelling and oral history in the African diasporic cultural tradition. This space, where experiential knowledge and narrating is encouraged, resembles the structure of focus groups but mirrors the framework unique to sister circles (Gaston, Porter, & Thomas, 2007; Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). Sister circles are culturally relevant support groups where Black women unite around a common cause, concern, theme, and so on to provide support to one another and build community. They are facilitated by Black women and used across social science disciplines. Psychology, social work, and education professionals, practitioners, and community leaders have "modified [sister circles] for use with Black adolescent girls" (Neal-Barnett et al., 2011, p. 268). These aspects of sister circles, Black women facilitators and building a sense of community and kinship, are important for developing CCSs for Black girls in K–12 spaces. First, CCSs are semistructured and less formal, allowing participants to freely engage in dialogue among themselves and with facilitators without the fear of being perceived as off-topic. In this sense, CCSs are different from focus groups, which include an array of facilitated activities like group interviews that can be formal and regimented (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). Second, CCSs are designed to be supportive and nonclinical spaces for healing and cultivating fictive kinship, like sister circles (Gaston et al., 2007; Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). In this way, CCSs allow Black girls' voices to be amplified in empowering ways through communal storytelling and lend space to the examination of the gendered and racialized dimensions of their lived experiences.

Scholars argue that interrogations of race-based oppression are critical for Black youth in their process of identity exploration (Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015; Nicolas et al., 2008). CCSs help lift the veil of disapproval and alienation, allowing Black girls to see that their experiences do not exist in isolation and that their voices, thoughts, and feelings are valid and valued. In doing so, the pathologizing narratives that surround Black girls' ways of being and knowing are called into question, and they can experience epistemic agency in the conversation spaces. As Black women educators, researchers, and teacher educators, we have occupied and continue to occupy multiple roles within racialized and gendered educational spaces, just like Black girls in K–12 spaces. Our lived experiences are another analytical tool we use to understand Black girls' experiences in school. The aforementioned scholarship, the theoretical influences described below, and our racialized and gendered analytical lenses have led us to consider the utility of CCSs for Black girls navigating toxic learning environments.

Theoretical Influences and Conceptual Framing

Critical Race Feminism and Black Feminist Epistemology

Critical race feminism (CRF) builds on critical race theory's analysis and critiques of the U.S. legal system by providing an intersectional examination that disrupts false notions of law as "neutral, objective, and determinate" (Wing, 1997, p. 4). Similarly, education scholars have increasingly engaged in research that unearths how Black girls are disproportionately affected by education policy, curriculum, and practices that seem neutral but are rooted in anti-Blackness (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; M. W. Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016a, 2016b). This study contributes to the discourse by utilizing CRF to illuminate the racialized and gendered operation of power and oppression in formal education spaces. Because formal sites of schooling operate as microcosms of U.S. society, they mirror the White supremacist patriarchal logics that undergird U.S. sociopolitical life. Despite recognizing that school systems operate within a racist and sexist society, schools continue to be portrayed as impartial, good, and safe spaces for all students. In actuality, schooling in the United States is fraught with exclusion, dehumanization, physical violence, and discrimination (Love, 2013, 2016). We situate our analysis of Black girls' schooling experiences alongside the historical and contemporary embodiment of whiteness, anti-Blackness, and cis-hetero-patriarchy that exist within U.S. political, judicial, and educational spheres. The normalized and elusive nature of whiteness allows it to go undetected and unquestioned. We utilize Bailey's term *misogynoir* to name and identify anti-Black misogyny as it operates within Black girls' lives (Bailey, 2013; Bailey & Trudy, 2018). With CRF as a theoretical and analytical lens, we illustrate the need for

"theories and practices that simultaneously study and combat gender and racial oppression" (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010, p. 20).

CRF encompasses elements of Black feminist epistemology (BFE) by positioning the lived experiences of Black girls and women as valid sources of knowledge. BFE is rooted in Patricia Hill Collins's (2000) foundational work *Black Feminist Thought*, where she critiqued feminist and Black political scholarship for excluding the intellectual contributions of Black women. *Black Feminist Thought* is central to examining the complexities of Black women's experiences as shaped by race, class, gender, and sexuality. As such, BFE positions Black women and girls as experts about their own lives. This theoretical perspective underscores the significance of epistemic agency for Black girls in their learning environments. When Black girls can speak for themselves, they "reveal the ways that dominant perspectives distort the realities of the other in an effort to maintain power relations" (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 263).

Our conceptual framework combines BFE and CRF to offer an analysis rooted in Black girls' articulations of their individual and collective experiences as expressed in high school CCSs. In these spaces, Black girls expressed the impossibility of meeting academic and behavioral expectations often predicated on notions of whiteness. In identifying the salient features of whiteness, Gillborn expounds on Leonardo's (2000) definition of whiteness as a "process of 'naturalization' such that white becomes the norm from which other 'races' stand apart and in relation to which they are defined" (Gillborn, 2005, p. 488). In our study, whiteness includes ways of being, thoughts, and ideas that can only be embodied by White people. Thus, the expectation of being "perfect and white" is a feat that can never be attained by Black girls.

Whiteness, Innocence, and Perfection

Whiteness carries with it the privilege of being perceived as innocent despite overwhelming evidence that signals otherwise. We draw on CRF to make visible the White supremacist logics embedded in notions of whiteness, innocence, and perfection and to highlight the unique individual and collective experiences of Black girls within multiple high school settings. Wun (2016b) posits, "Fantasized as perpetually guilty, black innocence is a structural impossibility" (p. 744). In our study, Black girls in the CCSs were aware that existing in a Black girl body made them a target for racist and sexist assaults on their intellectual, physical, and emotional well-being. On the other hand, the presumed innocence of White girls allows them to escape scrutiny, discipline, and responsibility even when they are exhibiting behaviors that would land Black girls in trouble. Annamma (2015) illustrates this point, stating, "Innocence as an intangible benefit of whiteness as property is further magnified when considering the intersections of gender and

race. . . . Those that are without the protection of innocence are subject to suspicion, surveillance, and incarceration" (p. 298). The silencing, policing, and surveillance of Black girls is normalized by White supremacist and patriarchal narratives that position Black people and girls and women as subhuman and undeserving of protection, care, and validation. Thus, it is imperative to recognize that when subjected to the White gaze, Black girls are adultified in ways similar to and nuanced from Black males; they are seen as dangerous, promiscuous, sassy, threatening, overly independent, and needing less nurture, protection, support, and comfort (Epstein et al., 2017; M. W. Morris, 2016). Characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors such as nonconformity are perceived as self-advocacy/agency, independence, and creativity when exhibited by White girls, but seen as disruptive, aggressive, and/or arrogant when exhibited by Black girls.

We argue that Black girls are haunted by the ever-present White supremacist and misogynistic gaze of the administrators, teachers, and staff they encounter daily. This gaze is a filter through which White students are the unequivocal embodiment of innocence even when their attitudes and actions signal otherwise. Burton (2015) discusses how whiteness operates as an expansive and pervasive network. He states,

> Whiteness . . . afflicts its proprietors with a twin condition of blindness and aphasia, inhibiting their capacity to recognize the discriminatory public policies. . . . And because it requires public recognition and acceptance of its norms and values, whiteness places a premium on social homogenization. (p. 41)

Black girls face a form of discrimination that is obscured by the normality of whiteness and magnified by the pervasive duality of anti-Black misogyny. In this way, whiteness serves as a cloak that shields White students from the scrutiny and surveillance that Black girls face. As a result, Black girls are held to unrealistic and impossible standards predicated on notions of whiteness and perfection in which they cannot manifest by virtue of existing in a Black girl body. As the girls in this study shared their experiences, it became clear that similar behaviors and attitudes are perceived differently depending on the race and gender of the viewer and the doer.

Method

Context

This research is part of an initiative launched by a state department of education, in partnership with a public policy firm and a local university. The project aims to glean an increased understanding of Black boys' and girls' schooling experiences by talking with students. A goal of the project is for school leaders to use the findings to inform their efforts at improving

Black student academic success. The university research team was central to the construction of interview protocols, data collection, and analysis. From the project, we chose to examine data from Black girls in five public high schools in and around the metropolitan area of a large, urban Midwestern city. Each school is located in a different school district. Two of the schools are in suburban communities outside the city, two are within the city limits, and the remaining school is housed in a small racially and ethnically diverse community surrounded by the city. Additionally, three schools are located in predominantly White communities outside of the city, with at least 50% of the population identifying as White non-Hispanic. The other two schools are nestled in city neighborhoods, with almost 80% of the population reporting as Black/African American.

Research Sites

The number of students at each site varied from 9 to 19, with the student population drawing largely from the city or from the surrounding communities. Those schools that were populated predominantly with Black students also had large numbers of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. For example, Site A's student population is 98% Black. According to the district website, 100% of its students qualify for free or reduced lunch. As a result, most of the five schools appear racially and economically homogeneous (see Table 1).

Participants

Seventy high school girls participated in CCSs between March and June 2017 (see Table 1), each lasting approximately 90 minutes. Almost all students (98.57%) in the study identified as African American or Black, with only one student identifying as biracial (White and Black). The girls who participated in the CCSs were selected based on teacher recommendation. Teachers at each school were asked to identify Black girls across the academic achievement spectrum who would be willing to talk about their schooling experiences with a team of university researchers. The participating girls had signed student assent forms, and their parents had signed parental consent forms.

Data Collection

Due to the personal, complex, and candid nature of conversations related to race, gender, and school culture, this study utilized qualitative methods to answer the research questions. Data sources included field notes, audio recordings, and transcripts from the CCSs, student self-reported and official school demographic information, and preliminary reports from the larger project. A CCS was held at each research site and was structured similar to a semistructured focus group interview. Conducting five CCSs

Table 1

Demographic Table of Research Sites and Participants

Site	Number of Girls	Participants' Grade(s)	Races/Ethnicities Represented at Site	Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced-Price Lunch at Site	Site Location/ Municipality Type	Date of Critical Conversation (mm/dd/yy)
Site A	19	9th to 12th	Black (98%)	100%[a]	Within city	05/11/2017
Site B	18	9th to 12th	Black (99.1%) White (0.5%) Asian American (0.1%) Hispanic/ Latino (0.1%) Native American (0.1%)	39.2%[a]	Within city	05/01/2017
Site C	11	9th to 12th	Black (71.5%) White (24.3%) Asian American (0.4%) Hispanic/ Latino (3.7%) Other (0.2%)	68%[b]	Charter township/suburb	04/24/2017
Site D	13	9th to 12th	Black (15.9%) White (64%) Asian American (16.9%) Multiracial (1.85%)	60%[b]	Suburb	03/24/2017
Site E	9	9th to 11th	Black (24%) White (38%) Asian American (37%)	94%[a]	Community school surrounded by city	06/06/2017

Note. We use the racial and ethnic group labels that the school districts use to categorize students.
[a]District Report.
[b]U.S. News & World Report.

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allowed for replicating findings and themes across school districts (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). At least three researchers were present at each site: one observing, one facilitating, and one taking notes and monitoring the digital recording devices. Open-ended questioning allowed the girls to voice their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions in a structured discussion, providing participants space to respond in their own words with detailed and in-depth answers (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011).

We used a phenomenological approach to understanding how Black girls describe and make meaning of their schooling experiences as racialized and/or gendered. Phenomenology provides a method of philosophical investigation that centers on the human experience, making participants' lived experiences a valid source of knowledge (Husserl, 1970; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Schutz, 1967). Phenomenology seeks to answer meaning and sense-making questions of a given phenomenon for a person or group from their own understanding rather than relying on outside narratives, notions, or ideas (Moran, 2002). This approach to the research aligns with our epistemological stance promoting Black girl epistemic agency, affirmation, and healing through collective sharing regarding racialized and/or gendered schooling experiences. It also aligns with our commitment to "research as responsibility, answerable and obligated to the very persons and communities being engaged in the inquiry" (Dillard, 2006, p. 5).

Data Analysis

All five critical conversations were audio recorded and transcribed. Open coding and theory-based coding were employed to cover the scope and depth of the data collected. To ensure consistency and dependability of the qualitative study, and to guard against research bias, the research team used the code-recode strategy and peer examination (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). First, transcriptions were analyzed independently by each member of the research team using open coding. Open coding allowed for the extraction of recurring ideas that emerged across CCSs using categories or codes (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011). Utilizing students' perspectives to analyze data during our first round of coding was essential to understanding *their* racialized and gendered school experiences (Fetterman, 2008). For example, when discussing adult expectations of girls, ideas related to *drama, fighting*, and *ladylike* emerged. We used these preliminary codes and others to guide the next round of coding.

In the second round of coding, we collectively analyzed the data, drawing from a combination of theoretical influences and our lived experiences. We renamed and reorganized the codes to make sense of what we collected from the participants' point of view, but through our researcher lenses (Fetterman, 2008). The goal was to create codes that represented a more nuanced picture of students' explanations, experiences, and stories. For

example, we noticed that *double standards in dress code, double standards of appropriate behavior, experiences in athletics*, and *experiences in advanced placement* appeared across multiple transcriptions. By recoding and reorganizing, we were able to clearly connect students' experiences and commentary to racialized and gendered themes within the research study.

After two rounds of open coding, theory-based coding was used to connect codes to CRF, BFE, notions of whiteness, and so on. We identified instances where participants explicitly stated or alluded to racists/racialized or sexist/racialized and gendered interactions with peers and adults. Ultimately, we had a series of experiences that were racialized, gendered, or both across various school contexts (e.g., the classroom, common areas, and extracurricular spaces) and relationships (with Black boys, White peers, and adults). The synthesis of site-specific, cross-case codes and theory-based iterations of coding led to the themes that emerged in the findings section.

Researcher Positionalities

All the researchers involved in this project identify as Black and female. We leverage an inclusive definition of Black as encompassing African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and other members of the African Diaspora. We are Black women from various ethnic backgrounds and regions of the United States and the Caribbean, with parallel but distinct educational experiences. Our varied lived experiences attest to the diversity within the oft-essentialized Black community, but in many ways, the racialized and gendered operation of power has held constant across contexts for us. We approach this work as Black Girl Cartographers, with "a deep concern for Black girls' health, lives, well-being and ways of being, [and our] commitments to Black girls extend beyond the page and the walls of the academy" (T. T. Butler, 2018, p. 33). As Black women, we were able to enter the school spaces and gain the trust of school administrators and participating Black girls with relative ease, an affordance of which we are cognizant. As the girls became more comfortable during the sessions, they sought our input, an indication that they perceived us as participants in the CCSs, not merely facilitators, observers, and recorders. While we would have enjoyed a more active role in the CCSs, we felt that it would have been a breach of the standards for responsible conduct to impute our opinions, recount our experiences, or provide directives for the girls. Further research on developing CCSs can help illuminate the latitude of the researcher.

Findings

CRF and BFE assert that Black women and girls are experts on their own lives and valid sources of knowledge in illuminating inequities (Collins, 2000; Wing, 1997). When given the space to share their understandings

and experiences, Black girls bring to light the ways in which educational inequities exist at individual and structural levels (Ladson-Billings, 2000). They enact epistemic agency in ways that enable us to understand how to best meet their academic, emotional, and social needs. Findings from this study suggest that Black girls' daily interactions and encounters with adults and peers prove central to how they view themselves, experience school, and understand their existence in society. Although several themes emerged, we focus on five that illuminated students' attitudes and treatment toward Black girls as well as adults' perceptions and expectations of them: *Notions of Femininity and the Policing and Surveillance of Black Girl Bodies; Black Girls and (Anti)Intellectualism; Marginalization of Black Female Athletes; Black Girls in Relational Contexts*; and *Necessary Support Structures for Black Girls*. Each theme connects to CRF, BFE, and understandings of racialized and gendered systems of power and oppression.

Notions of Femininity and the Policing and Surveillance of Black Girl Bodies

Across multiple CCSs, girls reported being told variations of the phrase "act like a lady" by teachers and other adults at their school. According to the girls, acting like a lady meant to "dress ladylike [and] don't use profanity" (Site A), "be like a nun or something" (Site A), "carry yourself neat and nice" (Site B), and "stay out of drama" (Site B). At the core of these expectations are normative ideas about femininity that are steeped in rigid and unrealistic notions of innocence and perfection. This sentiment was expressed by one student at Site A: "If you just do one wrong thing, they'll be like, 'you're a lady, you weren't supposed to do that!' But everybody makes mistakes." At Site B, one teacher was particularly invested in the girls being heterosexual, as expressed by a participant: "When girls be going through their little phases, and be liking girls and stuff like that, [the teacher] don't like that, but she understand it. She be like, 'You should love boys' and stuff like that." A peer corroborated this point stating, "She want us to be straight, to like boys. She don't like that gay stuff" (Site B). Although the scope of this article does not take up sexual identity, expression, or orientation explicitly, these comments expose a heteronormative construction of femininity that is oppressive to Black girls who identify along the gender and sexuality spectrum. This range of statements made by girls about how adults perceive them draws attention to their awareness of the prevailing narratives that depict Black girls as aggressive, immoral, and hypersexual.

Black Girls as Rowdy and Disruptive

Many of the girls described adult behaviors manifesting from perceptions of them as rowdy and disruptive. They admitted that "there are days when we're a little loud and stuff, but when we see everybody else getting loud, we kinda quiet down. And then we get blamed for something because

we all get grouped together'' (Site A). This demonstrates the girls' self-awareness of how their behavior is perceived and that despite their efforts to mitigate trouble, adults do not distinguish one group of Black students from another. Such profiling happened outside the classroom as well. As one student stated, "If it's a group of Black people in one area in the lunchroom, they think it's a fight. If it's a group of White kids, they think they're playing Pokemon, but they're doing Xannies and drugs and stuff" (Site C). This student observed that Black students were not free to cluster in school spaces without adults assuming mischief was taking place, while White students were innocent until proven guilty. The girls' sentiments illuminate an age-old narrative that replays across educational research that examines how Black students are negatively perceived by adults when they cluster in social spaces within schools (D. J. Carter, 2007; Tatum, 2017). One student recalled overhearing a staff member tell another that some Black students "act like animals" (Site E), and another described what she perceived as adults' expectations that girls "have to be tamed" (Site B). Students at Site E characterized adults' perception of Black students as being "loud, obnoxious, and dumb." In these instances, not only are students typecast, but they are also dehumanized by reductive and stereotypical comments rooted in a long tradition of likening Black individuals to animals (e.g., Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008). This outlook justifies the dismissal of Black girls' intelligence and consciousness, denying them the compassion reserved for other sentient human beings.

Adults' negative assumptions about Black students were also imputed onto unmenacing actions by the girls. One student recalled how a teacher policed her joy, stating, "He used to kick me out for laughing. If I want to laugh because life is great, let me laugh" (Site D). In essence, the White supremacist desires to exercise "social control over black girls' bodies and actions" (Wun, 2016b, p. 743) extends to lighthearted expressions of happiness. Despite defying the trope of the angry Black woman (Griffin, 2012), this student was faulted for her mirthful demeanor. This paradox reflects the impossibility of acceptance that Black girls confront. They work tirelessly to negotiate the expectations of them, but those goalposts constantly move.

Black Girls as Requiring Discipline and Control

Several girls described the expectation from adults that Black students require stricter discipline and control than their peers. One student referred to the school as resembling a jail because of its bare walls, and another pointed out, "If you ever see kids kicked out of class in the hallway, they're never White kids. It's also the White kids who hang with Black kids who are considered extremely friendly to Black people" (Site A). This imbalanced discipline seemed familiar to other girls at Site A and surfaced in other CCSs. The perception of Black girls as defiant, and the consequences

thereof, are documented by scholars in education and related fields (e.g., Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; M. W. Morris, 2016). These vignettes parallel the literature exposing how Black girls are seen as dangerous, promiscuous, sassy, threatening, and overly independent (Epstein et al., 2017; M. W. Morris, 2016).

The girls reported teachers demonstrating fear of their Black students, calling school safety officers when Black students advocated for themselves regarding missing grades, lost assignments, or untaught material on assessments. Several girls also experienced unwarranted suspicion and show of force from security personnel. At a sporting event, one girl recalled, "There's no reason for them to be so disrespectful. I'm not fighting, cursing, yelling. I'm going to my car, and they're pushing and shoving. But when the White kids walk through, 'alright guys, have a good night'" (Site C). In these instances, the Black body is treated as an *object* of antagonism, not a person with whom adults can reason (Dumas & ross, 2016). Recent school climate and safety data reveal that millions of students attend schools that are more likely to have discipline personnel on staff than a counselor, social worker, or nurse. This indicates that "tens of thousands of schools are not equipped to meet the social, emotional, or behavioral needs of students . . . [and] that many of these schools prioritize law enforcement rather than mental health and social services" (Losen & Whitaker, 2018, n.p.).

Black Girls as Hypersexualized and Adultified

A recurring theme across the CCSs was double standards regarding appropriate dress. Black girls experienced stricter enforcement of the dress code than did their White or male counterparts, as evidenced in the following statement:

> A guy can wear a tank top, and it's fine, but if I wear a tank top and it's covering everything, I'll get in trouble. I have to go get a hoodie or something, but it feels like it's 100 degrees in here 'cause we don't have AC!" (Site C)

Girls' bodies are policed in ways that are different for boys, and they are subjected to discomfort to uphold a seemingly neutral dress code policy. The lack of air conditioning in classrooms at Site C is an institutional problem for which Black girls were disproportionately punished compared with White girls. As one student stated,

> I'm not trying to be racist—these really skinny white girls wear short shorts, but [teachers] won't say anything. But for me—not everything fits me. I have really big legs! And I can't find shorts that go down to my knees. But they want me to call home, and I'm like, "I'm not calling home. I'm wearing clothes." I don't see why it's a problem. (Site C)

Another student noted that Black girls are hypersexualized by adult critiques of their clothing. She stated, "That's oversexualizing us. It's like, 'Oh, your shoulders are too sexual'" (Site C). The instructional time devoted to these perceived violations is not lost on one girl:

> I'll be sent to the office for a coat, rain boots, and a pair of overalls that's two times my size. And to Sally [indicating any random white student], "You go ahead to class. I'm sorry she's bothering you." So now I'm out of class, but Sally's gonna go learn and get the A+, while I'm stuck with a B because my knees are showing, which [with sarcasm] are *very* sexual, obviously . . . [The white girls] got these white see-through shirts, and all they wear is a bra, but they put a little jacket on to cover it. But she has no clothes on. She could go to a club right now, and she'll pass. But *I'm* distracting everybody? No, you're wrong, and I'm not going to stand for it. (Site C)

These injustices provoke indignation and resistance as a form of self-preservation among the Black girls, who then find themselves in a bind. If they speak out for themselves and advocate for equitable school policy implementation, they risk getting into trouble and reinforcing the stereotype of Black girls as angry, dangerous, and disrespectful (Bhabha et al., 1992; Crenshaw, 1989). The only other option appears to be to bear the injustice. Neither of these scenarios is ideal, and all of them result in emotional and psychological harm inflicted on the girls. Again, Black girls are simultaneously invisible and hypervisible, unprotected and punished, and adultified with regard to the sexualization of their bodies (Epstein et al., 2017; Evans-Winters, 2017; Zimmermann, 2018). They face the ever-present challenge of being perfect and White while existing in a Black body.

Black Girls and (Anti)intellectualism

CRF is useful for examining Black girls' grapplings with racism and patriarchy in school. In this study, both types of oppression manifested through the girls' susceptibility to the myth of Black anti-intellectualism (Cokley, 2015). Furthermore, the girls were subjected to the construction of intelligence as White property (Carter Andrews, 2009). As one student expressed, "[adults expect us] to be perfect and white." Her peer added,

> [A] lot of white people and people who aren't Black don't think that we know how to use our brains. I think a lot of white people look down on us; look down on our abilities, so they have low expectations. (Site D)

The underrepresentation of Black intellect and commitment to education persists in K–20 curriculum and education studies, despite scholarly work combatting this erasure (Anderson, 1988; Grant, Brown, & Brown, 2016). Overall, academic expectations of Black girls were low, even when

behavioral expectations were higher for Black girls than for White and male students. The girls narrated similar events across sites, highlighting the pervasive and ubiquitous nature of negative relationships and encounters with peers and adults.

Black Girls as Unintelligent and Unmotivated

The girls sensed that adults considered them unmotivated and therefore unworthy of high-quality learning experiences. Participants recounted instances of teachers seeming uninterested in providing rigorous or engaging curriculum and instruction or dismissing their questions and concerns. At Site E, there was a consensus that the school is not adequately preparing students for prospective future careers. One case at Site A was especially egregious:

> Class don't start 'til like 8:00, and most of the time [the teacher] won't be there, or she be asleep. I be trying to shake her up, and she still don't wake up. And when she do be up, she don't start class 'til like 8:40. She won't start doing work 'til like 8:40. She'll talk on the phone, giggling and gossiping. . . . She sleeps a LOT. She does more sleeping than teaching.

Other girls nodded in agreement and corroborated the details. There appeared to be a continuum of educational neglect across sites, including assigning busywork, not grading student work, refusing to reteach or clarify material, declining to discuss student concerns, and engaging in off-topic chatter. Per the girls, these teacher behaviors were evident in all of the high schools.

The lack of consistently adequate learning opportunities was also tied to teacher turnover. When asked what she would change about her school, one girl said, "They wanna switch our teachers every three months. They just took another teacher . . . and put a new person, and they want us to adapt to him" (Site A). Concerns about teaching strategies and teacher turnover, along with suspicions that their peers at other schools learn more advanced content, weighed on the girls' minds. The adults responsible for scaffolding the girls' development were denying them opportunities to experience empowerment through learning. Their curriculum was minimally culturally responsive (Gay, 2002), relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995), or sustaining (Paris, 2012), contributing to Black students' spirit murder (Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Love, 2013).

Black Girls in Majority White Spaces

For some of the Black girls in the study, their predominantly White settings, which were typically advanced placement (AP) courses and majority White schools, played a unique role in shaping their academic and social identities. In some schools, tracking practices privileged students who "took a test in eighth grade and then take advanced classes all the way up

to junior year" (Site C) to the detriment of students who experience academic success later in their schooling years, by which time they can no longer transition into the advanced tracks. Not only do these classes have significant barriers to entry, but they are also disproportionately White. One student stated, "All my classes are advanced, and there's like four Black people in the class" (Site C). The cycle of academic tracking perpetuates segregation in classrooms and outcome differentials for Black students compared with White and Asian students (Kasten, 2013; Mickelson, 2015). The girls in the study were subject to this same cycle, and the absence of students who looked like them in their AP courses underscored the pervasiveness of the myth of Black anti-intellectualism.

Black girls in classes with mostly White students believed that there was unspoken competition among students to be seen and heard by their peers and teachers. As one student noted, "As long as there is a white student in the class, there is a competition; you're always going to be competing" (Site D). This rivalry makes Black girls' experiences tense and less conducive to learning. Black girls in AP courses also had to contend with feelings of having to "win" or "prove" that they belonged in the presence of Black friends who were not enrolled in AP courses. A student enrolled in all AP courses revealed that there are "some people who don't want to be in advanced classes because their friends aren't in there, and if they *are* in there, they'll be considered white" (Site C). The perception that taking AP classes is likened to whiteness, especially by other Black students, is not uncommon (P. L. Carter, 2003; Nasir, 2012). It is a form of atmospheric racism that Black girls are subjected to in school (Carter Andrews & Tuitt, 2013). While some students feared the thought of being viewed as stuck up by their Black peers because they take AP courses, others renounced this notion. As one student simply stated, "It's the stupidest thing, but that's what people think" (Site C).

Multiple girls reported adult perceptions that Black girls do not belong in AP classes. A student at Site D stated, "They think Black people can only play sports, or sing or do some entertainment, they don't think that we know how to use our brains." For another student, the way she speaks was a point of contention with one teacher:

> I was saying something and [the teacher] was like, "Stop that street talk." I was like hold up. . . . They expect you to be underneath this threshold and it don't work like that. I'm educated, and I'm proud to say I'm educated because you're not going to talk down on me and act . . . [a teacher] was so surprised that I had all this vocabulary. I took out my own time to strengthen my vocabulary, don't act like I'm supposed to be this dumb girl, don't be surprised when you hear me speaking big words. (Site D)

This student proclaims her agency in taking the initiative to expand her vocabulary; she owned this knowledge and refused to have it negated by

an institution that had not helped her attain it. The girls' recognition that teachers viewed them as anti-intellectual highlighted another way in which race and power operated in these schools to position learning as White property. When a Black student excelled in one such class, her merit and integrity were called into question: "Math is so easy to me and . . . I can just figure out on my own and I get 100. I got 98 on the final, and he was like, 'Did you cheat?'" (Site D). Girls' testimonies of teachers appearing surprised at their knowledge or achievements are consistent with perceptions of Black students, and girls in particular, as unintelligent, unmotivated, and unworthy. Furthermore, the assumption that a Black girl is cheating evinces both doubt in Black intellect and the constant suspicion that looms over the actions of Black women and girls (White, 1999). These low expectations of Black girls reflect a conception of them as incapable of being intellectual (D. J. Carter, 2008).

Many of the students recognized that navigating inhospitable school environments as a Black girl can be isolating, especially when there are individual and structural forces upholding the status quo. For high-performing Black girls, the idea of having to choose between academic and social acceptance presented identity-shaping dilemmas. Being smart or prioritizing academics meant that they could have their academic ability and competence questioned by adults and White peers and to face social isolation from Black peers (Carter Andrews, 2012; Fordham, 1988; Galletta & Cross, 2007). Not enrolling in challenging courses reinforced the racial stereotype that Black students belong in lower level courses, yet it secured relationships and connections with Black peers (Galletta & Cross, 2007). Carter Andrews (2009) asserts that rejecting notions of whiteness and behaving in opposition to the racial group's accepted cultural norms (e.g., taking AP courses) "can be seen as rejecting group affiliation, and succeeding in school becomes adversarial to maintaining racial group acceptance by one's peers" (p. 297). Thus, the decision of whether to enroll in AP courses is nuanced and complex for Black girls. Resilience, support structures, and confidence are all factors that equip Black girls with the tools to enter racially isolating and potentially virulent spaces. The presence or absence of these elements informs whether Black girls are willing to negotiate any aspect of their identity.

The Black female students in our CCSs attending predominantly White schools were subjected to exclusion and scrutiny. Black girls' experiences taking advanced classes were also marred by teachers' tendency to only help quiet, "well-behaved" students. A key point of contention for the girls was the curriculum. One student deplored the stagnant and shallow history curriculum:

> I'm sick and tired of learning the same history. I can't even tell you how many times I've heard about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. It is so sad. I wish we could know more. I want to know about Hispanic culture and Native American culture. I'm tired of learning

about just white culture. That's basically all we learn about . . . we
don't learn about anything else. (Site C)

This student critiqued teachers' claims of covering new content without
exploring untapped areas of interest to students. It is not enough to teach
some Black history; many of the girls were eager for critical perspectives
beyond oversimplified narratives of Dr. King and Rosa Parks (Alridge,
2006; Busey & Walker, 2017; Carlson, 2003; Woodson, 2017). Despite the
abundance of noteworthy Black figures and other topics of interest, students
are often exposed to a narrow repertoire of Black forebears, perpetuating
Eurocentrism. The student cited above desired the inclusion of *other* com-
munities of color as well. Ethnic and multicultural studies scholars have writ-
ten extensively about the potential for critical consciousness through
pluralistic curricula (Banks, 1997; Banks & Banks, 2010; Gay, 2010; Takaki,
1993). Much like CCSs, instruction about the racialized experiences of others
can help students identify the structures and function of racism and White
supremacy at work in society.

Marginalization of Black Female Athletes

Despite the large number of girls involved in U.S. sports, the examina-
tion of Black girls and other girls of color participating in competitive high
school sports is a relatively new area of study (Braddock, Katz, Greene, &
Basinger-Fleischman, 2005; Pickett, Dawkins, & Braddock, 2012;
Stevenson, 2007). While issues of race and gender equity have been interro-
gated from collegiate (Foster, 2003; Harmon, Doss, & Donahoo, 2012;
Lopiano, 2001; Suggs, 2005) and professional (Banet-Weiser, 1999; Davis,
2016; Douglas, 2005; Latimer, 2003) perspectives, little is known about
Black female athletes in high school and the impact of race and gender
on their sporting experiences. The lack of inquiry of high school–aged
Black girls in sports illuminates the Eurocentric and patriarchal ideals of
what it means to be an athlete. Furthermore, it foregrounds the importance
that experiential knowledge, voice, and agency of Black girls have in
unearthing the racialized and gendered operation of power and oppression
in formal spaces of education, including sports (Collins, 2000). For girls in
this study, their experiences in sports were situated in White teammates' atti-
tudes and treatment toward them and their schools' overall treatment of
Black girls in sports.

Invalidation by White Teammates

Across CCSs, many of the girls described negative treatment by their
White teammates. For many of these student-athletes, the attitudes and treat-
ment toward them was unexpected and unfounded. A Black female softball
player at one of the predominantly White high schools (Site D) struggled

with understanding why her White teammates treated her differently, even though she considered them friends. She explained, "This girl got really afraid of me because I knew how to play softball; she got real scared." She wondered what prompted the shift in their relationship, noting that they *used* to be good friends. She recalled, "We used to be on the same team and she just got scared of me, and she never talked to me." One of her peers explained, "They don't want you to be better than them" (Site D). This sentiment of perceived jealousy from White teammates was shared by student-athletes in other sports, including cheerleading, basketball, and dance.

As the only Black girl on the dance team, one student recalled the lack of visible support and acclamation from her teammates. For example, at the team's end-of-season dance banquet, she received "The Best Jumps" award for her performance during competitions and routines. Despite recognition by her coaches, her teammates appeared to disagree and none of them applauded her. The disregard from her White teammates seemed to imply that she and her talents were unworthy of acknowledgment. This experience reinforced the ideas of many of the young girls at Site D that "if we do anything better than them [their white peers], they are going to be jealous." At Site E, girls reported feeling unwelcome in sporting activities and sensing jealousy from White teammates, who instead of seeing team success as a priority, begrudged the Black girls' accomplishments and the attention they received for them.

These reflections from the girls underscore the racialized and gendered attitudes and behaviors present in adolescent sports (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). Cultural constructions of who is considered acceptable as a high-performing female athlete are rooted in whiteness and White supremacist ideals in school spaces. This is evidenced through the dismissive messages that many of the high school girls received about their value as teammates and their physical presence as young Black girls (Carty, 2005). In this study, privileging whiteness as a cultural norm in sports dehumanizes Black female athletes, rendering them physically and socially ignored and regarded as less deserving of recognition and perceived as threatening by their teammates. Studies centering on the experiences of Black female athletes posit that the silencing, policing, and surveillance that Black girls experience in childhood sports are likely to continue as they grow into Black womanhood and pursue athletic careers in college and beyond (Foster, 2003; Harmon et al., 2012). The accounts that these Black girls shared mirror the racialized operation of power, oppression, and White supremacy that is visible in the athletic world writ large, particularly among highly successful Black women athletes (e.g., Althea Gibson, Mamie Johnson, Serena Williams), whose talents and abilities are questioned, scrutinized, or ignored (Douglas, 2005; Ifekwunigwe, 2018; Schultz, 2005; Spencer, 2004).

Invalidation by School Personnel

Irrespective of the sport and school student demographics, student-athletes shared the impression that Black girls in sports did not garner the same support, funding, or attention from adults as did boys' teams (Sites B, C, D & E). Per our participants, boys' team activities were broadcasted more frequently during announcements, and the allocation of school resources to sports teams had an apparent gender gap. One girl at Site C deplored the invisibility of girls' accomplishments in sports:

> Women's sports get no support moneywise, none at all. Our girls basketball team—amazing! They get trophies, they went to districts. They went so far this year. And [teachers] will announce, "Congratulations to the boys team, and the girls had a game last night," but they won't say if they won a trophy or anything. He won't recognize anything except football, or for basketball, just the guys. (Site C)

Students also noticed how some teachers offered more academic support and guidance to players on boys' teams compared with players on girls' teams. This perceived favoritism made the girls feel unimportant as students and as athletes. One student at Site D expressed her discomfort and disapproval about the ways in which players on girls' teams are treated:

> I feel that there are certain teachers that care only about the Black [male] athletes . . . teachers are really keen on, "Are you going to class? Are you doing this or are you doing that?" But they don't do the same thing for Black female athletes. Some of them might need it like the other Black boys do, but they don't take notice. They only care about the boys' football or basketball program. (Site D)

Additionally, school behavior policies were less likely to be enforced for male athletes, as highlighted by a student attending a predominantly Black school (Site B). She noted, "Mostly the male athletes get away with murder . . . they've gotten into fights and they don't get suspended. They barely come to school, but they get straight A's" (Site B). The girls' reflections regarding differential treatment of athletes by gender mirror recent comments made by Serena Williams regarding the ways in which professional tennis often perpetuates sexism by celebrating the "bad" behavior of male tennis players and punishing the "bad" behavior of female tennis players (Abad-Santos, 2018). The racialized and gendered operation of power in adolescent sports highlights the ways in which Black girls were rendered less than and unworthy of visibility and accolades.

These behaviors contributed to Black girls feeling underappreciated and rejected, even in an area of student life that is supposed to provide a respite from the stressors of the often hostile academic school environment. Receiving less moral and material support signals to the girls that their

endeavors hold diminished value in the eyes of school adults. Even in school districts with scant financial means, adults' personal investment and recognition of students' talents and dedication have the ability to offset budgetary constraints (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). This does not happen for the Black girls at these schools. While their Black male peers are celebrated for their athletic accomplishments, Black girls lack a space that they can call their own and instead "miss out on the many positive consequences of involvement in organized school sports as a learning and socialization context" (Pickett et al., 2012, p. 1599). They are not validated as student-athletes and thus exist in an undefined space that is constructed as illicit and marginal in the school. The need for a recognized space in which they can thrive makes CCSs all the more meaningful and necessary. Consistent with CRF literature, the racialized and gendered operation of power and oppression extends to *all* formal schooling spaces, including sports.

Black Girls in Relational Contexts

In a society where normative notions of girlhood and femininity are constructed along Eurocentric and patriarchal lines, Black girls are subject to behaviors and practices that ignore their Blackness (Collins, 2004). Yet Black girlhood, femininity, and performativity are "rooted in a matrix of raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized realities" (Esposito & Edwards, 2018, p. 96). For example, popular culture, television, film, and social media perpetuate the idea that fighting is an appropriate response to resolving conflicts among Black women/girls and that relationships between Black men and women are riddled with dysfunction (Edwards & Esposito, 2016; Esposito & Edwards, 2018). Waldron (2011) argues that these "popularized depictions have helped frame a public discourse about girls that suggests a rise in 'cattiness' among girls" (p. 1299), meanness toward each other, and being "overly emotional" and "dramatic" in relational contexts. In this study, girls discussed the challenges of navigating relationships with Black boys and among Black girls. Many of these challenges were rooted in perceived feelings of jealousy, resentment, judgment, or lack of respect. Black girls' responses to these situations challenged and sustained normative femininity ideologies.

Relationships Between Black Girls and Black Boys

Across CCSs, students reported strained relationships with Black boys. They identified romantic relationships, peer expectations, and experiences related to defending one's sexual reputation as contributing to ill feelings toward their male counterparts (Sites A, B, C, and D). For example, some girls voiced situations where Black boys spread rumors about them being sexually active and the anger and frustration that they felt as a result. A student at Site B recalled, "This boy was going around school telling people I

had sex with him [all] because I didn't like him." This not only speaks to the normality of the sexualization of Black girls' bodies but also speaks to how some Black boys have been socialized to perpetuate the misogynoir that is commonplace in society.

Other girls took issue with *who* Black boys were dating, especially if the girl was outside of their racial group (Sites C and D). One student tried to offer an unbiased perspective suggesting that girls "shouldn't fight over who's dating who . . . but we shouldn't exclude other races either" (Site C). At Site D, however, most of the girls voiced their disapproval of Black boys dating White girls and their opposition to interracial dating. One student expressed,

> I feel like it starts with us loving ourselves, especially the Black boys in our community loving Black women because they will go and love a white girl. They will go and love a white woman solely because it is easy to love a white woman. (Site D)

Another student added, "For Black men, it's easy because they can just easily get a white woman" (Site D). Although this assumption was shared by other girls in the CCS, one student explained that her opposition toward Black boys dating White girls had to do with historical and emotional pain. She argued,

> Black boys [are] always trying to date white girls. I think it kind of messes with our heads because white girls, whites in general, because everything we've been through, like slavery and all that stuff. They are so quick to leave us or cheat on us with a white girl and [I] think [that's] the reasons why Black girls and Black guys always get into it at our school. It's always *us* fighting with the Black boys. I think some of us are just bitter at the fact, rightful[ly] so. (Site D)

For her, this was the major cause of the rift between the Black girls and Black boys at her school. It became difficult for her and her peers to talk and interact with Black boys who deemed them "undateable." Another student at Site D pointed to the oppressive history shared between both groups, which in her eyes should be all the more reason to date Black girls. She reflected,

> And it's like for all this time, we've been through racism, slavery, oppression, segregation, we've only had each other's back this whole time. Like no other race of women would have a Black man's back like a Black woman does, that's from what I've seen. It's like really disappointing. (Site D)

In these instances, Black girls felt hurt, disappointed, and betrayed by Black boys choosing to date White girls instead of them. As these conversations suggest, their opposition to interracial dating was not "simply rooted in jealousy and anger towards white [girls], but is based on racism and what

interracial relationships represent to Black [girls] and signify about [their] worth'' (Childs, 2005, p. 544). These feelings resonated with other girls too, when it came to the expectations of how they were supposed to treat Black boys despite feeling invisible and unworthy. One student explained, Black girls are expected to "cook, twerk, [and] clean. We are supposed to know how to take care of him, his momma, and his sisters. We are supposed to be his mother and he is supposed to be out here doing whatever he wants to do" (Site D).

Students also pointed to the candid use of the n-word by their non-Black peers that led to uncomfortable interactions between Black girls and boys (Sites D and E). One student at Site E recalled, "They [non-Black students] say the n-word a lot." Her peer added, "If they skin not this color [pointing to herself], they're gonna say it" (Site E). Some girls felt disgruntled when the boys did not challenge non-White students who used the derogatory term. One student expressed,

> I feel strongly about white girls when they are so quick to say, "I just like Black boys," all this other stuff, [and] they use the n-word freely. They talk about Black people like it's nothing . . . and I just hate that. (Site D)

Another student questioned why the word was in their vocabulary and why White students felt compelled to use it. She added,

> Why are you so attached to this word? I understand you're white and I'm pretty sure you feel it in your bones a little racist, but you have no reason to use that word and it's not cute at all. (Site D)

Her peer noted that Black students are partially responsible for the usage of the term by their non-Black peers. However, she also indicated that it is Black students' responsibility to disrupt the normativity of its usage.

> I'm not going to 100 percent blame them [white students] for that because they are people. We use that word all the time, so they think they have a right to say that. "Well you're saying it so I could say it" [or] "my friends say that, then I could say that." So, I'm not going to 100 percent blame them, but at the same time I tell my people all the time, I don't care if you're with your little Chaldean [or] white friends, don't say that in front of me. (Site D)

Concerns about usage of the n-word by their non-Black peers illustrate the girls' awareness of the power of language and their willingness to advocate for higher standards among their peers.

Black girls' relationships with Black boys were not as tense at Site E. With few Black students at the school, the girls recalled experiences that were positive and family-like. One student noted, "It's only so many [Black boys] and you get close to them" (Site E). Her peer explained that

most of the Black students have lived in the same neighborhood and attended the same schools since the elementary grades. She stated, "When you get to be in a school for so long and you've been around [the same] Black boys for so long, you start to actually become family" (Site E). This idea of establishing a fictive kinship among Black boys and girls appeared comforting, despite the toxic and inhospitable school space (D. J. Carter, 2008). One student articulated their bond in these words:

> Like most of these [Black] boys here are family. Like most of us grew up together, [we] went to school together. We tend to cling to each other. Like if somebody had an issue, we would all be, like, sticking together. (Site E)

For these girls, developing and maintaining supportive relationships with Black boys helped them navigate the myriad issues and concerns they faced daily at school.

With the exception of Site E, Black girls' experiences suggest that their relationships with Black boys are rooted in conflicts that are in opposition to their personal beliefs, values, voice, and sense of agency. Black girls are bombarded with racialized and gendered messages of how to behave, interact, and communicate in school spaces (Esposito & Edwards, 2018; E. W. Morris, 2005, 2007; Waldron, 2011). Furthermore, they are vulnerable to adopting and consuming stereotypical, demeaning, and pejorative representations of ways of being that are often perpetuated by the media (Esposito & Edwards, 2018; Waldron, 2011). This does not mean that girls will not challenge, critically examine, or resist ideals that uphold heteronormative behaviors and qualities of femininity and girlhood. Rather, these representations, coupled with societal expectations and perceptions, leave Black girls to "navigate a [world] which misunderstands their gender performance without the support or opportunities they need to develop authentic definitions of self" (Esposito & Edwards, 2018, p. 87) or healthy relationships with others.

Relationships Among Black Girls

Within Black girl social groups, many students commented about the practice of "hating" (putting someone down or not recognizing someone's success or fortune), resulting from jealousy, bitterness, or anger (Site B, C, and D). Whether directly or indirectly involved in conflicts or misunderstandings, the sentiment is that "it is always someone hating on someone else all the time" (Site C). According to her peer,

> There's so much beef between us Black women, that we'd rather fight each other than come together to work things out . . . we can never just sit down and talk about our problems. Just 'cuz I don't like you doesn't mean I gotta be mean to you. I should have a reason

> not to like you, but the best thing is to come together and talk about our problems. (Site C)

Statements like these prompted robust conversations regarding the formation of cliques and how "rather than coming together as Black women or even women in general . . . we kind of just hate on one another" (Site C). Despite recognizing the need to "stick together" and "uplift each other," there was a consensus among the girls that "there's a lot of drama between Black girls" (Site B).

Although conflict among girls did not always result in physical altercations, fighting was a topic of discussion across CCSs. One student described an inhospitable environment at her school. She recalled, "I come here and everybody want to fight. Everybody acting out of their realm. I have to calm myself down. I got this one friend who wants to mess with me, so I gotta deal with her" (Site C). A student at Site A indicated that "personally, [she is] not into the fighting, but some girls, they make you come out your character." Her peer agreed, stating that despite exhortations from adults not to engage in physical altercations, it happens anyway.

> I feel like with drama, they [administrators, faculty, and staff] want us to not feed into it like they say. But at the end of the day, I know words ain't supposed to hurt you, but they do. And it's irritating 'cause females are emotional, so they gonna take stuff to heart. So when females arguing, yes they gonna go back and forth, but at the end of the day, they gonna fight. (Site A)

Another student added that "if they say something to you, she can say whatever she want to say, but as long as she don't put her hands on you, it doesn't go that far" (Site A). In these cases, students illustrated how nonphysical forms of violence can lead to physical actions and outcomes (Jackman, 2002; Waldron, 2011). However, some girls discussed avoiding the "messiness," "drama," and "fighting for no reason" (Site B). One student noted,

> There's a lot of he said-she said. People assume girls wanna fight over boyfriends. They expect you not to feed in it. As women, as girls, they expect us to just walk away, but sometimes it's hard if your momma ain't never taught you. If they say something from a distance, then I'm going to walk away. (Site A)

The CCSs revealed that Black girls recognize the significance and impact that subscribing to societal notions about Black girlhood and Black femininity has on their relationships with each other and their peers. Esposito and Edwards (2018) argue that "Black girls are bombarded with popular culture messages defining Black femininity along narrow notions of sex appeal, maintaining romantic relationships, and having the ability to fight" (p. 87).

This was especially true among girls who reported conflicts around these topics. Although most of the girls in the study acknowledged the need to support and uplift one another, they sometimes recalled a lack of social support and encouragement from one another and their peers. However, it can be difficult for Black girls to mediate relationships in a society that "condones violence and normalized racist, sexist, and heteronormative assumptions of femininity" (Esposito & Edwards, 2018, p. 102). The Black girls in this study handled conflicts to the best of their ability with the tools they had, which often left them feeling isolated and unaccepted. These findings suggest the need for CCSs where Black girls in K–12 settings can not only build healthy relationships with one another but also have the space to critically examine the racialized and gendered discourses that surround them and begin the healing process from these traumatic experiences (D. J. Carter, 2007; Esposito & Edwards, 2018).

Navigating the Impossibility: Necessary Support Structures for Black Girls

Despite their experiences with peers' negative attitudes and treatment toward them and adults' negative perceptions and lowered expectations of them, the Black girls in this study described relationships with adults in their schools who encouraged them to be their best selves and affirmed their racial and gender identities. Specifically, adults provided mentorship and motivation through othermothering practices (D. H. Butler, 2007; Collins, 2000; Guiffrida, 2005) and warm demander pedagogy (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Irvine, 2002, 2003; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Kleinfeld, 1975; Ware, 2006).

Black Women as Othermothers

Othermothering is a phenomenon in which non-blood-related women assume some parenting roles to support biological mothers and their children. A Black cultural practice that has roots in the African tradition and became essential in U.S. slavery and the Jim Crow era, othermothering is embodied in many Black women educators who go above and beyond providing formal educational opportunities to attending to students' emotional and psychological needs alongside academic needs (Collins, 1986, 2000). Much of the research on othermothering examines practices of Black women in higher education (Flowers, Scott, Riley, & Palmer, 2015; Guiffrida, 2005; Mawhinney, 2012). However, some studies look at ethic of care practice among K–12 Black women educators (Case, 1997; Henry, 1998; Mogadime, 2000). Several girls identified Black women in their schools as caring for them in ways that resemble kinship care. Their examples illuminated othermothering practices enacted in their schools. These characteristics were described by several girls across schools. When asked about her favorite teacher, one student stated,

> My favorite teacher is my choir teacher, Ms. J. She *gets in our busi-*
> *ness*; she's a big mom to everybody, and she *just wants the best for*
> *us*. Ms. S is another one of my favorite teachers, because *she keeps*
> *it real* with everybody. Kids don't like that *she's so blunt*, but she'll
> tell you. She'll tell me when I'm being stupid, but she'll also tell me
> when I'm doing the right thing. . . . Ms. M—she's like another mother
> figure. There's not a lot of Black women who work here [names
> three], but all of the Black girls gravitate to at least one of those,
> just because it's like a mothery thing, and because *they do look out*
> *for a lot of students* [italics added]. (Site C)

When asked the same question, a student at Site A stated that her ninth-
grade English teacher was her favorite teacher, because "she's real—she
don't ever sugarcoat nothing." Another student at Site A described Ms. M
as "very understanding. . . . she's like a mom. She takes us in." In these
reflections, girls highlight four traits exhibited by women in their school
that resemble behaviors of a mother/mother figure or close relative who
authentically cares about a child's success. The traits are (1) intentionally
prying in adolescents' personal lives, (2) seeking the best outcomes for stu-
dents, (3) being direct in how advice and reprimanding is given, and (4)
advocating for adolescents' well-being. This student-centered approach to
caring in the school context served to buffer the negative racialized and gen-
dered experiences the Black girls were having. Another student described
her long-standing relationship with Ms. H and the closeness that Ms. H
has achieved with the student and her mother:

> I've had [Ms. H] freshman year, sophomore year, and senior year. She
> always looks at me like a daughter. She is *always looking at my*
> *grades*. Like English 11, she checked my literary analysis paper and
> helped me work with that. She is just always there even if it's a class
> she doesn't teach. She still tries to help. Her and my mom are really
> close, so she is *always texting my mom*, like, "[student] is struggling
> with this, you need to help her at home." (Site D)

This reflection underscores the importance of teachers building authentic
relationships with Black girls early in their tenure in a school as a way to cul-
tivate and sustain their strong sense of self and academic success. Ms. H
enacts the othermothering practices of accountability and consistent com-
munication with this student and her mother by first checking the student's
grades and offering academic assistance. Given that it is not a course Ms. H
teaches, she goes above and beyond by also maintaining communication
with the biological mother to ensure that a similar level of accountability
and support is maintained in the home environment. Holding Black girls
to high standards of academic performance builds trust, authenticity, and
reciprocity in the adult-student relationship. These cornerstones are essential
to Black girls' school success. At Site E, multiple girls agreed that Ms. P was
someone who represented a mother figure. Although Ms. P did not return

for this school year, one student stated, "She was like my momma. She was like the momma of the school [other girls agreed]. She would see you lookin' down, and she'd be like 'what's wrong wit you?' . . . And she would give me a hug."

We were particularly struck by a story that one student shared at Site C regarding the caring and nurturing othermothering practices of Ms. B. This teacher went above and beyond to ensure the physical and mental health of a student, hence, strengthening the adult-student relationship:

> [Ms. B]'s not really a teacher, but this year has been really rough. I have really bad depression/anxiety, and at the time, I didn't have the right medications, and she was the one that was like, "Well, if you ever feel like you need to take control, to go to a hospital, tell me." And I trusted her enough to do that, and I didn't really know her. I only knew her for a few months. So I went to the hospital, and she dealt with all the stuff at school, and she was talking to my mom. I consider her one of my best friends at this school. I love her. (Site C)

Too often the mental health needs of Black girls go unnoticed and unaddressed. This lack of care has implications for personal well-being, a sense of wholeness, and academic engagement, and performance. The practices of women like Ms. B and others illuminate Black female educators' commitment to the survival and wholeness of Black girls as demonstrated through enhanced personal, educational, and socioeconomic stability in life. In this study, Black female educators provided holistic care for Black girls—care that extended beyond their educational or curricular needs (Case, 1997; Collins, 1986). Operating as a foundational component of the Black feminist standpoint, othermothering as demonstrated in this study allowed Black girls to manage the impossible expectation to be perfect and White.

Adults as Warm Demanders

Many of the girls described adults in their schools as motivating them to achieve at their highest potential. Despite experiencing lowered expectations by some adults and peers, Black girls also encountered warm demanders—adults who held high expectations for their potential and convinced them of their own brilliance. These adults also embodied an insistence approach (Ross, Bondy, & Hambacher, 2008) to their relationships with students. This insistence strategy represented a form of critical and authentic caring for these Black girls. In the CCS at Site C, several girls spoke highly of Mr. D's pedagogical style. Two girls' reflections captured the general sentiments of the group:

> Mr. D is also a firm believer. He really pushes his students and wants us to go to college.

> He will stay after if you need help with anything, and if you discuss with him why you couldn't do an assignment, he'll help you out. He has your back, and I like that. (Student 1)

> I love Mr. D, because he looked at me as more than just a student. I had times when I would doubt myself and I would give up on everything, but he really pushed me, and he believed in me when I didn't believe in myself, so I have respect for him. Anybody that can teach me more than they supposed to, automatically a go. (Student 2)

For these girls, Mr. D cultivated an affirming learning environment where they could see college as a viable pursuit, and their self-esteem was enhanced. As Student 2 stated, "respect" was established for Mr. D based on his ability to nurture the academic *and* personal development of Black girls. The girls also spoke highly of two female teachers, Ms. K and Ms. M. As one quotation illustrates below, these female adults embodied traits of warm demanding that have been previously mentioned:

> My favorite [teacher] would be Ms. K and Ms. M. Ms. K wants us to do our best, she talks to us about our college stuff. She's very concerned. One time in the beginning of the school year, she took us to the computer lab so that we could look at colleges. She wants us to do good. She gives us these long talks, she walks in with a good attitude, and she's like, "Good morning," and if nobody says anything, she says, "I *said* 'Good morning!'" She wants everybody to be in a good mood—she's just that light that I like. (Site C)

Across sites, girls described teachers who encouraged them to demonstrate academic persistence and fostered their educational success beyond high school. Part of being a warm demander includes building relationships deliberately, learning about students' cultures, communicating an expectation of success, insisting that students meet high expectations, providing learning supports, rewarding positive behavior, and communicating clear and consistent expectations (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Irvine & Fraser, 1998). While navigating the impossibility of being perfect and White, Black girls developed trusting and caring relationships with adults and were provided with tools for navigating the college process, personal challenges, and healthy identity development. This is further demonstrated by one student's comment regarding Ms. S at Site B: "I feel confident with her. She always pushes me to do better." The girls' reflections highlight the ways in which some adults in these racialized and gendered learning environments provided love, advocacy, comfort, and support to Black girls that extended beyond their official duties. These warm demanders embodied practices that resembled cultural responsiveness and attended to the specific needs of fostering healthy identities for these Black girls.

Discussion

Based on the individual and collective narratives shared in the CCSs, high school–aged Black girls described toxic racialized and gendered experiences with adults and peers in their schools. These occurrences happened in both academic and extracurricular spaces. The girls were not immune from having their ways of being and knowing challenged and dismissed in environments where their identities and epistemologies should have been affirmed and valued.

Under the guise of neutrality, racialized and gendered systems of power play a substantive role in the enactment of cultural deficit practices and policies that contribute to the marginalization and racialization of Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Many of the experiences that Black girls shared in the CCSs evidenced the double standards about appropriate behaviors and White-normed constructions of femininity to which they were being held. In this way, the status quo connecting perfection and whiteness was upheld in school spaces, and Black girls were forced to contend with it. Upholding the status quo manifested as policing Black girls' bodies through inconsistent dress code enforcement by adults. Furthermore, there was little safeguarding of Black girls who reported the dismissal of their complaints regarding sexual harassment. When Black girls spoke against verbal and physical harassment by their peers, whether racial or sexual, they were ignored. The girls in the CCSs were expected to handle these incidents on their own but were punished when they retaliated. Overlooking transgressions against Black girls reifies the intersectional oppression outlined in Crenshaw (1989): When fighting injustices committed based on race, gender, or both, Black girls run the risk of having their claims nullified by the corresponding authorities. At all the sites, Black girls were subject to lowered academic and unreasonably high behavioral expectations by teachers and other adults in their schools. These girls were beholden to the impossibility of conforming to and embodying White cultural norms in academic and extracurricular spaces. Their intellect was called into question in academic arenas, and their athletic ability and accomplishments were marginalized. The White supremacist and patriarchal logics that undergird U.S. sociopolitical life were evident and operating across the five sites in ways that dehumanized Black girls' bodies and limited the enactment of Black girl authentic identities. The narratives that these Black girls shared in the CCSs underscore the Black feminist standpoint that Black girls and women embody epistemological currency that should be integrated into their schooling.

Findings from this research have the potential to deepen our understanding of how to meet the academic, social, and identity needs of Black girls in school and to develop and implement educational policies that affirm Black girls' full selves in learning contexts. By fully comprehending the racialized and gendered schooling experiences of Black girls from *their* perspectives, we empower them to have a voice in not only illuminating macro-

and microlevel challenges they face in school but also as alternatives to remediating these issues. In this study, Black girls' schooling experiences were racialized and gendered in ways that manifest symbolic, epistemic, and physical violence in classroom, social, and extracurricular spaces. Peer-to-peer relationships are compromised, and adult-student relationships are often problematic. However, the CCSs allowed for Black girl narratives to be individually and collectively shared in liberatory and healing ways. While research has explored the concept of sister circles on college campuses (see Croom, Beatty, Acker, & Butler, 2017), the literature is virtually silent on sister circles as a CCS in K–12 settings and how it can serve as an identity-affirming counterspace (D. J. Carter, 2007) for Black girls. We argue that these CCSs represent a type of sister circle where fictive kin networks and emotional healing can take place for Black girls. Similar to Black women on college campuses, K–12 Black girls need their educational spaces to cultivate community with same-race, same-gender peers. These spaces should center naming, unpacking, and addressing aspects of oppression that they face *within the school context*, such as sexism, heterosexism, patriarchy, and homophobia. In CCSs, Black girls are able to share their unique and collective racialized and gendered schooling experiences in the context of the prevailing presence of anti-Blackness and misogynoir in schools and society. These spaces can provide emotional support that is often lacking for Black girls within the larger school structure. We posit that this type of space must be institutionalized as part of the explicit school curriculum. Otherwise, narratives (individual and collective) and lived experiences like those shared in this study will only be heard in research settings.

Black women have and continue to develop spaces where Black girls can freely express their thoughts, ideas, hopes, challenges, dreams, and desires. For example, in collaboration with Black girls and women, Ruth Nicole Brown conceptualized and implemented *Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths* (SOLHOT) as "a space to envision Black girlhood critically among and with Black girls" (Brown, 2013, p. 1). The development of curriculum, programs, and organizations focused on the overall well-being of Black girls requires commitment and intentionality. We recognize that it is not enough to have Black women creating and facilitating CCSs for and with Black girls. We must also ensure that these spaces do not reinforce White supremacist logics and dangerous respectability politics that shame some Black girls and uplift others. These spaces must operate as refuge for *all* Black girls as they individually and collectively share, examine, and make sense of their racialized and gendered experiences in and outside of school. Although SOLHOT, with Girls for Gender Equity, Sisters in Strength Youth Organizers, and similar types of programs and organizations often operate primarily outside formal educational spaces, there are Black women educators doing this work inside school spaces. Nyachae (2016) critically examined the *Sisters of Promise* curriculum that she and three other

Black women educators created for Black girls at the middle school where they worked. Nyachae highlights the contradictions that emerged through reflection on the curriculum in theory and practice. She states,

> As Black women teachers, our aim was to improve the schooling experiences of our Black girls and to empower them, but we were faced with the stark reality that these girls had to survive within an individualistic, disciplinary, White school culture, and so did we. (Nyachae, 2016, p. 800)

Even as Black Girl Cartographers (T. T. Butler, 2018), we faced challenges as we conducted this research. The Black girls who participated in the CCSs demonstrated needs that we struggled to reconcile with our researcher identities. At several sites, the girls wanted us to weigh in on the matters they were discussing, answer their questions about people and experiences they described, talk about ourselves, and return for follow-up sessions. The uncertainty about the prospects of arranging a second visit to any of the sites troubled us. It hardly felt like a humanizing endeavor to open up such personal CCSs and not sustain the growth, self-reflection, and sisterhood building that the girls desired. We maintain that continuity is indispensable in forging spaces that promote critical consciousness but remain comfortable for Black girls. For this reason, school contexts should seek to make CCSs be a normative part of the school day.

Future research and practice focused on Black girls' schooling experiences should be interdisciplinary. In this study, we drew on conceptual and theoretical frameworks and scholarship from education, sociology, gender studies, and philosophy to critically examine Black girls' experiences navigating the impossibility of being perfect and White. This aspiration has never been theirs; yet they are held to such standards. Black girls are multidimensional and multifaceted; hence, an intersectional approach to studying issues they confront as well as identifying interventions for meeting their academic and social needs requires intersectional analyses. Like all of us, Black girls embody "potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). Educator pedagogy and practice should also draw from varied disciplinary theories and frameworks for developing instruction and school policy that affirms and integrates Black girls' whole selves into the learning experience. As long as Black girls contend with society's perpetuation of perfection and femininity as an embodiment of whiteness, schools will not be a place where they can practice epistemic or identity agency, and simply *be* while learning.

Note

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