BLACK ALUMNAE PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY AND INTERACTIONS:

THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE AND GENDER IN ALL-GIRLS SCHOOLS

by

Alexandra Rahshel Channell

Bachelor of Science, 2011
Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

Master of Education, 2017
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

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Dissertation approved:

Dr. Erin Atwood

Major Professor

Dr. Taryn Allen, Dr. Miriam Ezzani, Dr. Jo Beth Jimerson

For the College of Education

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Abstract

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by
Alexandra Rahshel Channell

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Texas Christian University

Erin Atwood, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership

Using Intersectionality as a critical framework, this qualitative study analyzes the perspectives of Black alumnae who graduated from all-girls schools in order to better understand the influence of single-sex schooling on race and gender identity development. Further, this study explores the role of gendered education on cross-racial and cross-gendered interactions. Findings contribute to the literature surrounding the experiences of Black girls in schools and specifically address their unique experiences in all-girls settings. This study offers implications for practice and future research to further support the holistic development of Black students.

Keywords: Black girls, intersectionality, all-girls schools, race, gender

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"I don't know how to interact with White people." These words clotheslined me as I walked past the Black, senior student who was conversing with a peer in the hallway. "What do you mean by that?" I inquired, politely. Ebony expressed that she felt comfortable engaging with White adults, particularly white women, but experienced difficulty when interacting with White peers her own age. My mind reeled as I recalled the fully-funded cultural performances, the mediated conversations about race, the culturally-relevant summer readings, meetings with diverse prominent female figures, the mentorship opportunities, and the college visits that she had been exposed to throughout her tenure in secondary school. A swift feeling of denial drowned in the guilt of hearing a Black, female, student admit that she experienced a level of discomfort when interacting with her White peers. Ebony's all-girls school promoted student empowerment and leadership for success in both college and in life; but as a Black girl on the verge of graduating, Ebony's statement not only challenged the efficacy of the school's mission but also provoked questions regarding the broader experience of Black students in all-girls schools.

Single-sex environments were encouraged by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) as a form of innovative experimentation to improve outcomes for students of color (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). Single-sex schools that serve girls are often promoted as a vehicle for equalizing the academic playing field, primarily by emphasizing Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), fields in which women are often underrepresented (Goodkind, 2013). Correspondingly, Ebony's school website illustrates support for STEM education and highlights the admittance of underserved students. Even so, oppressive systems

and structures often interrupt the practical application and positive impact of many well-intended interventions (Allen et al., 2018).

Ebony, like many Black and Brown students across the nation, has shared few classes with White classmates in her secondary school. This is due, in part, to the aftermath of racial segregation in the United States that continues to pervade American public schools. Historically, Black students are more likely to attend school with Black and/or Hispanic/Latinx peers than with White peers, which consequently may result in racial isolation and infrequent exposure to White students (Orfield et al., 2016). Limited interaction between White and Black students in schools may adversely affect future interracial relationships as students develop their social identities and move into adulthood (Babbitt, 2013), and may contribute to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and prejudice (Cooley et al., 2019). While White students may be able to successfully evade interactions with Black students and assume little penalty, Black students are often expected and required to navigate predominantly White spaces for societal inclusion (Anderson, 2015). Even schools that serve mostly African American students often adhere to White heteronormative policies and curricula that marginalize Black students, especially Black girls (Anderson & Ritter, 2020; Bottiani et al., 2016; Haynes et al., 2016; Morris, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

Black girls' experiences in schools differ from those of both White girls and Black boys. Black girls exist at the unique intersection of race and gender where they experience marginalization from both being Black and being female (Babbitt, 2013; Collins, 2000, 2015; Morris, 2007; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). Secondary schools serve as a nucleus for perpetuating inequitable treatment of Black girls, promoting their invisibility and hypervisibility by removing them from narratives in the classroom, and by implementing school policies that target characteristic features of many Black girls related to gender identity, clothing, and hair

styles (Haynes et al., 2016; Morris, 2016). The lack of diversity within the teaching profession (as the American teaching force is predominately White) means fewer mentors who share racial and ethnic similarities to contribute to students' cultural identity development (Letendre & Rozas, 2015). Researchers have found that Black girls are often over-disciplined and undereducated as a result of institutionalized and interpersonal racism and oppression that permeates many school districts and classrooms (Ispa-Landa, 2017; Martin & Smith, 2017; Paul & Araneo, 2019). Some educators, knowingly or unknowingly, fear Black girls due to differences in cultures, leading to lower expectations or undue consequences due to misunderstood interactions (Morris, 2016). Cultural mismatch between teachers' perceptions of gender/ethnic norms and students' behaviors and performance leads to a lack of exposure to diverse experiences for students of color (Francis, 2012; Ipsa-Landa, 2017) impeding educational progress for Black girls in schools and in larger society. This lack of exposure may contribute to inexperience in dealing with people from culturally diverse settings (Ipsa-Landa, 2017). Dearth of diversity in cultural representation also extends to the curriculum, where textbooks often neglect to highlight racial, gender, and sexual orientation diversity. When diversity is present, the representations of girls of color commonly perpetuate biases and stereotypes that contribute to negative self-perceptions and skewed interpretations of others (Deckman et al., 2018).

The collective experience of Black girls as they progress through elementary and secondary school influences how they develop and internalize their sense of self and the entirety of their identity (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). This further impacts their short and long-term decisions, future achievement, and how they come to view themselves and their race in the context of larger society (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Bottiani at al., 2016; Hope et al., 2015; Ipsa-Landa & Conwell, 2015). Girls of color need opportunities to affirm their experiences and learn about tools that may help them maneuver diverse spaces. Educators are

able to empower girls of color by providing opportunities for them to challenge stereotypes and create counter-narratives that oppose the negative stereotypes they often internalize (Garcia & Scott, 2016). Every educator has the responsibility of recognizing the factors that influence identity development in order to help students develop positive and healthy identities. This coupled with an understanding of cultural development enables schools to better understand, teach and support the whole child. As our schools and nation become more diverse, it is imperative for educators to adjust and ensure they are implementing culturally responsive practices and preparing students to be successful in a multicultural society (Ford & Whiting, 2008).

Research Purpose and Research Questions

For centuries, Black girls' schooling experiences have reinforced the messaging that they have lower intelligence and less value than their White peers (Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005); and as Black girls grow into Black women, they experience higher rates of unemployment, lower wages, poverty, reduced access to healthcare, and higher incarceration rates than White women (Brewer, 1999; DuMonthier et al., 2017). Research shows that the societal devaluing of Black women begins with Black girls in schools. If we want to advance as a society, we must care about the education of Black women, which starts with supporting the unique experiences of Black girls in schools and the lasting impact these experiences have on their identity formation. Black women are not valued by society, and research shows us that this is reflected in schools. Black girls face marginalization resulting in disproportionate discipline, lack of access to quality teaching and culturally responsive curriculum, and oppressive school policies. Existing literature identifies the impact of high and low-performing private schools, charter schools, and traditional public-schools on Black girls' racial and gender identity development. However, a dearth of literature exists on the experiences of Black girls in single-sex public schools. This study

attempts to bridge this gap in the literature by focusing specifically on the perspectives of Black girls who graduated from all-girls schools and how their educational experiences influenced the development of their race and gender identities. Further, this study investigates the influence of single-sex schooling on Black girls' perceptions of cross-racial and cross-gendered interactions. This research is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Black girls from single-sex schools perceive their identity in terms of race and gender?
2. How do Black girls from single-sex schools perceive their interactions with people who have different racial and gendered identities?

Significance of the Problem

The glaring inequities for Black girls in public schools indicate a dire need for active and intentional intercession on their behalf. Appropriate actions and interventions require an awareness of Black girls' experiences and an understanding that they are not monolithic (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). This begins with recognizing the challenges and barriers that Black girls face (Gibson & Decker, 2019), as well as more extensive knowledge on how some Black girls thrive in their respective school settings (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Discerning the diverse and unique needs and experiences of Black girls can be best learned by listening to the voices of Black girls as they share their personal stories. Research contributing to this knowledge-base will allow for more comprehensive prevention and interventions that can create more positive and inclusive school cultures and climates and contribute to increased academic achievement and social aptitude for all students, especially Black girls.

We live in a rich and multicultural society (Easton-Brooks et al., 2018) due to the diverse intersections of race, ethnicity, national origin, language, gender, social class, sexual orientation, faith, and ableness as described by Terrell et al. (2018). As the number of single sex schools in

our country continues to grow, it is imperative that educators stay informed and are equipped with greater insight to support the unique experiences of the Black girls they serve. Educators' daily interactions with students inevitably play a role in the holistic development of their cultures and identities (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). Thus, school leaders have an opportunity and responsibility to utilize their programming to empower Black girls and help interrupt their institutional oppression within education systems. It is critical to remain aware of these intersections in single-sex school settings, particularly as they relate to Black girls who live at the junction of multiple sources of marginalization. If students have a positive academic identity and believe in their abilities, they are more likely to experience academic success. It is also imperative to help young women develop competence in engaging with people who are different from them and who have diverse worldviews (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2013). It is through creating and sustaining an inclusive school culture that leaders can contribute to the positive culture and identity development of Black girls, improving the trajectories of their futures as they move into adulthood, ultimately creating a stronger society. Discerning the diverse and unique needs and experiences of Black girls' can be achieved by listening to the voices of Black girls and learning from their personal stories. This contributes to a larger aim of addressing "real issues" of ending oppression and racism and moving toward equality for all (Collins, 1996).

Use of Terms

Although the racial labels of African American and Black have a controversial history linked to racism in the United States, in modern society they are often used interchangeably (Hall et al, 2015; Morris 2016). For the purposes of this study, I will intentionally use "Black" as a term of inclusivity to encompass people who identify as African American, as well as people who identify with the same racial group but who have citizenship and/or ancestral ties to other

countries (Mapedzahama & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017; Morris, 2016). By using the term "Black," I do not attempt to suggest commonality in terms of ethnicity or culture of people who share a brown or black complexion; yet, I do acknowledge their collective experience of being problematically and inappropriately grouped and marginalized by American systems (Agyemang et al., 2005).

Similarly, Hispanic and Latinx are commonly used in the United States and have historical conception rooted in the government's aim for racial identification through the U.S. Census (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). Latinx has emerged more recently and most commonly in higher education settings as a term to remove the binary gender association from the Latin American social identity; but this term is not used consistently in Latin American communities (Salinas, 2020; Salinas & Lozano, 2019). Some persons of Latin American ancestry choose to identify as Hispanic (Trujillo-Pagán, 2018). Given these varied perceptions, I will use the term Hispanic/Latinx.

When reporting my findings, I will use whichever terms respondents use in direct quotes and to self-identify. In order to offer a more comprehensive understanding of this study, it is important that I offer some context regarding the major themes present in this research. The next chapter will provide a synthesis of literature relevant to my research questions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Black women and girls in the United States often assume multiple marginalized identities situated within race, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality, among others (Collins, 2000, 2015; Harrison, 2017; Morris, 2007; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). This multifaceted positionality becomes even more complex when investigating their experiences within societal institutions, such as schools (Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). Children spend an average of seven hours per day in school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008) interacting with educators, school policies, peers and curriculum; and the quality of these interactions shape how students grow to understand their cultures and form their identities (Brotman & Mensah, 2013). Although schools serve as key agents in the socialization of students (Del Toro & Wang, 2020; Hope et al., 2015), minimal research investigates the race and gender socialization of Black girls that occurs in school, especially when they are situated within gendered contexts (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018). This study attempts to bridge the gap in literature surrounding the experiences of Black girls in single-sex public schools by focusing specifically on the influence of single-sex education on Black girls' race and gender identities. Further, this study explores the influence of single-sex schooling on Black girls' cross-racial and cross-gendered interactions. The following questions guide this research:

1. How do Black girls from single-sex schools perceive their identity in terms of race and gender?
2. How do Black girls from single-sex schools perceive their interactions with people who have different racial and gendered identities?

Answers to these questions will provide educators with greater insight into how to support positive identity development for Black girls and increase cross-cultural competence for Black

girls in their interactions with others. In order to address these questions, it is important to unpack the different components embedded within these questions. First, it is integral to explore identity as an aspect of one's culture. Next, it is imperative to understand the experiences of a majority of Black girls in schools, and the specific ways in which schools often fail to serve Black girls. Then, it is important to discuss prominent ways schools can and do support Black girls. In the next sections, I will review the literature pertinent to these areas.

Defining Culture and Identity

In order for educators to be intentional about supporting the culture and identity formation of Black girls they must be aware of how the terms "culture" and "identity" are commonly used, the nuances in their respective definitions based on the contexts in which they are used, and the meanings that are most relevant to the field of education (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Culture

The meaning of "culture" has changed across time and contexts (Eisenhart, 2001) and continues to differ between individuals due to variance in lived experiences and beliefs (Tillman, 2002). Matusov and Marjanovic-Shane (2017) propose that culture includes relatively stable patterns of symbolic expressions and practices that guide people through their daily lives. Some definitions of culture describe the experiences of individuals, and others express culture as shared among a group (Tillman, 2002). A group's culture includes thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, codes and experiences that serve as a foundation for ideas, and influence how groups of people experience, interpret and interact with the world (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Tillman, 2002). Members of a particular culture (often referred to as insiders) typically standardize their cultural beliefs and values as normal and because of this, sometimes view themselves as having no culture. In this same vein, people outside of a culture (commonly known as outsiders) may view

another's values or beliefs as unusual, and may instead label this observed difference as "culture" (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016).

Ladson-Billings (2006) found that the terms "culture" and "race" are often used interchangeably within discourse in the United States. This erroneously labels people of color as the "other" and minimizes the inherent diversity situated within culture. When this type of language is used in educational settings toward students, it serves to diminish their cultural identity. Educators seeking to validate the cultural development of students need to consider the definition proposed by Terrell et al. (2018), who describe culture as the intersection between race, ethnicity, national origin, language, gender, social class, sexual orientation, faith, and ableness. This definition not only provides explicit descriptors, but also illustrates that students may have multiple intersecting cultures that interact and influence each other (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Educators who remain cognizant of the cultures that comprise the fabric of students' lives are able to address the individual needs of students based on their unique cultural intersections. This understanding is closely linked to knowledge about identity development.

Identity

A student's cultural development contributes to identity formation by laying the foundation for which identity is constructed (Cardwell et al., 2020; Nagel, 1994). Identity is an ideological form of culture (Eisenhart, 2001), with one's conception of identity reflecting cultural self-perception. Ireland et al. (2018) define identity as "a person's internal and evolving sense of self (both as an individual and as a member of various social groups)" (p.230). Identity construction is flexible, encompassing both actions and feelings (Carlone & Johnson, 2007). People generally develop multiple identities, including racial/ethnic identities, social identities and academic identities, that are influenced by the intersection of multiple factors (e.g. race and

gender) and how they interact to form a person's sense of self (Bowe et al., 2017; Ireland et al., 2018). Both culture and identity share the properties of nonlinearity and fluidity and hinge on the intersections of race, ethnicity, national origin, language, gender, social class, sexual orientation, faith, and ableness which shapes the way students perceive themselves and engage with the world at any given time (Brotman & Mensah, 2013; Higgins, 2010; Maticka-Tyndale, 2014; Terrell et al., 2018). This study will focus specifically on the intersections of race and gender for Black girls.

While families influence much of children's identity development, especially for girls (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015), many other external factors also play a role. Membership to an oppressed group influences how people are viewed and treated by the larger society, which contributes to identity development (Ireland et al., 2018). Mass media often promotes stereotypes that become ingrained in popular culture; and regardless of whether these stereotypes are positive or negative, they are often internalized, influencing how youth shape and develop their own identities (Eisenhart, 2001). In many cases, deleterious effects on children's identity development stem from negative messaging attributed to certain races (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012) national origins (Banks,1998), and/or socioeconomic statuses (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017). The misconception that racial similarities indicate shared identities also proves problematic for children who are trying to navigate multiracial and multicultural identities (Berry, 2010; Chang, 2014).

Interplay of Culture and Identity in Schools

While the general consensus is that culture and education inform each other (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2016) society has varying ideas on the role of schools in influencing the culture and identity formation of students. One popular opinion regarding schools in the United States is that they serve to foster American culture and create law-abiding citizens who are

functioning members of society inculcated with American ideals (Stevens, 2008). However, as schools are becoming more diverse and complex, school leaders must remain aware of the different personal and professional beliefs, backgrounds and experiences teachers, students, families, and stakeholders bring to the school community (Eisenhart, 2001). It is imperative for educators to be vigilant in recognizing their own cultural positionality and the effects of cultural and political hegemony on students and be intentional about valuing the cultures of all of their students and their families (Tillman, 2002). Many schools are guilty of either intentionally or unintentionally treating one culture or identity membership as dominant and correct, which negatively influences the culture and identity development of students who are not part of this dominant group. This can also create challenges when addressing a common definition of culture and embracing cultural diversity on school campuses (Harris, 2018). Educators must remain aware of the implicit and explicit messages they send to their students and the long-term effects that they impart on students' self-perceptions. Positive messaging about cultural heritage is linked to a positive racial identity, self-esteem and academic achievement (Bowe et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2012); and school leaders who are intentional about creating environments that foster healthy culture and identity development can positively impact the trajectory of students' lives (Ireland et al. 2018). Unfortunately, however, Black girls are often denied this dignity. The next section will provide an overview of the inequitable treatment of Black women in the United States and highlight the oppressive experience of Black girls in schools.

Oppression of Black Girls in Secondary Schools

Black women remain the lowest educated group among men and women of all other races, despite considerable improvement in their levels of educational attainment in the past decade (DuMonthier et al., 2017). Remnants of systemic racism and oppression continue to manifest in perilous ways, such as, reduced access to health care, lower wages, and higher

incidences of poverty and incarceration in comparison to White women and women of most other races (Carson, 2018; DuMonthier et al., 2017). Black women are often the target of negative stereotypes which breed stigmatization and discrimination (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016). When discrimination emerges within the workplace, it causes stressors that contribute to poorer overall health and limits opportunities for Black women to advance (Paradies et al., 2015), resulting in professional stagnation (Showers, 2015) and ultimately perpetuating a vicious cycle.

While societal structures in the United States have consistently failed to equitably serve Black women (DuMonthier et al., 2017), the prevalence of inequities Black women experience begins in adolescence. Black girls in the United States are often sexualized, treated like women, and robbed of their childhoods, providing the illusion that they are equal in status to adults (Morris, 2016). Rather than protect students from it, schools often perpetuate the racism and discrimination Black girls experience (Neal-Jackson, 2018), which inevitably stifles their educational attainment and long-term success. Literature identifies three prominent ways in which schools fail to adequately serve Black girls: disproportionate discipline, cultural mismatch, and inadequate curriculum and teaching.

Disproportionate Discipline

Many K-12 schools utilize referrals as a part of the disciplinary system. However, data suggest that these referrals are utilized inequitably. As part of their profession, teachers are generally afforded the autonomy to choose how they respond to a student's misbehavior. Internalized stereotypes and personal biases influence the discipline that students receive (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014), teachers issue referrals for Black students more frequently than for their grade level peers; and the number of referrals Black students receive is commonly disproportionate to the racial composition of the schools' Black student population (Monroe, 2005).

Regardless of the actual behaviors of students, there is a general assumption that Black students require more stringent rules and regulations and therefore more restrictive forms of punitive punishment (Skiba et al., 2014). Black students generally receive punishments for minor offenses or receive harsher punishments than White students for the same offenses (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015; Monroe, 2005). Further, White students commonly receive disciplinary referrals for objective offenses, such as possession of an illegal substance, whereas Black students are referred for subjective offenses, such as disrespect (Gregory et al., 2010). These referrals contribute to the higher suspension and expulsion rates for Black students in comparison to students of other races. The loss of class time due to disciplinary absences causes students to experience difficulty or fall behind, decreasing students' investment in school, and increasing the chances of misbehavior if they return to class (Gregory et al., 2010; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015). Suspended students typically receive additional suspensions, which precipitate dropping out and juvenile delinquency (Skiba et al., 2014).

While the disciplinary disparities for Black students necessitate attention in literature, the grouping of Black girls and Black boys in these disciplinary statistics ignores the unique experiences of Black girls that result from the intersection of their race and gender (Morris, 2016). Black boys often experience higher rates of disciplinary incidents which overshadow the wider and more disparate gaps in the discipline Black girls receive (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Morris, 2016). It is imperative to look beyond the statistics of all Black students and isolate the experiences of Black girls. In a study by Morris and Perry (2017), Black boys were twice as likely to receive a disciplinary referral when compared to White boys, but Black girls were three times as likely to receive a disciplinary referral in comparison to White girls. Teacher expectations and perceptions of Black girls are often lower than girls of other racial/ethnic groups (Francis, 2012), which contributes to the higher incidences of disciplinary

action (Gregory et al., 2010). Black girls have the highest rate of out-of-school suspension in comparison to girls of other races (Office for Civil Rights, 2014) and receive a disproportionate number of suspensions and expulsions in relation to school demographics (Paul & Araneo, 2019). While rates of arrest and detention are decreasing for boys, they are increasing for girls; and given the subpar educational access in juvenile delinquency facilities, Black girls are being left behind (Morris, 2017). Absences resulting from punitive and exclusionary discipline create barriers for Black girls' attainment of academic instruction leading to long-term disadvantages (Davis et al., 2019; Skiba et al., 2014).

Cultural Mismatch

Several researchers attribute the disparities in discipline to a cultural mismatch between the teacher and the student, suggesting that the teacher's culture is disconnected from the student's culture (Carothers et al., 2019; Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Swain-Bradway et al., 2014). Nearly 80% of the teaching force is composed of White women, and this majority has remained relatively stagnant over the past decade (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008). Some students have identified White teachers who employ detrimental practices that preserve Eurocentric, middle-class values as the dominant ideology, mitigating the diverse culture and experiences of Black girls (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). Though these biased enactments are often unintentional, their impact is no less harmful toward Black girls (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Francis, 2012; Hyland, 2005).

Varying cultural norms, and differences in behavior and communication leave space for misunderstandings and misinterpretations during interactions between teachers and students (Dray & Wisneski, 2011). For example, Black girls who are talking loudly may be perceived as aggressive, defiant, or unfeminine, thereby inviting reproach from teachers and redirection

aligned to the teachers' beliefs about appropriate cultural behaviors (Morris, 2007); and stigmatization from teachers may incite resistance from students, leading to additional negative consequences (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2015). Consequently, teachers may give more attention to social assimilation rather than academic achievement of Black girls (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). This is troublesome as it proposes that Black girls must abort their organic selves in exchange for the majority culture in order to achieve social or academic success (Ricks, 2014).

Cultural mismatch contributes to low academic expectations for Black girls (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rollock, 2007); and teachers with low academic expectations of Black girls are less likely to recommend them for college-level courses (Campbell, 2012). According to CollegeBoard (2014), Black students with the same levels of readiness as their peers are excluded from Advanced Placement courses. Black students are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and math courses (Ireland et. al, 2018) and overrepresented in Special Education for learning and behavioral disabilities (Harry & Anderson, 1994). These factors limit access to college preparatory content which reduces competitiveness for college acceptance and decimates the number of Black girls in higher education (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Skiba et al., 2006). Thus, cultural mismatch impedes educational progress for Black girls in schools.

Inadequate Curriculum & Teaching

In addition to cultural mismatch, a lack of culturally responsive curriculum is another hindrance Black girls face in schools. Much of the curriculum in public schools is racist and sexist (Nyachae, 2016). Textbooks often highlight only institutionalized Eurocentric views and values, marginalizing students who do not identify in the same way, often neglecting to include diversity in race, gender, and sexual orientation (Deckman et al., 2018; Sirkel, 2002). On the rare occasions when diversity in curriculum is present, the representations of girls of color commonly

perpetuate biases and stereotypes that contribute to negative self-perceptions and skewed interpretations of others (Deckman et al., 2018). The dearth of curricula communicating Black experiences and Black contributions to society leads to decreased self-knowledge and self-confidence for Black students (Mazama, 2016). Despite research that supports the benefits of learning African American History, the content is lacking in many classrooms (Boutte & Strickland, 2008). This degrades positive identity development for Black girls.

Additionally, teachers often lack adequate preparation to teach culturally relevant content. Few teacher preparation and education programs require courses rooted in cultural responsiveness, multicultural education or issues of diversity (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Further, due to difficulties associated with staffing urban schools that often serve students of color, Black girls in these settings typically have less qualified teachers than their suburban, advantaged peers (Jacob, 2007). Due to the systemic neglect of Black girls' experiences regarding inclusive curriculum, responsive teacher preparation, and quality staffing, even teachers with high expectations and good intentions may not be prepared to adequately serve Black girls.

Although it is important to identify the oppressive and inequitable systems that frame Black girls' experiences within the education system, in order to interrupt them, it is equally as important to highlight and acknowledge educational strategies that promote Black girls' success and excellence (Ladson-Billings, 2014). The next section will discuss the literature on supporting Black girls in schools.

Supporting Black Girls in Secondary Schools

Literature suggests myriad ways that schools can function to best elevate and support the academic, social, and emotional development of Black girls. Much like the intersecting identities of Black girls, when considering academic, social, and emotional support, the methods are inextricably linked. Modern literature references several ways school leaders can influence the

positive development of students, which align to positive support for Black girls. The next section will outline three practices that are frequently cited in literature and prove most relevant to my research: culturally relevant education, building relationships and mentorship, and all-girls schooling.

Culturally Relevant Education

Several studies (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Kang et al., 2019; Sax et al., 2013; Welton & Martinez, 2013) have found that students of color perform better with culturally relevant social and pedagogical supports. Culturally relevant education refers to curriculum and pedagogy that is rooted in social justice and social change (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Culturally relevant pedagogy, originally coined by Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014), includes three components (a) academic success; (b) cultural competence; and (c) sociopolitical consciousness. This includes an enduring understanding of educational topics taught, understanding of one's own cultures in addition to fluency of at least one other culture, and preparation to contribute knowledge learned to the real-world and greater good of society. She asserts that this pedagogy, also commonly referred to as culturally sustaining pedagogy, requires continual evolution to meet the varied, complex, and changing demands of underserved students, particularly students of color. While minimal research focuses on supporting Black girls, specifically, teachers who provide opportunities for collaborative learning, affirmations, and avoidance of shaming contribute to positive outcomes for Black girls (Joseph et al., 2019). Culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy recognizes and responds to ethnic and cultural diversity by incorporating the elements of sociocultural awareness, communication, caring and affirming views, agency for educational change, construction of learning communities, knowledge of experiences and perspectives, understanding of teaching and learning, and rigorous lessons all relevant to culturally and ethnically diverse students (Acquah et al., 2020; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas,

2002; Walter, 2018). One avenue by which this is achieved is through the curriculum that is taught.

Curriculum

Educators are responsible for selecting curricula that represent multiple cultures and varied narratives within cultures, without emphasizing one over any others (Puzio et al., 2017; Tillman 2002). Stories of resilience and endurance from the past can provide students with inspiration, appreciation and hope, and provide engagement and empowerment through minimizing ignorance (Van Wormer et al., 2013). Teaching culturally-relevant content and curriculum leads to increased engagement and achievement of Black students (Bonner, 2009; Boutte et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2017; Skiba et al. 2011). Aronson and Laughter (2016) reinforce the importance and viability of incorporating culturally responsive education in the curriculum of all content areas; and Ford et al. (2018) suggest that providing culturally responsive support for Black girls in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and advanced placement courses prepares them for increased engagement in the world economy and labor force. Teaching culturally-relevant curricular content that communicates positive messaging about Black girls helps interrupt traditional gender and racial stereotypes and promotes positive racial identity development for Black girls (Jacobs, 2016).

Teacher Recruitment & Training

Ladson-Billings (1995) and Chambers et al. (2016) suggest that culturally responsive supports should be at the forefront of teacher and counselor recruitment, preparation and education programs, and professional development; and the programming should contain a greater emphasis on culturally relevant pedagogical techniques that emphasize race and gender. In order to implement curricula that contribute to improved academic outcomes, school leaders must intentionally hire and train teachers (Sun & Miller, 2020). Teachers who are able to guide

students through a culturally responsive curriculum, first need to be aware of their own cultures and adept with knowledge and skills to navigate multiple perspectives and biases, including those of students, their own, and those present in the curriculum (Borrero et al., 2018). Educators who commit to culturally responsive practices, including culturally responsive teaching, college preparation, high academic expectations and clearly defined and equitable behavioral regulations and also consider the interplay of race and gender identity contribute to increased achievement for Black girls (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Gholson & Martin, 2014).

Policies

School leaders must also remain aware of policies and structures in their schools and the impact on diverse aspects of students' cultures and identities. In some school communities, historically implemented and ingrained education policies that center Whiteness are often overlooked at the expense of Black girls (McArthur & Lane, 2019). School leaders must be vigilant about the policies they are enforcing and the potential impact on marginalized youth, ensuring that policies are implemented through race and gender conscious lenses (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020). Educators must gain and utilize cultural knowledge to influence educational policies, recognize what is meaningful to students and their families and understand how they make meaning of the world (Eisenhart, 2001; Gadsen, 2017; Tillman, 2002). Policymakers also need to continue to update the curriculum as schools and society continue to become more diverse (Del Toro & Wang, 2020). Ladson-Billings (2006) suggests that teachers should not only engage students inside of the classroom but also outside of the classroom and in students' communities to gain a better understanding of their cultures and provide better support in developing identity. This critical awareness helps create inclusive spaces by bringing in voices of school community stakeholders to address power structures,

curriculum, and pedagogy that support the learning for all students and is inclusive of their cultures and identities (Pendakur & Furr, 2016).

Relationships and Mentorship

Teachers who genuinely care for and develop affirming relationships with Black girls are integral to Black girls' successes and psychological well-being (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020; Joseph et al., 2019). Positive relationships and mentorship help foster positive identity development and increased social competence for Black girls (Edwards, et al., 2016; Ricks, 2014; Rivas-Drake et al., 2020) creating space for empowerment and healing from their oppression (McArthur & Lane, 2019). Teacher relationships have shown to increase Black girls' sense of belonging and achievement in the classroom and can decrease disciplinary incidences for Black girls (Booker & Lim, 2018; Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020). Teachers and counselors who have high expectations and positive relationships with Black girls can better identify and respond to their social and emotional needs and provide them with skills to become socially competent. Social competence contributes to improved long-term outcomes, including increased college and career readiness, and even healthier relationships and employment aptitude in adulthood (Carter et al., 2018; Rivas-Drake et al., 2020).

Mentors have the capacity to empower Black girls through sharing wisdom, skills and experiences that help young women to understand and validate their own experiences (Ricks, 2014). While national mentorship programs have been established to focus on the mentorship of Black boys, programs for Black girls do not exist in the same capacity (White, 2018). Watson (2016) also suggests regular access to mental health professionals and the establishment of affinity groups as safe spaces that allow Black girls to build self-esteem and positive relationships with peers. Educators who gain cultural awareness, build relationships, and provide

mentorship can provide a counternarrative to negate the oppression that Black girls often internalize (Ricks, 2014).

School structures that focus on single genders have shown also shown to bolster positive impacts on the culture and identity development of students (Bowe et al., 2017; Martin & Beese, 2016). The following section will examine the unique role of all-girls schools in interrupting racialized and gendered stereotypes for girls.

All-Girls Schools

Gendered socialization, which occurs in many traditional schools, influences identity development. As early as three or four years of age, children begin to recognize gender stereotypes and tend to conform based on the gender perceptions they have of themselves (Halim et al., 2013). Girls are frequently steered away from male dominated fields, such as STEM, which contributes to lower confidence and achievement in these fields (Ireland et al., 2018). Some research has shown that single sex schooling helps reduce gender socialization by providing greater support for girls to overcome traditionally gender-normed barriers to academic achievement and lessening the likelihood for the internalization of negative gender stereotypes (Bowe et al., 2017; Sax et al., 2013; Tweedale & Kronborg, 2015).

The messages offered in all female school settings also tend to counter the hyper-sexualization that is often presented in the media, providing girls with a more positive self-image (Starr & Ferguson, 2012). Teachers in all-girls schools suggest that they are able to more easily provide lessons geared toward engaging girls, girls appear more confident when answering questions, and there are reduced distractions which enable girls to develop stronger self-concept, self-esteem, sisterhood and community (Bowe et al., 2017). The specialization of all-girls schools and the focus on a positive self-concept fosters positive identity and culture development by negating negative stereotypes and stigmas, supporting girls toward high achievement.

Benefits of all-girls education include increased confidence, motivation, engagement, and self-visualization in traditionally male-dominated fields, such as, STEM (Bowe et al., 2017; Tweedale & Kronborg, 2015). These advantages suggest that this ideology needs to be replicated across schools and contexts for all cultures and identities.

There are also some proposed developmental disadvantages to single-sex schooling, including the inability for students to socialize with and develop relationships with peers of a different sex (Crawford-Ferre & Wiest, 2013; Wong et al., 2018) leading to the potential for unsuccessful engagement with other sexes in post-secondary the real-world settings (Liben, 2015; Pennington et al., 2018). Critics also argue that the promotion of gendered stereotypes and socialization affirm inequality between boys and girls (Goodkind et al., 2013; Martin & Beese, 2016). Further, while there is minimal literature on LGBTQ+ youth in single-sex schools, there is potential for assumptions, limitations, and/or discrimination placed on students who do not identify as heterosexual or cisgender (Nanney, 2020).

Much of the literature in opposition to single-gender schooling attempts to dispute the inflation of beneficial outcomes, rather than negate the beneficial outcomes themselves. The controversial findings suggest that further research is necessary to contribute to the literature on single-sex schooling and both its proposed advantages and disadvantages. Further, the experiences of Black girls are largely absent in literature regarding single-sex schools. This research study aims to contribute to this gap in literature by focusing on Black girl's perspectives and experiences regarding the influence of gendered education. This necessitates the use of a critical framework that will situate Black girls in an affirming lens while still bringing awareness to the unjust systems in which they inhabit. Intersectionality serves as the critical framework that grounds this study and allows for a critical examination of Black girls' perspectives.

Critical Framework

As research surrounding the experiences of Black girls and women continues to expand, so does the need for critical frameworks that adequately and appropriately represent the multidimensionality of Black girls' cultures and identities (Few, 2007; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). When conducting research regarding the holistic experiences of Black women, Tillman (2002) suggests a critical framework rooted in history and culture, and based in theory and practice, that integrates their strengths and successes and incorporates culturally sensitive approaches. The theoretical frameworks used in research to address the positionalities of Black women establish criticality through their commitment to social justice (Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). Many of the critical frameworks that emphasize the experiences of Black women emerged during the Modern Civil Rights Movement resulting from activism by Black feminists (Austin, 1999; Brewer, 1999). Black feminists aimed to avoid the interracial tensions that were associated with larger feminist movements of the time, as they felt these larger movements focused solely on the rights of heteronormative White women and did not consider differences in female experiences due to race, age, class, or sexual orientation (Lorde, 1987). Though Black feminism existed long before the Modern Civil Rights Movement (King, 1988), this era provoked a closer examination of the civil rights and the economic and political issues affecting Black women (King, 1988; Taylor, 1998). The Black feminist ideology proposed that a major factor in eliminating oppression for Black women was providing visibility and awareness of inequities while also highlighting their strength, power, and resilience (King, 1988).

Scholars have developed critical frameworks, such as, Critical Race Theory (CRT) that focus on the intersectionality of race, racism, law, education, and systems of power in society, and offer counter-stories to dominant White perspectives (Solorzano et al., 2000). While CRT provides a platform for people who are often marginalized to have a voice (Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005), some female scholars of color assert that it fails to fully conceptualize the

multidimensionality of Black women (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Crenshaw (1989) warns against the fault in relying on a single theory to explain the experiences and discrimination of Black women. Critical frameworks that focus on race, class or gender alone cannot serve to adequately capture the complexity of the Black woman's experience (Few, 2007; Collins, 2000). The unique and multidimensional experiences of Black girls in schools can be explained through the critical framework of Intersectionality (Delgado et al., 2017; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017; Patton & Ward, 2016).

Intersectionality

Issues concerning race or gender tend to circulate around either White women or Black men, respectively. Resultantly, due the overlap of Black women's' identities, they are regularly left out of the narrative (Brewer, 1999; Crenshaw, 1991; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Intersectionality focuses on the overlapping identities of Black women, namely race, gender, class, and sexuality, and the discrimination that does not fall purely under one identity but a combination of many (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw 1989,1991; Morris, 2007). It contends that the specific combination of being Black and being a woman produces a particular experience that is distinct from either a Black male or a White woman, for example, and requires multidimensional analysis (Haslanger, 2014: Morris, 2007). Garry (2011) explains that the intersection of multiple identities is not unique to Black women; however, whereas many White people experience privilege through their identities of race, gender, class, and/or sexuality the consequences of this convergence for Black women are often adverse and oppressive.

Using several examples, Crenshaw (1989, 1991) outlines how the legal system fails to support Black women by ignoring the intersection of their identities and the unique forms of discrimination and violence they experience. She explained one lawsuit (Moore v. Hughes Helicopters, Inc, 1983) where Black women were forced to choose either race or sex as the basis

for their discrimination; and the case for discrimination was not upheld on the premise that only Black women were treated unjustly within the organization, not all (White) women. Correspondingly, Intersectionality helps to frame the inequitable treatment that Black girls experience in schools which generally takes the form of disproportionate disciplinary action, overrepresentation in Special Education, and underrepresentation in college-level courses and institutions of higher education (Morris, 2007). Educators who fail to acknowledge and understand the positionality of Black girls are unable to interrupt oppressive systems.

Some critics of Intersectionality argue that it focuses too heavily on the intersection of identities based on individuals' experiences and does not give enough attention to the systemic factors that contribute to the oppression of Black women (Ireland et al., 2018; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012). There is also the argument that the critical framework of Intersectionality does not offer a thorough methodological approach to support the focus on the complexity of the Black woman's experience (McCall, 2005). It remains too open ended, neglecting to offer guidance for using the theory in response to the consequences of intersecting identities, thereby creating issues for structurally sound research (Davis, 2008). Even so, Cho et al. (2013) expressed their hope for continued evolution of Intersectionality through further study in academic fields, practical application and political discourse.

In my own research approach, these arguments served as a guide for both identifying potential pitfalls and operating using cultural responsiveness lenses. Culturally responsive critical frameworks for Black girls and women avoid a deficit lens by addressing their strengths and resilience in relation to the injustices they encounter and the various settings in which they interact (i.e. home life, social life, school life and work life) (Collins, 2000; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Few, 2007; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). The identities of Black women cannot be treated as mutually exclusive. As a researcher, I included the comprehensive voices of Black

girls and women, and also account for their own varied perspectives and biases (Tillman, 2002). While this study explicitly focuses on the race and gender identities of Black girls, Intersectionality is being used as a framework to highlight the interplay of multiple identities that inevitably interact and influence each other. The next section will outline the methodology for the proposed research study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN

The inequities that Black women and Black girls face have been frequently investigated in recent literature. Through this research study, I aim to bridge the gap in literature surrounding the unique experiences of Black girls in single-sex public schools and focus on Black alumnae's perspectives regarding the influence of gendered learning on race and gender identities. Further, I attempt to contribute to the literature by examining Black alumnae's perspectives on the influence of single-sex schooling on cross-racial and cross-gendered interactions. I intend to answer the following research questions at the conclusion of this study:

1. How do Black girls from single-sex schools perceive their identity in terms of race and gender?
2. How do Black girls from single-sex schools perceive their interactions with people who have different racial and gendered identities?

The next section will describe the research design I used to answer these research questions.

Research Design and Rationale

Black girls are understudied in research, and when they are studied, they are often compared to Black boys and/or White girls (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Morris (2007) calls for race-conscious gender analysis that examines the unique, racialized gender experiences of Black girls in order to understand and remedy their inequitable treatment; and further, to elevate Black girls, transforming the negative stereotypes and expectations placed on them. In efforts to centralize Black girls' voices and their diverse experiences within single-sex schools, I utilized a qualitative case study approach for this study. Rossman and Rallis (2017) describe qualitative research as the collection and analysis of data to transform it into information that allows researchers to learn about an aspect of the social world. Qualitative researchers typically aim to investigate and

understand how people interpret and create meaning from their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), especially through creating space for people whose insights are commonly disbarred from formal, academic dialogue (Mertler, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). A qualitative case study provides an in-depth, detailed investigation of a specific case in order to better understand a larger phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Tight, 2017). However, based on the context specific nature of case studies, these results are not intended to be generalized (Mills et al., 2010). A *case,* according to Creswell (2013), is bound by time and place using multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations, or multimedia artifacts. The multidimensionality of the qualitative case study design is compatible with the overlapping complexities of my critical framework of Intersectionality (Rodriguez, 2018). Thus, a qualitative case study approach provides a comprehensive structure to achieve my goal of investigating and understanding how Black girls interpret and create meaning of their racial and gendered identities based in their single-sex schooling experiences.

Setting

The case selected for this study was a group of seven campuses situated within a network of all-girls schools located in the South-Central region of the United States. The network, as an organization, partners with public school districts to assist in funding the single-sex schools. Although most of the campuses in the network have an application process, all of the schools are considered public schools within their respective school districts and are designed to serve traditionally underserved populations. Based on demographic data provided by the network, roughly 85% of students enrolled at the campuses are students of color, with about 65% of students identifying as Latinx, 17% as Black, and 14% as White. Students who identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, Multiracial or Native American comprise less than 2% of the total

network student population, respectively. Approximately 65% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 4% qualify for special education services.

In alignment to research and in accordance with NCLB guidelines, the campuses emphasize STEM, and promote women in these underrepresented fields. All schools in the network offer a college preparatory curriculum and prioritize college readiness, health and wellness, and leadership. Though the curriculum is aligned to the regional standards, it is also accompanied by college preparatory curriculum, such as, College Board Advanced Placement curriculum, Dual Credit, and/or Dual Enrollment opportunities which afford students the opportunity to earn college credit. Senior students in the network experience over 90% graduation and college acceptance rates. Although, collectively, the schools serve students ranging from grades PreK-12, this study targeted participants who met the predefined criteria of identifying racially as Black and graduating from one of the single-sex schools in the network.

Participants & Selection

The qualitative case study approach allows for targeted sampling of participants (Mills et al., 2010) and benefits a smaller sample size, as was used for this study (Tight, 2017). Purposeful sampling (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) was utilized to identify nine participants who met selection criteria. To be considered for the study, participants had to identify racially or multiracially as Black/African American, had to have graduated from one of the all-girls schools included in the study, and had to be at least 18 years of age.

Participants were recruited through public social media websites using accounts related to the all-girls campuses. Information about the study, including consent forms and sample interview questions were provided to respondents within the initial communications. Prior to data collection, consent forms were reviewed with respondents and any questions were

answered. In total, nine out of eleven respondents met inclusion criteria and volunteered to participate in the study.

Data Collection

In qualitative case study research, multiple sources of information are collected through in-depth data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, data was collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. Black girls who have attended a single-sex school, as specified above, served as key informants in providing information to assist me in answering the research questions for this study.

Interviews

Each participant engaged in one individual interview via Zoom that lasted approximately 60 minutes to allow for in-depth exploration of participant experiences. Interviews were audio and video recorded and transcribed using Zoom teleconferencing software and the embedded transcription function. All videos and transcriptions were reviewed multiple times in conjunction with the original audio to verify accuracy.

Interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol in which predetermined, open-ended guiding questions were used, allowing for flexibility in asking probing questions to gain greater detail and clarity from responses (Flick, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each interview had three segments with a central focus. Approximately thirty questions were asked in total, varying in complexity and style. The first set of questions focused on each of the participants' overall experiences in single-sex schools. These questions asked participants to recall their academic and social experiences, interactions with adults, and likes and dislikes about being in an all-girls environment. The second set of questions focused on the participants' awareness of their racial and gendered identity, and experiences in their single-sex schools that have contributed to their race and gender identity awareness and development. These questions asked

about Blackness and womanhood, and asked participants to consider the influence of their all-girls schooling experiences on their current understanding of their race and gender. Participants also considered the intersectionality of being Black girls in the single-sex schools. As Hines-Datiri and Carter Andrews (2017) suggest, these intersectional interview questions were asked in a way that positions race and gender as interrelated and non-binary. The third set of interview questions explored participants' perceptions of their interactions with people who have other racial and gendered identities. Participants were asked about their comfort in interacting with people who have different racial and gendered identities, and their beliefs about the benefits or drawbacks from these interactions. Brief notes were taken in my research journal during each interview to highlight any possible themes. Throughout data collection and analysis, I utilized self-reflective journaling as a source of substantive validation to document ideas, clarify biases and engage in reflexivity (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Document Collection

Information from public district reports and campus websites were collected and analyzed to gather demographic information and to uncover data pertaining to the emergent themes in the study. Specifically, District Academic Reports from each participants' graduation year were analyzed, along with mission and vision statements from each campus, and uniform policies.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is primarily inductive, (Frey, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) describe three overarching stages included in the data analysis process: preparing and organizing data, identifying codes and reducing codes to themes, and representing and reporting data. Correspondingly, data analysis was conducted in three phases. The first phase of data analysis centered on the interviews. Each participant's interview was accurately transcribed,

organized and analyzed using qualitative methods of analysis to identify patterns and themes in the data. After each interview, an individual case narrative (Wilson, 2015) was prepared that includes the preliminary analysis of the individual participant's interviews. The participant's individual narrative was emailed to each participant, and the participants had one calendar week from the date and time it was emailed to review the narrative for accuracy and reply to the email with any concerns or errors in interpretation. Participants were also sent a text message indicating that the email had been sent. Concerns and errors were addressed with each participant and updated for accuracy prior to the second phase of analysis. This member checking process served to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study (Flick, 2018).

The second phase of data analysis consisted of organizing, categorizing, analyzing, and inductively coding all data (from interviews, site visits, document collection/artifacts, and the researcher journal) to find emergent themes to assist in answering the research questions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I personally conducted open coding of the data to fully immerse myself in the analysis and continued with this process until I developed exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitive, and conceptually congruent themes to guide and theorize the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Multiple iterations of coding were conducted as a form of triangulation in order to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study by ensuring consistent inductive coding of themes related to the research questions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The emergent themes resulting from this study will be discussed in the Findings section.

Trustworthiness

Throughout my data collection and analysis, I implemented strategies to contribute to the trustworthiness of my study. Trustworthiness describes credibility of a study, the usability of the data, and the ethical considerations in how the study is conducted (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Triangulation of data contributes to trustworthiness and can be described as the confirmation of

results through the use of multiple qualitative approaches (Flick, 2018). In this study, I triangulated my data through the use of multiple sources of data collection and the practice of member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I utilized member checking by corresponding with participants to ensure accuracy in the interpretation of their individual narratives. I updated the original narratives using any suggestions offered by the participants and sought their approval prior to moving to the data analysis phase of the study. I also engaged in debriefing with peers and scholars in each phase of my study to contribute to trustworthiness. Flick (2018) describes ethics as ensuring and promoting quality research, data protections and privacy protections, and avoiding harm of participants. Throughout the study, I used pseudonyms to replace the names of the schools, locations, network, and participants in order to protect their privacy. Additionally, all electronic data that was collected was housed in a password protected TCU Box platform.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher often serves as a primary instrument of the study due to the researcher's interactive and immersed role in data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This establishes the need for the researcher to engage in reflexivity and awareness of personal perspectives and biases. Rossman & Rallis (2017) define reflexivity as "looking at yourself making sense of how someone else makes sense of her world" (p.37). This self-awareness allows for sensemaking that differentiates between my voice and the participants' voices. It is through utilizing the methods I have previously described that I will be *reflectively reflexive* in order to offer systemic interpretation (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) and maintain trustworthiness in this study.

However, as I approach this research it is also imperative for me to articulate my own relevant positionality. My role as a researcher in this study situates me as both an insider and an outsider. My insider perspectives result from my race and gender identity development in

adolescence resulting from my schooling and experiences as a Black girl. I may also have insider status based on the potential of previously established relationships with participants due to my professional role within single-sex schools.

Even so, my professional role may also position me as an outsider, as I may be perceived as an authority figure in the field. My experiences as a Black girl from a middle-class multicultural family may also run counter to the experiences of the Black girls in my study, especially as the network aims to enroll students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, in the region under study, many of the neighborhoods where students live are racially/ethnically homogenous. By recognizing the influence of my positionality in my research, I am able to more accurately offer descriptive interpretivist assumptions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) toward the ultimate goal of creating opportunities for marginalized voices to be heard in order to contribute to improvements in society for Black girls. In the next chapter I will discuss the research findings and data analysis, resulting in my emergent themes.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the role of single-sex public schooling on Black girls' race and gender identity development. Further, this study aimed to investigate the influence of single-sex schooling on Black girls' cross-racial and cross-gendered interactions. Using the theoretical framework of intersectionality, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Black girls from single-sex schools perceive their identity in terms of race and gender?
2. How do Black girls from single-sex schools perceive their interactions with people who have different racial and gendered identities?

Participant Overview

This study included nine female participants who met the inclusion criteria of graduating from an all-girls public school and identifying racially or multiracially as African American/Black. Eight participants identified as African American/Black, and one identified as Multiracial (African American/Black and Hispanic/Latinx). Participants ranged in age from 19 to 26 years old and graduated from three different high schools between the years of 2014 and 2020. The three single-sex alma maters included in this study were Friendship Academy, Rainbow Academy, and Sunshine Academy. These secondary campuses serve students in grades six through twelve and enroll students using an application process. Alumnae attended their respective single-sex campus for at least four years prior to graduating and were all admitted to a 4-year college or university in their senior year. For clarity and consistency, the term "high school" will be used to reference the secondary, middle-high school campuses. An overview of

participant information is shown in Table 1. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the individuals and their respective alma maters.

Table 1:

Participant Overview

Participant	Age	Academy attended	No. years attended	Year graduated	Graduating class size (approx.)
India	19	Friendship	6 years	2020	40
Natasha	19	Friendship	7 years	2020	40
Kisha	19	Friendship	7 years	2020	40
Breonna	19	Friendship	4 years	2020	40
Alexia	24	Friendship	6 years	2016	30
Mya	22	Rainbow	5 years	2017	70
Joyce	23	Rainbow	7 years	2016	60
Kayla	24	Rainbow	7 years	2016	60
Aleah	26	Sunshine	6 years	2014	30

Each participant participated in one in-depth interview that lasted approximately 60 minutes. Throughout the interviews, participants shared about their social and academic experiences at their all-girls secondary school campus, explored influences on race and gender identity development, and reflected on their comfortability with cross-racial and cross-gendered interactions. Interviews were video recorded, audio recorded, and transcribed using Zoom video conferencing software. I then constructed a narrative summary of each participant's interview, and each participant was given an opportunity to member-check their own individual narrative for accuracy. I also analyzed specific documents from the three campuses to support data collected from the interviews. Subsequently, I coded and analyzed the collective data for emergent themes. I also utilized a journal to document researcher notes throughout the process.

The next section will highlight the findings from the document analysis. This will be followed by a presentation of the participant's individual narrative summaries. These summaries are included in efforts to center Black women's voices in this research. Then, in the remainder of

the chapter, I will share the thematic findings based on the aggregate data collection and analysis.

Document Analysis

I collected information from state academic reports and the single-sex campuses' official school websites to complement the contextual evidence provided by the narrative summaries. Some information presented in this section is intentionally vague to maintain participant confidentiality and to obscure the identity of the individual campuses.

Campus Websites

The website for each campus included information about the school's unique all-girls history and conspicuously displayed accolades and high ratings. Key words and phrases frequently referenced across the homepages and the mission statements included: STEM, college preparatory, 4-year college enrollment, health and wellness, and skill development for success in college, career, and life. Participants used many of these phrases during their interviews suggesting alignment between the overarching mission and the messaging that is shared with students. The websites also housed general campus information including newsletters, schedules, and calendars which alluded to transparency and regular communication with students and families. The photographs presented on the website displayed diverse representations of students and the larger school community. This was congruent with many participants' observations regarding the diverse cultural demographics of the school community.

Since several participants referenced the uniforms during their interviews, I also reviewed the uniform policies at each campus. The dress code guidelines were easy to locate on all campus websites. One campus's uniform policy contained significantly more detail than the others; and in addition to clothing, included guidelines and restrictions for makeup, backpack styles and colors, hairstyles and hair colors, hair and body accessories, and body piercings. This campus

also offered a regularly instituted alternative to wearing a skirt. The consequences of a dress code violation for this campus ranged from requiring parents to bring appropriate clothing to removal from campus for repeated offenders. The other two campuses' uniform policies provided guidelines specific to clothing and presented far fewer restrictions. However, they also did not offer a regularly integrated alternative for wearing a skirt, indicating less flexibility for students who may be gender nonconforming or preferred not to wear skirts. The consequences for dress code were not listed publicly on these two campuses' policies.

The conspicuousness of the dress code requirements on the campus websites signals a level of importance of these policies. Many participants confirmed this notion in their interviews by referencing the strict requirements, the regular enforcement, and both the intended and unintended consequences of the policies. Further, while these policies avoided any overt culturally insensitive language, such as rejecting braids, dreadlocks, or afros which are common hairstyles for Black students, the content of these policies still seem to promote gender stereotypes. Regulations regarding hairstyles and colors, body piercings, makeup and/or the requirement of skirts send both implicit and explicit messages about the definition of "appropriate" and "acceptable" attire and appearance for girls.

Graduation Year State Reporting Data

In addition to gathering information from campus websites, I collected and analyzed electronic academic reporting records from the State Department of Education for each campus. Friendship Academy reports were gathered from years 2016, 2017, 2020, and 2021; Rainbow Academy reports were gathered from 2016, 2017, and 2018; and Sunshine Academy records were collected from 2014 and 2015. These years corresponded with each participant's graduation year and the year following their graduation year, as some records are not made available for a graduating class until the following year. The graduation year was selected to provide some

parameters to the data, and because senior year it is often memorable and is the most proximal year of their high school experience. I reviewed these reports for the primary purpose of corroborate participant's recollections regarding the demographic data of teachers and students on their respective campuses. The information presented here refers specifically to these years.

Teacher Demographics

The reports showed that a majority of the teachers at each campus identified as female, as shown in Table 2. At least 40% of the teachers at each campus racially identified as White, and at least 70% identified as female. In most years, the percentage of non-White teachers exceeded the percentage of White teachers. Approximately 30% of teachers at Rainbow Academy and Friendship Academy identified as African American/Black compared to 5% of teachers at Sunshine Academy in 2014.

Student Demographics

All participants shared that their respective schools consisted of mostly Brown and Black students. This aligns to State reported data that show participants attended schools where at least 85% students identified racially as African American/Black or Hispanic/Latinx. African American/Black students represented 4% to 30% of the student population during each graduation year, with the lowest percentage at Sunshine Academy and the larger percentages at Friendship Academy. Students who identified racially as Hispanic/Latinx comprised at least 57% of the student body at each campus each year.

Alumnae also shared that the study body had some socioeconomic diversity. The percentages of students who were reported as "economically disadvantaged" ranged from 61% to 82% across the campuses. Economically disadvantaged refers to students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch meals under the National School Lunch Program (U.S. Department of

Agriculture, 2021) and is often used to approximate socioeconomic status. All campuses demonstrated a 100% graduation rate during each participant's graduation year.

Table 2:

Teacher and Student Demographics Across Campuses

Demographics	Friendship Academy (2019-2020)	Friendship Academy (2015-2016)	Rainbow Academy (2016-2017)	Rainbow Academy (2015-2016)	Sunshine Academy (2013-2014)
Staff Demographics					
African American/Black	23%	33%	23%	34%	5%
Asian	3%	3%	3%	3%	0%
American Indian	3%	3%	7%	0%	0%
Hispanic/Latinx	12%	14%	16%	16%	55%
Two or More Races	3%	0%	3%	3%	0%
White	56%	47%	48%	44%	40%
Male	22%	27%	26%	22%	5%
Female	78%	73%	74%	78%	95%
Student Demographics					
African American/Black	23%	30%	15%	16%	4%
American Indian	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.5%
Asian	3%	2%	2%	2%	1%
Hispanic/Latinx	63%	57%	72%	73%	90%
Pacific Islander	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Two or more Races	1%	2%	1%	1%	0.5%
White	10%	8%	9%	8%	3%
Economically disadvantaged	75%	61%	81%	82%	70%
Total enrollment 6th-12th (approx.)	460	370	540	570	390

In the next section, I will present the nine narrative summaries of the Black female alumnae participants represented from three all-girls campuses: Friendship Academy, Rainbow Academy, and Sunshine Academy.

Participant Narrative Summaries

The following narratives are summaries from individual participant interviews and are written from the perspectives of the Black alumnae.

Aleah

Aleah is 26 years old and identifies as a Black femme person. Aleah is curious about the world, sensitive, feels deeply, and cares about people. Aleah is Love.

Aleah began her single-sex schooling journey at Sunshine Academy and attended from 7th through 12th grade. Enrolling in one of Sunshine Academy's first classes, Aleah enjoyed being part of the newness of the school. Aleah originally learned about Sunshine Academy in 6th grade from a recruiting visit by the Sunshine Academy principal. Aleah felt that the school's college-oriented mission aligned to her own long-term goals of graduating from college and emerging from cycles of poverty and incarceration. There was one year when Aleah wanted to leave Sunshine Academy because two of her teachers who also served as her mentors were leaving, but she ultimately decided to stay.

Aleah ranked among the top of her class while at Sunshine Academy and described her experience as challenging, particularly due to her heavy course load and high participation in school-related activities. "I felt like school was my life." However, Aleah felt that the experience of learning to balance her various academic and extracurricular commitments while staying organized helped her in college. Aleah's extracurricular involvement at Sunshine Academy included participation in the National Honor Society, student council, athletics, and the ethnomathematics club.

Socially, Aleah valued the strong sense of sisterhood and community that she shared with her peers at Sunshine Academy and enjoyed their ability to have open conversations. Aleah described the all-girls environment as both a "social and learning space" that allowed students to be engaged and involved, and really care about learning in ways that were not always possible in traditional co-educational environments. Aleah also felt empowered by the frequent opportunities to hear women in different professions and different levels of leadership speak and answer questions about their personal and professional journeys. Aleah speculates that students from Sunshine Academy were more empowered than some of their female peers at co-educational schools in relation to increased levels of confidence, stronger perceptions of themselves as leaders, and more opportunities to take and lead initiatives. Aleah's connections to her classmates extended beyond Sunshine Academy as she keeps in touch with many of them today, years after graduating. "If I had a daughter, I would send her to an all-girls school."

Aleah indicated that many of her high school friends identified as Mexican. Aleah described the racial composition of the student body as mostly non-Black Hispanic/Latinx students, with a handful of Black students. This mirrored the racial composition of her graduating class, as Aleah recalls having only one White student in her senior class of roughly 30 students. Aleah shared that being a Black minority in the school was often "real and apparent," due to "some of the ignorance around Blackness and what it means to be Black." Aleah shared her perspectives about this:

> What it means to be Black is to be a part of a history and a lineage of really beautiful, powerful, and resilient people. Black is beautiful. Black is deep. And, I'm definitely proud to identify with being Black. I think I'm constantly in awe of the history of Black people and all the people who have come before me; not only honoring and appreciating

their struggle, but through their struggles the wisdom, the fight, and the love they've also passed on.

Although there were many things that Aleah enjoyed about Sunshine Academy, there were also some aspects she disliked. One thing Aleah disliked the strict uniform policy and the consequences of demerits for failure to comply with this policy. Also, Aleah felt that there was too much policing around students' sexuality, with minimal demonstrated support or acceptance for students who expressed varying gender identities and non-heterosexual orientations. After graduating, Aleah provided feedback to Sunshine Academy administrators regarding the lack of mental health tools, resources, and support students were provided with overall. The dearth of mental health resources rendered challenges not only for students at Sunshine Academy, but also for graduates who did not possess adequate knowledge or skills to manage the mental health challenges they experienced in college.

Additionally, Aleah described some of her experiences with teachers as problematic. She mentioned that a majority of teachers at Sunshine Academy racially identified as White, with a few Hispanic/Latinx teachers. There was only one Black teacher on campus, and Aleah did not have her as a teacher. In general, Aleah described her relationships to and memories with teachers as "very complicated," alluding to the ways that relationships shifted over time. Aleah mentioned a specific situation involving White female teachers where she felt that power and racial dynamics came into play. "Because it was this intense environment, this college-prep school, there was also an unhealthy level of pressure from some teachers who, while they were trying to be supportive, were also harmful." However, Aleah expressed that after graduating, she was able to appreciate the mentorship she received from many of her teachers, despite the challenging interactions. Aleah also understood there was a heavy burden on teachers, whose workload also included tutoring, club sponsorship, and coaching.

> For the most part, all the teachers were really passionate and cared a lot and invested a lot of time and energy into us and into the school...Some of them really went out of their way to be like second moms to some of us.

In addition to supportive teachers, Aleah described her principal as "caring a lot and being focused on how to make the students great."

Aleah graduated from Sunshine Academy in 2014 and enrolled in a small liberal arts college located out of state. She was inspired to attend a small liberal arts school due to a recommendation by her English teacher, but ultimately made the decision due to the financial award, the quality of the school, the weather, and the apparent happiness of the people on campus. Aleah described the college as a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). Enrolling at a PWI after attending Sunshine Academy was a culture shock. "I felt the dissonance of not having really grown up around White people." Aleah was exposed to a different world of people and lifestyles that she had to learn how to navigate and integrate. "I was very aware of, not only the Whiteness, but also the resources that came with that."

While many of Aleah's friends identify as Black, she enjoys the daily interactions she has with White people and people of all races in her current context. Aleah finds value in interacting with people of different identities.

> There is a lot you can learn from people, and there's a certain social capital you can gain from being able to be in an environment where you're interacting with different types of people from different racial backgrounds, ethnic background, cultures, and gender identities.

While Aleah does not feel that attending an all-girls school particularly impacted her ability to interact with people of other gender identities, she did feel that the demands of her academics left little time to explore romantic dating relationships while in high school. She is

often read as a heterosexual woman, though this is not entirely aligned to how she views herself. In thinking about intersectionality and Aleah's identity as a Queer, Black, femme person, Aleah recognizes the facets of marginalization and oppression as well as resilience and power that correspond to her experiences, and highlights the importance of a Black, Queer analysis of the world. Aleah believes living in an antiblack world contributes to internalizing some level of antiblackness and colorism. She recalled feeling, at a young age, that if she had a lighter skin tone, it would make her inherently better and more beautiful. She also referenced societal beauty standards, especially in relation to Black hair, and how her own attitudes positively shifted once she was in college. Literature from Black scholars and intellectuals radicalized her perspectives, and she was able to better understand what antiblackness was, what it looked like, and the systems related to it. "I am committed to un-learning antiblackness, and the ways that I personally internalized that, and being able to find my own ways to organize and fight against that." Aleah identified several influencers of her racial and gender identities including, Eve and her femme aesthetic, Black Lives Matter movement organizers (many of whom identify as Queer), and Maya Angelou.

Aleah aims to support and uplift others close to her and is grateful to those who support and uplift her. Aleah values community, and after graduating college, founded a non-profit organization to support youth. Aleah continues to pursue her own healing work, and is also in the pursuit of a Ph.D.

Kayla

Kayla is 24 years old and identifies as a Black woman. Kayla describes herself as "a follower of Christ who strives to commit herself to a lifelong journey of learning."

Kayla began her single-sex schooling experience at Rainbow Academy in the 6th grade. She was originally inspired to attend Rainbow Academy by her elementary school best friend

who also applied and enrolled. Kayla remained at Rainbow academy through her senior year and graduated in 2016 with a class of approximately 65 students. Following high school, Kayla enrolled at a small, private, liberal arts college within her home state where she majored in Biochemistry and minored in Spanish. Following the conferral of her bachelor's degree, Kayla enrolled in medical school as one of the youngest students in her cohort. Kayla's role as a caregiver for family members influenced her pursuit of medicine.

Kayla felt that her academic experiences at Rainbow Academy prepared her for post-secondary coursework. She found the curriculum challenging and rigorous and enjoyed taking advantage of College Board Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Kayla felt that managing her AP course load not only contributed to college preparation, but also promoted the development of discipline, positive study habits, and time management skills. The teachers at Rainbow Academy contributed to Kayla's success through the formation of relationships and provision of advice and support. Kayla referenced feeling closest to several of her Black teachers and one of her Hispanic/Latinx teachers.

Kayla enjoyed the Rainbow Academy's diversity. She recalls that approximately 65% of her graduating class identified as Hispanic/Latinx with the remainder identifying as Black (apart from two or three White students). Correspondingly, most of Kayla's friends from Rainbow Academy identified as Black or Hispanic/Latinx. Kayla felt connected socially with her peers, relating to them more as sisters rather than classmates, and she still keeps in touch with them today.

When asked specifically about the school's response to varying gender identities, Kayla felt like she and her peers were "accepting and loving of everyone," irrespective of their gender identification or sexual orientation. Some of the teachers at Rainbow Academy, however, did not regularly express similar affirmations. When asked to consider her own personal experiences

with discrimination at Rainbow Academy, Kayla recalled a specific experience where some of her peers challenged her acceptance and involvement in a school-related organization due to her race. Despite the initial resistance by some of her peers, Kayla noted that she felt supported by campus staff throughout that particular experience. Overall, Kayla felt that Rainbow Academy positively contributed to her racial identity development by incorporating Black culture into the school, specifically through student clubs and external partnerships. Kayla's experiences with her Hispanic/Latinx peers and her involvement in Hispanic/Latinx organizations throughout her secondary school tenure also allowed her to feel connected to Mexican American culture. Kayla's decision to minor in Spanish during her undergraduate studies was influenced by this cultural connection. "I do feel closer to home when I'm around someone who is Hispanic or Mexican American."

In high school, Kayla participated in community service, the science fair, Academic UIL, powder puff football, and orchestra. While traditional social events, such as prom, may have looked different at Rainbow Academy, Kayla does not feel that attending Rainbow academy created any disadvantages for her in comparison to her peers at other schools. Although at one point Kayla had considered transferring to a high school that focused primarily on health sciences, she ultimately decided to remain at Rainbow Academy due to the positive relationships she developed with faculty and the constructive academic and intellectual challenges she encountered. Even so, looking back, Kayla wishes Rainbow Academy offered even more AP science course options.

In general, Kayla perceived that the students who attended Rainbow Academy were more empowered than female students who attended traditional high schools. Kayla enjoyed being in an all-girls school environment, which she felt presented fewer distractions and provided more comfort to speak freely. She appreciated that Rainbow Academy prioritized opportunities for

students to hear from different powerful women leaders and noticed a marked shift toward androcentrism once she went to college.

> I remember when Chemistry first began. I was studying with this group of girls I met, and we invited guys to our study group. I noticed that [the girls] would shrink themselves academically and make it seem like they didn't understand something. When it was just me and them, we both understood it; but then throw a guy, especially an attractive athlete, into the mix and they would dumb themselves down a bit to, I guess, get his attention. I also noticed that they were hesitant to speak up to guys, or to correct them when they were wrong, or stop them when they were trying to mansplain something to them. I feel like they're generally a little bit more submissive in that nature.

Kayla was surprised to witness similar interactions between women and men during a dissection lab in medical school.

> I noticed a lot of the women would throw the tools to the guys and have them do it; but I feel like in order to make the best of the experience we should all have a turn at [the dissection], to see if we want to be a surgeon one day or go into orthopedics, for example.

Kayla wonders if attending a single-sex high school influenced her responses to these types of situations, and she values the resilience she learned through her experiences at Rainbow Academy. “I feel like being at [Rainbow Academy] really showed me that your self-worth comes from within, despite any external obstacle, or external comment, or experience that might contribute to any negative feelings.” Further, Kayla observed an increase in female representation at her medical school and feels like progress is being made in this regard. When discussing her feelings about her race,

> It is very empowering to identify as Black, because I feel like we’ve been through so

> much and we're still going through things. But also, it's a reminder every day that our crown was literally made by God. We're so special, we're a great people, and we're a strong people; and I just feel like it's an honor to identify as Black.

Kayla's feelings about her race have remained positive over time. She attributes this, in large part, to early lessons about Black history from her parents. She stated that it

> built a strong foundation within my racial identity, and in the pride that I have in being Black. Even though, sometimes, experiences throughout my life take a stab at it, I feel like knowing [Black history] from a younger age really helped with my stability in that faith.

Kayla enrolled in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) after graduating from Rainbow Academy. Kayla found that it was an "interesting transition" to go from an all-girls high school that served mostly students of color, to a college that was both co-educational and mostly White. While in college, Kayla experienced challenging situations with White peers who confronted her with microaggressions. These experiences caused her to be more cautious in her interactions with White peers. When asked specifically about the importance of feeling comfortable interacting with other races, Kayla's response was that it may be more desirable than important.

> I feel like you can't really control how people are going to treat you. Going into a field where I will eventually be responsible for life and death situations, I don't have time to be trying to assess my comfort. I need to be assessing the patient's comfort. I can't be thinking about what Mary is over there thinking about me. I need to be able to collaborate with Mary to help this patient.

Though it took her a while to find a group of close friends, Kayla's experiences with peers of different races in college also inspired growth. While Kayla describes many of her current

friends as Black or Hispanic/Latinx women who are outspoken and supporters of women empowerment**,** she has also made South Asian and Southeast Asian friends and has learned more about their cultures, respectively. She also made a few close White female friends. “I like them, they’re pretty woke, and I don’t have to explain much to them. It was like a breath of fresh air for once. It [is] really nice.”

Kayla describes the intersectionality of being Black and a woman as both empowering and emotionally draining due to the racial tensions specific to Black women. Kayla recalled a particularly hurtful experience pertaining to dating as a Black woman:

> [In college,] the Black guys there, a majority of them, would say really hurtful things about dating Black women. I remember I had a get-together at my house, and this guy was going on and on about how he doesn’t date Black women…It was a common theme there…I’m all for interracial dating, but you can do it with your mouth closed. You do not have to bring down an entire population of women just because you are uncomfortable with your own blackness…It really left a scar on me.

In reflecting on her own dating experiences, Kayla suggested that attending an all-girls school has influenced her dating life on a subconscious level, as she tends to seek male partners who value feminist ideals and support her ambitious career aspirations.

Kayla’s views of Black womanhood stem primarily from her family. She characterized these women as strong, emotionally mature, unafraid of being vulnerable, and able to maintain their femininity and self-confidence while knowing who they were in the world. Kayla also identified her Principal at Rainbow Academy as a model for Black womanhood based on how she carried herself and encouraged the students to represent themselves. “[Our Principal] had high expectations for us. At the time we were like, 'she's just being picky,’ [but] she really wanted us to be the best versions of ourselves.”

Kayla is finishing her first year of medical school and plans to pursue anesthesiology in the future.

Joyce

Joyce is 23 years old and describes herself as an African American woman and a creative who is becoming and evolving with new environments.

Joyce started her educational journey at her neighborhood elementary school, then, due to recommendations from her teachers, transferred to a local, public, performing arts elementary school where she attended until 5th grade. Joyce applied and was accepted to Rainbow Academy during her 6th grade year and continued through 12th grade. She chose to attend Rainbow Academy based on its positive reputation throughout the community, and from her own experiences at a recruitment event. Even so, Joyce admitted to a period of time when she considered transferring to a different high school that focused on theater arts. Joyce even applied and was accepted to an arts magnet high school for her sophomore year, but she ultimately decided to remain at Rainbow Academy. One reason she chose to stay at Rainbow Academy was due to a monetary award offered to students who attended from 6th through 12th grade. However, this scholarship dissolved prior to the year that Joyce graduated. While at Rainbow Academy, Joyce was involved in dance, choir, and theater, and assisted in the founding of an African American student organization on campus. Joyce graduated in 2016 with a class of approximately 60 students.

When reflecting on her secondary school experiences, Joyce referenced several of the policies at Rainbow Academy that stood out to her. She noted an emphasis on academic integrity and the practice of writing a statement on every assignment attesting to academic honesty. She also highlighted the strict uniform policy. Students were required to wear a plaid skirt and tops in specified colors that varied by grade level. Other iconic aspects of the uniform included knee-

high socks and flats. She laughs as she remembers, “I only had flats. I didn't have any other type of shoes for a really long time.” There was also minimal flexibility in the uniform requirements once the weather got cold. “You could not wear pants (or leggings) until the school gave us permission. It didn't matter if you felt like it was too cold, you had to wear the skirt until it was announced that you could wear pants.” The uniform policy also included guidance on jewelry and other accessories, such as the size of hoop earrings and quantity of bracelets that could be worn on the wrists. Joyce felt like the strict uniform policy influenced her sense of fashion following high school. “I didn’t really know what my style was outside of school. Even when I got to college, I really judged what I would wear based on what other people were wearing, or my own internet research.”

However, Joyce loved attending an all-girls school because of how close she and her peers were. She specifically mentioned that they were all body positive. Like many teenage girls, she sometimes struggled with her concept of weight, and was grateful for supportive friends who would notice. “People were open about what they were experiencing and sometimes it ended up helping other people find out what was going on with their bodies.” She recalled an experience where one student shared her personal health experiences which helped another student reach a medical diagnosis. Joyce felt like she had a group of great friends and knew everybody, which was facilitated by her small class size. Many of Joyce’s friends in high school were Black or Hispanic/Latinx, as there was only one White student in her graduating class. Nonetheless, Joyce fit in best with students who had similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

> I remember there being an emphasis on the school [being] created for Women, especially minority women in [our city] to be able to get the same education and to have the same opportunities. I remember a point in time where, in the grades below us, there were a lot

> of more affluent students going to [Rainbow Academy], which I didn't have a problem with, but we didn't really have a lot in common.

Joyce perceived that many of the affluent students identified racially as White and would exclude students who they believed could not afford the same lifestyle as them. Joyce also recalls that a group of White students traveled to school in a charter bus, rather than a school bus, from the neighborhood in which many of them lived. Though she remembers finding this strange, she does not recall many other specific details in relation to why this happened.

Joyce also highlighted her interactions with adults at Friendship Academy. Joyce described the Friendship Academy principal as both "respectable" and "a little bit scary," in a sense that urged and motivated students to follow expectations. "If you saw her in the hallway, you would be like, 'I need to get to where I'm going!'" Further, Joyce acknowledged feelings of empowerment from having a Black, female Principal who exuded confidence and competence and showed respect toward students. In reference to her teachers, Joyce felt some were supportive and understanding, and others rationalized their rigidity by upholding a "you chose to go here" mentality. Many of her teachers identified racially as White, and that she did not have many male teachers. The male teachers at Rainbow Academy generally taught Math or Science and had reputations of being very strict. Joyce heard they had "weird policies" that made things unnecessarily difficult, and therefore she purposely avoided taking their classes.

Joyce reflected that she wished Rainbow Academy had a stronger African American History curriculum and more Black teachers. Joyce felt particularly connected to the Black teachers she did have, favoring them because she found them to be the most straightforward while also being encouraging and supportive, even if their classes were difficult. She appreciated that her Black teachers helped ensure that all of the Black students at Rainbow Academy knew each other. They also assisted with founding the campus' African American student association.

Their goal was to “create an association that would create opportunities and events specifically to showcase what every single group of different identifying students at Rainbow Academy were doing.” While at Rainbow Academy, Joyce held a perception that whenever there were opportunities to showcase Rainbow Academy, only Hispanic/Latinx students and light-skinned Black students were chosen to represent the campus. Joyce was happy to hear that the African American student organization still persisted after she graduated, yet also heard that it was suppressed in some ways by new leadership. “But talking to some of those girls, they seemed pleased to have that resource too, even if it was just a meeting for them to get together and talk about some of the things they were experiencing.”

After she graduated, Joyce was both surprised and excited to be invited back to Rainbow Academy to serve on a student panel and speak to current students about her college experience. During the panel, she was grateful to receive a question about her decision to attend a Historically Black College/University (HBCU).

> Even if students don't get to go to HBCUs, I feel like HBCU education is just lacking. What they are, why they exist -do only black people go to HBCUs? No! Why do Black people go to HBCUs? -They're not the only choice, but you should at least know what an HBCU is.

Joyce originally decided to attend an HBCU because she recognized that other people who she met from HBCUs that majored in areas she was interested in were still actively involved in their fields. She also describes “rebellion” as a factor that played into her decision to attend an HBCU, since HBCUs were not strongly emphasized at Rainbow Academy. Joyce recalls a conversation with some of her Black friends in high school where they questioned why their college advisor never helped them find scholarships to HBCUs. “She never talks about the HBCUs or the students who go to HBCUs. We felt like nobody talked about it enough.” Joyce believed that her

college advisor may have been unfamiliar with HBCUs, so while she was in high school, she resorted to researching them on her own. At Rainbow Academy, Joyce recalls that senior students had a minimum requirement of applying to five colleges located in-state and five located out-of-state. Joyce applied to three HBCUs in total, one of which was a women's college.

Joyce's pride in her racial identity and her confidence in being a "darker-skinned woman" has grown over time, especially in the last 5 years. Joyce recalls a specific experience from 8th or 9th grade when she first started wearing makeup. Given her inexperience with cosmetics, she bought a foundation that was lighter than her own skin color and applied it very heavily to her face before going to school. When she arrived on campus, one of her teachers pulled her aside and indicated to Joyce that she had applied too much makeup and that the color was too light. At the time, Joyce remembers being offended:

> Thinking back, [the teacher] was probably saying, 'you have great skin, if you're going to wear makeup, you need darker makeup.' But in my head, I [heard], this makeup is too light, and I need to be the same color as this makeup for it to work out. So, for a while I struggled with something identity-wise with makeup.

In high school, Joyce believed she would always be viewed as a second choice due to the color of her skin. However, after attending an HBCU and seeing other successful people who looked like her, these feelings began to wane. Joyce began her college journey as an acting major, then transitioned to a lighting major, an area in which she excelled; but ultimately, Joyce majored in theater arts administration because she wanted to be more challenged by the work she was doing. Joyce also started doing her own research and practicing self-care through yoga and journaling which helped her build confidence in herself. "There's ample opportunities everywhere, and sometimes you have to move around to see them."

Overall, Joyce expressed that going to an all-girls school was empowering because she felt like she could do anything herself, even things that were challenging or stereotypically done by men. Joyce referenced examples of female friends who attended neighboring schools and insisted that they needed "a guy to hold their bags" or have "a guy do the hard part" of an assignment. Joyce opposed these sentiments but did face other challenges in relation to socializing with young men her own age. She did not engage in dating relationships while in high school, partly because her interactions with men did not feel like organic conversations. She had trouble reading body language and occasionally felt nervous and awkward. Although Rainbow Academy hosted school dances with the local all-boys schools and co-educational public schools, Joyce wished for more opportunities, such as academic projects, to socialize with boys. Outside of her younger brother, Joyce had few interactions with men in her personal life. As a result, when she first attended college, she mostly befriended women, and experienced discomfort around men, or a fear that she may make men feel uncomfortable. It was not until she began participating in extracurricular collegiate activities that she engaged with members of the opposite sex for the first time. Though these interactions became more natural, she is still cautious around men today. She explains:

> Being a woman feels like sometimes you have to be stronger. When I go into a room that I know is full of mostly men, I feel like I need to stand up taller to feel confident and speak a little louder. I carry my poise with me really close to my womanhood because I want people to take me seriously without thinking about it twice.

In addition to the initial social challenges Joyce faced in college, she experienced a brief, unexpected academic adjustment. Although she felt equally as prepared as her peers, she simultaneously felt that she had an exaggerated sense of preparation and confidence. Joyce expected college courses to be very easy since she had attended a college preparatory high

school, but classes were harder than she anticipated. However, after her first semester, Joyce adjusted to the new workload and environment. Joyce believes that attending an HBCU helped shape her racial identity:

> I think that 'African American' encompasses even the things that I haven't experienced. I know I have African roots. While I might not know exactly what they are, I do know that they are there. I'm American, not only by my ancestors being born here, but I was born here; and I know a lot of American ways. I think both parts of that are meaningful to me. I don't initially say that I'm a Black woman, specifically because I do want to acknowledge that I have African roots.

As an adult, Joyce has actively researched the murders of Black people due to police brutality in the area in which she lives. She expressed sensitivity around the question regarding how she currently feels about being African American. "Being African American, it feels powerful to me. It's loaded in that not everybody has the same experience, but sometimes everyone is seen the same way." As Joyce considered the intersectionality of being African American and a woman, she shared, "I often think that being a woman is powerful in that being confident in my womanhood has often gotten me compliments, whereas me being confident in being Black gets me questions." After graduating college, Joyce moved to a new city to work in theater production. Joyce loves her job and is living her best life.

Mya

Mya identifies as "proudly Black and a woman." Mya is 22 years old and graduated from Rainbow Academy in 2017. Although Rainbow Academy serves students starting in 6th grade, Mya began attending the all-girls campus in the 8th grade and continued through 12th grade. After graduating, Mya moved out of state for college. She began her undergraduate studies as a business major, but ultimately graduated with an education degree. Her inspiration to

pursue a career in education stemmed from her parents and other family members who worked in the field. Shortly after receiving her bachelor's degree in education, she returned to her home city to continue her career in teaching.

Mya started her education at her local public elementary school. She then attended a private middle school during her 6th grade year, where she describes feeling like she received special treatment from being the only Black pupil. She left due to financial constraints and attended her local public school during her 7th grade year where she describes standing out among students who faced many academic and behavioral challenges. Based on a combination of factors including the strong reputation of Rainbow Academy, her 7th grade school counselors' recommendation, a cousin who had attended Rainbow Academy, and her mother's intuition (which included fear of "boy craziness"), Mya attended Rainbow Academy beginning in 8th grade. Despite the accolades the campus received, Mya had little desire to attend Rainbow Academy and openly voiced her desire to go to another school. She had come from a school environment where she was a self-proclaimed teacher's pet and won various academic awards; but when she transitioned to Rainbow Academy, she faced academic challenges for the first time. Sometimes, she felt that she and her peers at Rainbow Academy received undue pressure to strive for goals that were not always attainable or desirable for all students. Resultantly, Mya admits to frequently getting into trouble for challenging minor rules, such as dress code, and feeling little remorse. She also felt that the campus was "overrated." She "felt like there were people that went to other schools that were looked down upon that were just as good, if not better, than the students at [Rainbow Academy]." Rainbow Academy promoted that they were doing revolutionary things, but when Mya attended programming that involved students from other local schools, she found that the other students were doing many similar things in their

schools. Even so, she did recognize that students at Rainbow Academy received more support and exposure to leadership opportunities than some of her peers at other campuses.

Despite the initial resistance toward attending Rainbow Academy, Mya came to enjoy the comfort that came along with being around all girls. She did not hyper-focus on her appearance, and there was a general sense of comfort in talking about female experiences. For example, topics such as periods were met with increased understanding and support. Mya felt that the students at Rainbow Academy were nurtured and cared for. *"*We had the proper tools for girls going through girl things," which included heating pads in the nurse's office and understanding from other girls if she was not feeling well. Further, all of the girls played a role in the high levels of focus. There was strong messaging about women empowerment which influenced Mya's confidence to speak up and advocate for herself and others. "I learned empowerment…and I think because it was so pushed into me, I am not fearful of discrimination and [I'm] also more able to advocate when there are times of discrimination." In recent years, students at Rainbow Academy have had interactions with many high-profile women including the speaker of the United States House of Representative, a state congresswoman, a CEO of a professional sports team, and a Former First Lady. Through her experiences at Rainbow Academy, Mya feels that she is more aware of prominent women in history than peers who attended traditional high schools, as this knowledge was incorporated into every classroom and subject area. "I learned a lot about women and cannot isolate any experiences in high school that made me feel bad about my gender."

When asked specifically about gender identification at an all-girls school, Mya described an initial unfamiliarity and lack of clarity about navigating differences in peers' orientations, and a sense of frustration in staying abreast of what felt like constantly changing pronouns and fear of unintentionally offending someone. However, Mya expressed that "once their exploration got

more comfortable to them, it got more comfortable to the rest of us," and she found that she and her other friends became more understanding and more adept at supporting their peers. Mya perceived that most adults attempted to be respectful and supportive of students' gender exploration:

> The official uniform for our school were skirts. We used to have this really big event […], and it would be a time where they wanted everybody in the official uniform. But at the time we had a couple of students that were in the early process of transitioning, and so they were against wearing skirts. Whereas all of us hated wearing the skirts, it seemed to be unfair because [due to their] transition, they were able to get out of that uniform tradition. So, there was a moment where it seemed as if some of the teachers were not as accepting [as others]. It was a big controversy at the school, but I do think it ended up [being] more of a fairness thing, that if some students are going to be allowed to not do that, then it should be an option for all students. So, I do think that teachers were as supportive as they could be at that state of their lives.

Although Rainbow Academy was established in a largely Black community and was originally promoted as an all-girls campus intended to cater to Black girls in the area, Mya identified that she still found it very diverse. "It was my first experience [with] different religions, different gender pronouns…different personalities…different parental structures…It was very diverse…, and that I did appreciate, because I felt like it made me more aware of the world around me." Mya also recalls having significant trust from faculty, high expectations, and many opportunities for students to be leaders. Mya specifically mentioned support from Black teachers, sharing that they always tried their best to work with them and make them feel comfortable. Mya highlighted the support of Black teachers who assisted students in forming an African American association to bring awareness to the experiences of Black students on

campus. The students who were part of this Association also put together the first program for Black History Month. Although it was met with initial resistance from some faculty, the students eventually gained support to perform the program for the entire student body and even some members of the larger community. The success and support Mya received from this program allowed Mya to feel seen and important.

Overall, Mya feels that her academic experiences in high school prepared her for college. In college, she was grateful to revisit content that she had already been exposed to in high school. “I saw my first annotated bibliography in high school,” Mya explains, referring to an assignment she was also given in college. However, even though she felt that the curriculum she received in high school was college-focused, she feels that she did not receive as much college credit as her peers from other campuses. She specifically expressed dissatisfaction with not receiving an associate’s degree in high school, despite completing various college level classes.

While Mya felt confident navigating academic life once she entered college, navigating social life posed a greater challenge. Mya describes herself as friendly and willing to talk to anyone. However, in college, she initially experienced some social isolation. Coming from a single-sex school that served mainly students of color, Mya had to adjust to a co-educational, Predominantly White Institution. Mya describes the transition to co-educational classrooms as “not that bad,” as she had friendships and dating relationships with men while in high school. However, Mya did admit to less tolerance with men who spoke up in class seemingly just to speak, rather than to offer meaningful contributions to the classroom environment. Further, as a business major, the business students with whom she shared her classes and dorms held noticeably higher socioeconomic statuses than she had previously experienced. Although Rainbow Academy had served students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, the degree of differences between herself and her peers in college were more striking.

In terms of her own comfort in interactions with White peers, Mya shared, “this is hard, because I never wanted to come off [as] uncomfortable, even though there would probably be moments where I was. But I will never show White people that they make me uncomfortable.” She describes an encounter with a White male classmate early in her freshman year. They were discussing their mutual course (one with a reputation of being incredibly difficult), and Mya mentioned her goal of working to get an “A” in the course.

> He looked at me really weird and then he goes, ‘yeah that's unattainable…people like you would never get an “A” in that class.’ So initially, I didn’t know how to take it. [I wondered] is he referring to the fact that I’m Black or female? What exactly is it? I cannot remember what I said, but I think it went along the lines of, ‘okay, I’ll show you…’ So, I did get an A in that class, and I did rub it in his face. [That experience] really shaped a lot of my experiences and I always took White people with a grain of salt. I always made sure I was super aware of everything-the things they said, the things they were doing-it definitely fueled a fire in me.

In addition to this experience, Mya isolates one experience in high school where she felt judged by a peer whom she was not friends with. One of the girls said, “you should go back to [the neighborhood school] where you came from.’” Mya lamentably described her neighborhood school as low-performing and dirty. “At the time, I just felt like it was an insult.” Mya believed the girl who made the comment also identified as Black but lived in a predominantly White neighborhood. What angered Mya most about that experience was that after that comment was made, additional interactions occurred that ultimately led both students to have a conversation with the principal. However, the messaging that Mya received from her principal insinuated that she must have done or said something to evoke the comment.

As Mya reflected on her feelings about her Blackness in adulthood, she recognized that her pride in her Blackness has gotten stronger.

> I have always been aware of my Black identity, and very proud. The first class that I took on Black history I took as a kid, and ever since then have been very into Black history, current events, and Black culture.

Mya is known by her friends for posting "woke" things on social media. "I look at Blackness as the whole group of people. So, my Blackness includes my people. It includes having opportunities for them, and still looking for opportunities for myself and sharing the things that I'm learning." However, while Mya enjoys being Black and would not want to be anything else, she has moments of sadness about being Black. She recalls about a time when she watched a documentary:

> The first time I can remember feeling that way was when "When They See Us" came out about The Central Park Five…having to prepare myself and then care for myself in the midst of watching…that's the very first moment I can remember crying because I was Black—Not only [crying] for myself but crying because this is what Black people have to go through…For someone to not want to be Black because they know that's the only reason something is happening to them, it made me really sad.

Mya values different races, cultures and backgrounds, and shares that most of her friends identify as Black. Mya asserts that talking about Black issues is one of her top priorities in life, and that these conversations are typically easier with other Black people who are willing to engage in them. Mya believes that a lot of times, race shapes who people are. She shared that while a person can change their gender, they cannot change their race, ethnicity, or background. Mya indicates that she appreciates the opportunity to have been exposed to Black women who were strong and courageous and who supported her in knowing that she could do anything as a

Black woman. “I believe that Black women are the reason [for] the world, I think that we are the magic.”

Alexia

Alexia is 24 years old and identifies as a Black woman. Alexia describes herself as a Christian who is striving to be who God created her to be and is learning more about herself every day.

Alexia began her single-sex schooling experience at Friendship Academy in the 7th grade and attended through the 12th grade. Alexia initially learned about Friendship Academy following a recruiting visit from the acting Principal and applied to the school with encouragement from both her mother and her piano instructor. Alexia and her mother were primarily attracted to the college-going mission of the campus and the potential for greater advantages and opportunities than the other local public schools provided. “Once I got accepted, we had to sign a contract stating that we would attend a four-year university, and that's really what my mom liked.” Upon her enrollment, Alexia’s mother set the expectation that Alexia would remain at Friendship Academy until she graduated.

Over the course of her first year at Friendship Academy, Alexia had to adjust to the new culture.

> I had to learn how to unlearn certain traits that I had picked up at other schools to defend myself …Those are things that I took to [Friendship Academy] not knowing that I didn't even need to do that, because most of the kids there were nice.

Alexia expressed that she formed many strong friendships with peers across grade levels, and described the faculty, staff, and students as warm and inviting. Alexia felt that the campus was diverse. “We had kids from different parts of the city, who had different cultural backgrounds,” and at school, Alexia hung out with everyone.

Yet despite her initial excitement to attend and the friendships she had formed, Alexia regularly asked her mother if she could leave Friendship Academy. Alexia struggled with "culture shock" and the feeling that she was "missing out on going to school with boys and having a normal middle school and high school experience." She specifically mentioned wanting to attend boys' basketball and football games, and homecoming, for example. Alexia also felt that some teachers were more critical of Black students and enforced policies, such as dress code, more stringently with the Black girls in comparison to their non-Black peers. She suggested that she was subjected to stereotypes which caused her to get in trouble frequently for what she considered to be minor, unnecessary, or unintended offenses stemming from her personality. She also felt that the Black girls' behavior was often misunderstood due to cultural differences between the students and teachers. She indicated that a teacher was fired during her time at Friendship Academy due to racism, which likely heightened her perceptions of discriminatory teacher mindsets.

> Us being ourselves is not breaking the rules. It's not making us any less than who we are, or making you feel any less than who you are. But there [were] people who didn't understand us, and we knew that.

Even so, Alexia acknowledged that there were also adults at Friendship Academy that made her feel valued, and comfortable in who she was within her own culture. She felt like the campus, overall, was intentional about exposure to people and opportunities that allowed students to recognize their worth as women. She appreciated messaging from teachers that made her feel empowered as a Black girl, particularly when she was viewed as an intellectual and held to high expectations in STEM courses. Alexia was grateful to have a Black representation among the faculty on campus, which included her principal and several teachers who served as role models for her. Alexia felt like Friendship Academy generally offered a platform for students to

express themselves as she often felt heard. ‘They took into consideration the things that we needed that they could actually control.”

When considering her overall experience. Alexia reflected that she was glad that she remained at Friendship Academy. Alexia realized she did not miss out on too much in regard to the “traditional” high school experiences and may have even avoided some poor decisions or friendships. “Looking back, I wouldn’t trade it for the world, because I feel like it was a steppingstone to help me get to where I needed to be.” Further, Alexia believes that Friendship Academy offered her opportunities that many of her peers at co-educational public schools did not experience. “I'm very grateful for the academic challenges and acceleration that they were able to put us through, because academically it definitely prepared me for college. Once I got to college my freshman year it was a breeze.” The high expectations at Friendship Academy, along with consequences for academic negligence, created a mindset that propelled her toward success in college.

Alexia graduated from Friendship Academy in 2016 with a class of approximately 35 students and enrolled at a Historically Black College/University (HBCU). “I am glad I went to an HBCU instead of a PWI because I was able to be myself in an environment [where] I didn't have to worry about experiencing racism like I did in high school.” Alexia feels that Friendship Academy needs to improve in advocating for HBCUs and addressing negative stereotypes associated with them. She and some of her peers perceived disapproval surrounding their decisions to apply to and attend an HBCU, which led some students to hide that they had applied or were accepted. Alexia learned about HBCUs through sources outside of Friendship Academy and wishes for continued exposure to and communication about HBCUs across Friendship Academy’s community. She also hopes that Friendship Academy will have more opportunities for students to visit HBCUs as part of their standard college programming, so students are better

able to make informed college decisions. “I think it's important that they're able to get exposed to the best of both worlds and they're able to make their decision based on their personal preference.” Based on her recent interactions with the campus and currently enrolled students, Alexia noted a decrease in the number of Black students enrolled at Friendship Academy, but an increase in programming centered around Black culture on campus.

Alexia suggested that attending an HBCU has helped her shape and develop her own perspectives on race and her racial identity. *“*I love being Black. I think it's a blessing to be Black. Now, I don't idolize being Black.” Alexia shared that at the HBCU that she attended, “being Black was [often] idolized to such a point that it was put on a pedestal; like, you're stepping over everybody else because you're Black.” While she appreciated the confidence that this mindset portrayed, she also felt like other races shouldn't be disregarded. Alexia also rejected monolithic views of Blackness. “One thing that I learned going to a HBCU was just because you're Black, it doesn't mean that everybody has the same personality and characteristics, and that you act the same; and that's with any race.” Outside of school, Alexia realized that most of her friends are Black women, however, she has close friends and family members of other races as well. Alexia expressed comfort in interacting with people of other races and gender identities unless she feels like her identity or culture are being disrespected. Alexia operates under the premise of mutual respect. *“*I feel like I'm a little apprehensive when it comes to interacting with some older people outside of my race, because I don't know how they were raised.” Alexia also had some apprehension about being around and forming friendships with men with whom she does not have a mutual friend.

When reflecting on her transition from Friendship Academy to college, Alexia referenced expected hurdles such as larger class sizes and exposure to a multitude of varying perspectives; but she also experienced more significant social barriers than she had not anticipated.

> I think that [all-girls schools] can set you back socially in different areas. I attended an HBCU, so right off the bat that was different for me because I wasn't used to being around so many African American scholars from all over [the State], and all over the world. Let alone it being both boys and girls. I can attest for me, and probably a couple of other students, that socially it was like we had to start all over. We had to get used to being around boys, we had to get used to going to class with boys, we had to get used to literally living right across the street from boys in different dorms-it seemed like all of the other kids were a lot more advanced than we were when it came to social things, even relationships.

Alexia indicated that dating was foreign to her in middle school and high school. While she was in high school, she wanted to develop more male friendships but did not have the skillset to form those relationships organically, which may have contributed to this struggle in college. Based on these experiences, Alexia suggested that Friendship Academy should implement programming about dating relationships throughout high school.

> I think it is very important that before the girls leave to go to college, [Friendship Academy] makes a firm foundation of what it means and what it looks like to be in a consensual interaction or relationship when it comes to a male. Because if you haven't been around guys for so long…you might be gullible, or you might be naive to certain advances that guys are making that aren't consensual if that hasn't been taught in your household.

Alexia also referenced the peer pressure at her HBCU to refrain from interracial dating, which also posed different challenges.

Despite the pride Alexia has in being Black, she recognizes the negative stereotypes that surround Black women and the cultural pressures to conform to artificial standards of beauty,

such as plastic surgery, based on what is often portrayed in the media around womanhood and Blackness. When referencing the intersectionality of her race and gender, Alexia shared, “I definitely know that I'm a Black woman, but Black women come in all different shapes and sizes.” It was important to her to be confident in who she was and who God created her to be. Alexia maintains a positive perspective and extends grace to herself:

> I'm at a point now where I'm learning it's okay to be vulnerable; it's okay to express that something has hurt your feelings; it's okay to express that you're not perfect and that you made a mistake; it's okay to apologize and mean it regardless of if that person accepts the apology or not; it's okay to just be okay, and not have everything together.

Alexia is currently pursuing a master’s degree and continuing her pursuit of personal and professional growth.

Breonna

Breonna is 19 years old and identifies as a proud African American woman. Her family is from Senegal, and she is “definitely proud” to see how her African community has grown and is still fighting for themselves. She also has pride in being a woman and believes that strength comes in unity.

Breonna started her single-sex education journey at Friendship Academy in the 9th grade and continued through the 12th grade. The transition to Friendship Academy was challenging as she engaged in a full course load of mainly College Board AP classes. Breonna found it difficult to maintain a high academic ranking, which targeted her confidence and prompted her to want to leave the campus the same year that she started. Breonna originally applied to and attended Friendship Academy because her older sister had attended from 7th through 12th grade. Her parents really liked that Friendship Academy offered an environment that focused on leadership and STEM without the distraction of boys. Despite her desire to leave, Breonna’s parents

decided to have her remain at Friendship Academy. For Breonna, this resolution was facilitated by the friendships she had developed over the course of her freshman year, her adjustment to the new environment, and learning to ask for help when she needed it.

Breonna described Friendship Academy as having a "homey" feel. She graduated with a class of approximately 40 students, and they formed close bonds that made them feel like a family. Breonna found that a benefit to attending an all-girls school was developing sisterhood, learning teamwork, and creating positive body images. Although some students at Friendship Academy did their make-up daily and tried to look their best, there was less of an emphasis on physical appearance and less pressure to try to show off or to impress others. She felt like students were generally comfortable in expressing true versions of themselves.

Breonna also described a positive experience at Friendship Academy where she was able to learn from others who had different racial identities. Many of her friends at Friendship Academy identified as Black girls, although she noted, "we had a lot of different races and cultures, and we all got along pretty well." When considering the development of her own racial identity, Breonna noted that her pride has grown over time. "Growing up it was hard because I got bullied a lot for being African…I still get a lot of comments at my age, but it doesn't affect me as much." Breonna did not recall this type of bullying at [Friendship Academy] as "race wasn't really brought up that much." However, Breonna did recall some differences between her African upbringing and the upbringing of some of her African American peers, and she found herself attempting to reconcile these aspects of her identities. Breonna offered some examples, "our households have different rules…little things like how we greet each other… [differ] from American people… and there [were] a few words growing up that my parents only said in their language…it was just different." Breonna perceives that sometimes people view her as "just African," neglecting to also acknowledge her American identity. Breonna is grateful to her

parents who served as major influences in her African American identity development. “Growing up my parents made sure that they taught me about my race and culture, and they tried to make me proud of who I am.”

At Friendship Academy, Breonna felt like she fit in among her peers and felt that her teachers treated her like an adult. In describing her overall experience, she shared, “it was very empowering.” Friendship Academy offered a lot of intentional programming and exposure to speakers that made her proud to be a woman and inspired her and her peers to believe that they could all be successful if they tried. While at Friendship Academy, Breonna was involved in several clubs, she served as a basketball team manager, and also participated on the track team. Breonna felt like she was more empowered than her peers who went to co-educational public schools; and although she described herself as quiet in high school, after she graduated, she felt more confident than other women to speak up for herself or answer questions.

Even so, Breonna felt underprepared when she entered a college environment that included men. She found it awkward and uncomfortable, even though she had attended a co-educational middle school. “It’s a different environment when there’s boys there.” Breonna suggested that Friendship Academy should have had more events with other genders. However, she also acknowledges, “it would be hard to put the blame on [Friendship Academy] because it's an all-girls school and we knew what we were getting into.” Breonna also suggested that Friendship Academy should place less emphasis on attending 4-year colleges and universities and provide increased support and encouragement for students to attend community colleges. “I feel like they put a lot of pressure on [us to go to] Ivy League schools when most of us were not ready for that.” Despite these challenges, Breonna expressed that she would not change anything about her Friendship Academy experience. “I feel like everything helped me become a better person.”

Breonna graduated in 2020 and currently serves as a guest relations supervisor. She regularly interacts with people from other cultures and who speak other languages, and she feels comfortable and confident in doing so. Breonna is taking some time off to study real estate and is working toward becoming her best self.

Kisha

Kisha is 19 years old and describes herself as a Black American woman who is caring and consistently aims to challenge herself.

Kisha began her single-sex schooling experience at Friendship Academy, where she attended from 6th through 12th grade. She originally applied to Friendship Academy due to her older sister's enrollment, parental influence, and the selective and challenging nature of the courses. Though there were times throughout her tenure, mainly in middle school, when she wanted to leave to go to a "normal" high school and potentially earn additional opportunities for college credit, Kisha ultimately felt that the campus both supported her socially and challenged her academically, so she stayed. While at Friendship Academy, Kisha was involved in cheerleading, choir, and art. However, when she reflected on her high school experience, Kisha wished she had spent more time volunteering, being involved in additional extracurricular activities, and hanging out with friends.

Kisha described a "great sense of community" at Friendship Academy, where she felt like she fit in and belonged. She described Friendship Academy's racial demographics as "mainly Black and Hispanic, and some Asian…But, I don't think there were as many White people as Black and Hispanic." Most of Kisha's friends in high school were Black and/or Hispanic/Latinx women, but she recalls being close to all of the students in her grade. "We were pretty close-knit since it was so small. Our graduating class was less than 40. Everyone knew each other. Everyone [also] knew all the teachers. Even if you didn't take a class, you'd know that teacher."

Kisha felt like she was exposed to a variety of quality opportunities and that her teachers pushed her to pursue them.

> Academically I'd say it was pretty challenging as far as what classes you were expected to take. I mainly took AP classes and one dual enrollment class; but that's just something I took because I wanted to challenge myself, which is the reason why I chose the school. [...] It was challenging but you were always pushed to do the best you could do, which I really appreciated.

Kisha appreciated the organizational skills and values that were instilled in her, such as turning in homework on time, that helped prepare her for college.

Kisha felt that attending an all-girls school, constantly hearing about women's accomplishments, and meeting women leaders in powerful roles contributed to her own pride and confidence in her capabilities as a woman. She also acknowledged influences from her mother and other women in her personal life who had accomplished things that she desired for her own future. As Kisha has gotten older, she recognized she had an increased awareness of the racial climate, and a greater internalization of the accomplishments of Black women. Although Kisha enjoyed attending single-sex high school, when she applied to colleges as a senior, she did not apply to any women's colleges.

> I was worried that going to a single gender school would affect me and my work life. I felt like because I was mainly around all girls, I wouldn't be as comfortable around the other gender when I eventually started working. But now, my view has changed. I feel like in college, I'm interacting with the other gender. I don't feel like going to an all-girls school affected me that much in that aspect; but it was something that I was worried about when I was applying [to colleges] at first.

Kisha graduated from Friendship Academy in 2020 and enrolled full-time in one of the top colleges in her state to pursue a bachelor's degree. While she felt prepared for college, she also felt that there were a couple of areas in which some of her peers were more academically and socially prepared. This was exacerbated by Kisha's non-traditional start to her freshman year, as classes were remote due to COVID-19 protocols. This made it challenging for Kisha to connect with her professors as online courses made her more reluctant to reach out; but, with the return to in-person learning, Kisha has been intentional about building relationships with her professors. "I know just having that relationship is very beneficial, and once you've already established it it's easier to ask questions."

Since she has moved to her college campus, Kisha has felt more connected. Kisha enjoys participating in her extracurricular activities, which includes the Black Student Association, where she has made many of her friends. While Kisha has formed both male and female friendships while in college, Kisha finds that she has more female friends than male friends and is slightly more reluctant to voluntarily introduce herself to men. While Kisha does not feel like attending an all-girls school has negatively impacted her friendships with men, she does feel like it has influenced her dating relationships. Kisha's narrow focus on academics while she was in high school left little room for socializing outside of school, which limited her exposure to men, and therefore her dating prospects. She feels that this lack of experience was compounded by her parents' strict dating rules and her lack of social media presence.

While Kisha felt like she transitioned smoothly from her single-sex school of mostly Black and Brown students to a coeducational, Predominantly White Institution, Kisha noted that she was more aware of and responsive to certain racial issues than some of her collegiate peers. She shared an example of a controversial statue in the middle of the University's quad. While there was a petition by the Black Student Association to remove it, Kisha recognized that her

peers who identified with other races did not always see the same issues with the statue or other larger social matters. She acknowledged similar insouciance related to the use of racial slurs and recognized less widespread support for Black events on campus than for events sponsored by student groups of any other racial/ethnic groups.

Kisha's university recently implemented a course for freshmen to discuss racial issues. This new course was not well-received by all of the students, and she wonders if improving the communication process around implementing the program could help. When considering her own Blackness, Kisha described pride in the skin she was born in, and she feels that her pride in her racial identity has grown over time. She remembered in elementary school, she felt different for being the only Black student. Kisha also mentioned that people often ask her if she is mixed. She shared her perspectives regarding her racial identity relative to her skin tone:

> Sometimes, I guess, because I am light skinned, I may not experience the same things as people that may be of darker skin. At least, as of now, I don't feel like I've experienced any [obvious] racial discrimination. I'm conflicted because I know that my unique experience is likely due to my skin tone and the fact that I always occupied spaces that were majority people of color.

She shared a story referencing discrimination that her father experienced and felt grateful that she could not relate to a similar personal experience.

> My dad is a little darker than me, but is still considered light skinned, so I just find it odd and disheartening how people's experience with racism can vary so much depending on their appearance, gender, or political climate of the location they're in.

In terms of her racial experiences at Friendship Academy, Kisha recalled that campus offered "diversity dialogues" for students to discuss racial experiences, and felt like overall, her racial experiences at Friendship Academy were positive.

Kisha referenced the inevitability of interacting with people who have differing racial viewpoints and asserted that constructive engagement with these individuals may contribute to the personal growth of all parties. While she does not necessarily seek them out, she aims to be cordial. "I feel like you're not always going to be in agreement with someone, but you should still interact with them as long as they're not disrespectful or hateful…It's how you interact that matters." Kisha suggested additional, intentional opportunities in all-girls schools for students to engage with people of other races and genders.

Kisha is contemplating medical school as she aims to capitalize on her strengths of challenging herself and caring for others.

Natasha

Natasha is 19 years old and describes herself as a young, proud African and Mexican daughter, an older sister, a role model, a first-generation student, and a faithful Christian. She is a hard-worker, a go-getter, and a problem-solver.

Natasha began her single-sex schooling experience at Friendship Academy in the 6th grade and attended through 12th grade. Natasha originally learned about Friendship Academy from a friend whose older sibling attended, and they applied and enrolled together. Although Natasha was initially nervous about transitioning to a new middle school, she assimilated quickly. Natasha described her tenure at Friendship Academy as a growth experience and noted that the campus "allows you to grow up quickly, but you're also being nurtured at the same time to grow up." Early on, Natasha developed pride in both herself and the school and was inspired to uphold the high standards and reputation.

> I was surrounded by a lot of like-minded people, and we all had the same drive and passion for education; and I think part of that was just the environment that we were put in. We joined together and struggled together to get through it.

Natasha enjoyed working with her peers, speaking up in class, and asking questions of her teachers. Natasha described her teachers as uplifting, always available, responsive, and willing to help when needed. Throughout high school, Natasha's extracurricular involvement included robotics, student council, and cheerleading, and she still keeps in touch with her high school peers today.

The strong bonds Natasha formed with her classmates at Friendship Academy made them feel like a family. She also noted that the racial demographics of the campus mirrored those of her own family, which contributed to her feelings of belonging on campus.

> I did feel like I belonged. A majority of the girls at the school looked like me or…I had someone else back home that looked like them; so, I was comfortable in that [environment]. We were [a majority of] minority students.

When describing the racial demographics of the campus, Natasha shared, "I would say a majority of the campus was either African American or Hispanic." When describing her own racial/ethnic identity, Natasha described herself as Black. At separate times, she also identified racially as African American and ethnically as Hispanic. She also considered herself biracial. Although many of her close friends were Hispanic/Latinx and she was often surrounded by people who identified as Hispanic/Latinx, other people often assumed she was Black and neglected to acknowledge her Hispanic ethnicity. "There's definitely been a struggle growing up, not necessarily being accepted fully within either community because you're either too Black or not Black enough; it's always finding that middle ground." It appears that she was still unpacking her identity, not only in terms of the language she used to describe herself, but also in terms of how she felt like she fit into different racial settings given her multiracial identity.

Despite this struggle, Natasha recalled many experiences at school that allowed her to feel empowered about her race. She isolated an interaction with an African American Opera singer who visited campus.

> She pulled me aside and asked me what I wanted to [do] when I got older; and at the time, I said digital media because I didn't want to do engineering. And she was like, 'well if you're going to do something, you've got to be the best at it!' That's what her mom told her ever since she was little, so she wanted to pass it on to me. That was something that I really took to heart.

Natasha also referenced positivity around cultural celebrations during Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month but expressed that there was room for growth.

> I don't think we ever had a sit-down talk to address racial stereotypes, and that everyone has preconceived notions about different races…, and about changing the way you think in a way that's beneficial not only towards you, but also your peers, and everyone that you come into contact with daily.

When asked about her female identity, Natasha shared, "I feel proud to be a woman. I think it comes with a lot of stress, a lot of things we can't control…but that doesn't have to change the way you treat yourself or the way you treat others." Natasha intentionally "put herself out there" to develop relationships with adult mentors, which included her two Principals from Friendship Academy whom she described as strong, Black women. The consistent exposure to professionals while at Friendship Academy bolstered her competence and confidence in dialoguing with adults and sharing her own opinions. This contributed to her critical thinking skills and professional growth. Her experiences at Friendship Academy instilled the mindset that as a female she could do anything as long as she "put in the work for it," which also propelled

her involvement in selective long-term internships. When asked specifically about gender identity at a single-sex school Natasha shared:

> I think [attending Friendship Academy] allowed everyone to find their true self because we were so comfortable with everyone. I've known a lot of girls that discovered that they might not identify as female, they might identify as non-binary, and they might not be attracted to men and might be attracted to just anyone. We all learned there's a spectrum of genders, there's a spectrum of who you like and what you're attracted to, and that's something we all figured out together… it's something that we felt comfortable doing together.

Natasha believes attending an all-girls school allowed her to develop both greater confidence and stronger interpersonal skills than she may have gained at a co-educational school.

> I've heard from other people that they didn't feel like they could speak up because a guy in a class would try to answer; or they didn't feel like going to get help because they didn't want to seem less than anyone else.

Natasha also referenced experiences in robotics competitions where male peers from other campuses made snide remarks about her role as captain; but she remained steadfast in her leadership and attempted to change their perspectives through her actions and direct conversations. Natasha reflected on one instance:

> I think my impact on him was hopefully positive in the sense that I was his mentor and he had to understand that I knew what I was doing…at the end, I definitely allowed him to loosen his reins and change his perspective, a little bit.

Despite her overall positive experience at Friendship Academy, Natasha wished that Friendship Academy provided more opportunities for students to earn college credit while in high school, other than College Board Advanced Placement options. Natasha also felt like the

focus on academics required students to be more intentional about "joining clubs and organizations and then making the effort outside of school to maintain those social interactions." Natasha felt that due to her high level of involvement in school, she sacrificed opportunities to both interact and develop skills to interact with men her own age. Natasha hopes that Friendship Academy will continue to offer opportunities for students to interact socially with boys at other campuses and create more cross-sectional events that will inspire more friendships. Natasha also feels that attending an all-girls school has influenced her dating relationships by making things "unnecessarily awkward," due to her narrow focus on her studies and extracurricular activities.

Natasha graduated from Friendship Academy in 2020 and enrolled as a full-time college student within her home state. Natasha described the college's racial demographics as diverse, but also as largely Hispanic/Latinx. Natasha is majoring in mechanical engineering and is involved in a sorority and summer internships. In comparison to her peers, Natasha felt well-prepared for her post-secondary academics and has been experiencing success. Natasha describes most of her college friends as Hispanic/Latinx and female or non-binary, but she does have more male friendships than ever before. She has also recognized that her social interactions have changed since high school. "What I've learned is that I'm not really an extroverted person. It's just because I knew [my Friendship Academy friends] for so long, I was just comfortable being around them." Natasha describes a practice of "easing" people into her personality and slowly letting people get to know her true self "because it might be too much at once, and not everyone is ready for that." Natasha also navigated some novel social situations that allowed her to learn more about herself and others. For example, Natasha perceived arrogant behaviors from male peers during group projects and learned how to work more effectively with different personality types.

Natasha values the growth that stems from interacting with people of other races and genders, particularly as she pursues a career in a White, cis-male dominated field. She assumes a sense of pride and responsibility in representing her people and her ethnicity well, particularly when she is provided with opportunities to enter spaces where there are few other people of color. Natasha aims to serve as a role model and positively impact other young women, especially those who look like her.

India

India is 19 years old. “I am a Black woman who's trying to find myself in America; find my path, find my reason.”

India began her single-sex schooling experience at Friendship Academy in the 6th grade. She originally decided to apply to the campus because a friend’s sibling attended, and she and her group of friends ultimately enrolled. However, after her 8th grade year, India left Friendship Academy to attend a high school in another city. She then moved back to her home city and re-enrolled at Friendship Academy for her 10th grade year and remained until she graduated. Although India wanted to have a traditional, co-educational, large, public-school experience, she felt that returning to Friendship Academy would be a good choice for her continued college preparation.

India described Friendship Academy as interactive. She formed close relationships with both faculty and students, and she was very involved in the school community. India participated in orchestra, student council, the Black Student Union, and other organizations centered around advocacy and change. India felt that attending an all-girls school provided her with more opportunities to meet different people and have a variety of experiences. She felt privileged and empowered by the consistent messaging she received about her potential. India also felt affirmed by campus wide festivals that celebrated Blackness through music, performing arts, and different

cultural foods. She felt like she belonged and got along well with her peers who were mostly Students of Color. India perceived that someone who was unfamiliar with the school might think that students were "preppy, like we had a whole bunch of money," even though that was not a reflection of a majority of the student population. India also felt like her peers at Friendship Academy supported varying orientations and gender identities, even more so than her peers at co-educational schools. At Friendship Academy they felt like sisters, free to be themselves and free to be open about their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment. "It's mostly the boys that tend to judge…at Friendship Academy, it was kind of a judge-free type of zone. Nobody really cared. It's who you are."

India shared that she had good teachers who taught her well. Although her academic experience at Friendship Academy was challenging and the workload was a little stressful, she feels it was worth it since it prepared her for her college. India described her transition to college as easy. She expressed, "it was basically the same thing as high school, maybe a little easier." Socially, the transition was "kind of weird at first" since she had not had boys in her classes for several years. She described feeling an internal sense of awe. Although most of India's college friends identify as Black women, India feels comfortable interacting with people of other races and believes in approaching all people with kindness. She also made male friends and appreciates their male perspectives. India does not feel that attending an all-girls school hindered her dating relationships, but rather reinforced that she was not interested in women.

India's experiences at Friendship Academy contrasted in comparison to her experiences at the other high school that she attended during 9th grade. The other high school was not challenging, and she was often bored. She also noted larger class sizes and fewer expectations for college preparation, specifically in relation to minimal requirements to apply for scholarships or engage in community service. Another difference was that most of the students at the campus

identified racially as White. For the first couple of days after she arrived, she mostly stayed to herself, until she found a group of people to hang out with. She and her new group of friends, who identified as Black or Hispanic/Latinx women, avoided some of their other peers because the other students "acted like they were better than everybody." India recalls an experience in one of her classes where a male peer told her, "You can't live over here, these houses are expensive." She said that although this comment bothered her, she tried to ignore it and remain focused on her education.

India feels that as a Black person, she is sometimes judged by the color of her skin, before people get to know her as a person. Even so, India loves being Black. "I wouldn't want it any other way." As she grows older and becomes more aware of the hatred in the world, she feels even more privileged about her race. At Friendship Academy, India recalls having positive experiences related to her race, outside of one instance. "We got called a racial slur by another minority. It was kind of shocking. We knew each other for all these years, since 6th grade, and it was like a stab in the back." India believes that once administrators were informed of the situation, they handled the situation the best way they could. "They provided meetings to talk about race and to show why we may be offended by what they say, and how what we say could be offensive to them." At Friendship Academy, most of India's close friends were Black, although she felt like she was close with all of her peers in her grade level, regardless of race.

When asked about her perspectives on womanhood, India shared, "I think we have it harder than men do. I think we have to work 10 times harder just to get equal pay." India condemns stereotypes that suggest that women can only be housewives and cannot pursue male dominated fields. She believes that attending an all-girls school showed her that she has a voice and deserves to be heard. She also feels that as a Black woman she gets labeled with additional stereotypes related to hair and speech, for example. "I see myself just as powerful or hard

working as a White woman, or a Hispanic woman, or any woman." When considering Black womanhood in America, India references influences from social media and TV, as well as her campus principal who was a Black woman. India reflected on interactions with her principal who spent time conversing with students, referencing books they should read, and exposing them to experiences that highlighted Black women in a positive way. "She provided us an opportunity to see ourselves in our world, and she would ask us what she could do to make our environment feel good for us."

India feels like the only disadvantage to attending a single-gender school was that she did not have the "traditional" high school experience that included social events such as football games. Even so, India shared:

> I think how we had it was good preparation for life. At [Friendship Academy], we had to work for everything; and in life, you can't just expect handouts, you have to work for what you want. Although we complained, I think it really did shape us.

India felt like healthy competition and high expectations contributed to her success at Friendship Academy. Her family was also very proud that she attended. "They bragged about it all the time."

India graduated from Friendship Academy in 2020 with a class of approximately 40 students. She subsequently enrolled at an HBCU as a nursing major while also maintaining employment outside of school. India made the decision to attend an HBCU instead of a PWI just a couple of weeks before the start of her freshman year of college. "Honestly I feel like that was the best decision ever." India was inspired by the good nursing program and felt like her success should not be determined by whether she went to an HBCU versus a PWI. "I felt like I didn't have to go to a big PWI to get my degree, I could go to an HBCU, and it still holds the same

weight." India hopes that her actions will contribute to challenging racial and gender disparities, and she plans to continue to confront hatred with kindness.

These narrative summaries presented the Black women participants and their individual experiences and voices. The next section will discuss the emergent themes resulting from a cross-comparison across all of the data collected from individual narratives, researcher journal notes, and document analysis.

Emergent Themes

As a result of the comparative analysis, five themes emerged related to the research questions that assist in explaining how Black girls develop their racial and gendered identities and understanding of cross-racial and cross-gendered interactions. I identified the following themes in my research: (1) the importance of women and Black women role models, (2) belonging and emotional safety, (3) body, beauty, and behavior standards, (4) adjusting to college life, and (5) synchroneity of pride and pain.

Emergent Theme 1: The Importance of Women and Black Women Role Models

All nine participants in this study identified positive role models as a strong source of empowerment in relation to their race and gender. They appreciated being surrounded by women every day at school and valued frequently hearing about women's accomplishments. All of the participants' principals were women. Most participants had a Black principal for the majority of their tenure at the all-girls schools. One participant had a Hispanic/Latinx principal for the majority of her experience. Alumnae explicitly referenced their campus principals as strong, positive, women role models. Many appreciated seeing Black women in the principal's role. "I loved the fact that we had Black women in administration...it really made an impact…we had so much respect for them for putting themselves in the position to help us to get to where we needed to be." For Alexia, seeing Black women in administration made her feel worthy of the

investment in her future and exemplified the potential for own positive outcomes. “Not only were they telling us, but they did it themselves.” Natasha had two different Black principals during her tenure at Friendship Academy, and intentionally built close relationships with both of them. She believes these relationships forged additional opportunities. Natasha noted, “I was also able to have a conversation with a strong, Black woman that was in a high position, and I got mentorship from both of them so that was something I kind of cherished at the time.” Similarly, India described the principal as a source of knowledge who would offer pertinent literature and cultural experiences to students. “[Our principal] instilled in us what it would be like in the outside world and opened our eyes to being a Black woman in America.” Kayla and Joyce described aspects of their principal’s demeanor that they valued. Kayla shared, “everyone wanted to be her. She was a huge female role model for all the students...the way she carried herself…the way she walked was amazing, and the way she spoke, she was so eloquent.” Joyce shared, “my principal being Black was really empowering. She had so much confidence.” Joyce indicated that her principal not only garnered respect, but she also gave it. “She wasn’t the type of person to call you out in front of people, she would pull you to the side and tell you something.” The principal served as a role model for a majority of the participants and for these Black alumnae, seeing a Black woman in this role has a positive impact on how they viewed themselves as Black girls.

Alumnae also recognized some of their teachers as role models. Several alumnae specifically referenced strong relationships with Black teachers and wished for more Black teachers. Alumnae indicated that their Black teachers assisted with building a stronger community among Black students and planted seeds for academic growth and future successes. Even so, some teachers made students feel valued, cared for, and supported regardless of their race or the rigor of their classes. Kisha shared, “I'm just appreciative of the community we had

because I had such a close relationship with my teachers that I wasn't scared to talk to them if I needed something." Alumnae indicated that positive relationships with teachers not only contributed to their academic successes but also assisted them with building relationships with professors in college. Natasha shared, "I did visit a lot of office hours to get closer with my professors... and that's something [Friendship Academy] helped me with because going to the teacher was so easy." However, some participants also referenced encountering challenging interactions, feeling misunderstood, experiencing racism by some teachers, which hindered role-model relationships. One participant indicated that she avoided taking classes with male teachers, but students did not directly reference negative interactions with teachers related specifically to gender.

Overall, alumnae received consistent messaging that emphasized their competence as equal to men and reinforced their capabilities to engage in any career path, especially in male-dominated fields. Breonna remembered, "we had a lot of women empowerment things, like speakers; and that just made me very proud to be a woman and know that we can all be very successful if we tried." All of the campuses offered opportunities for students to engage with guest speakers, whom they deemed as powerful women in influential leadership positions. Alumnae identified benefits from hearing from all women, but specifically captured the importance of hearing from and seeing successful women who looked like them. For participants, observing Black women in powerful leadership positions influenced how they visualized their own futures. Participants identified various interactions with Black guest speakers who positively influenced them, including visual and performing artists, politicians, and chief executive officers. Outside of school and in adulthood, alumnae had several other sources for Black women role models, which included their parents or extended family members, celebrities, authors, activists, and college advisors, and/or professors.

Emergent Theme2: Belonging and Emotional Safety

Participants described camaraderie with their peers and feeling seen and celebrated by educators in the school community as contributing factors to belonging and emotional safety at their all-girls schools.

Camaraderie

All of the alumnae indicated that the development of strong bonds among their peers served as a primary benefit of attending an all-girls school. Alumnae experienced a strong level of comfort being around all girls and perceived that this sense of comfortability was deficient in a co-educational environment. “It’s all girls, we feel comfortable and can do all types of stuff together.” Alumnae used terms such as “sisters,” “family” and “sisterhood” to describe relationships formed on campus. Parents and students alike appreciated the college focus of the campus and perceived that a single-sex school meant fewer academic and social distractions. When asked about her family’s perceptions about her attendance India shared, “They loved it. They bragged about it all the time.” Kisha and Kayla mentioned that their fathers, in particular, appreciated the absence of boys; however, all participants indicated feeling a sense of encouragement, pride, and special attention surrounding their attendance at an all-girls school. Participants felt like there was a collective sense of focus on campus. “We were pretty much always a focused school. No matter what class you went to, you could always find that focus.” Mya also felt that she and her peers were trusted more, especially with being leaders, because they were all girls. Natasha shared, “I was surrounded by a lot of like-minded people, and we all had the same drive and passion for education.” Although each alumnae indicated that they considered leaving the single sex campus for a variety of reasons, including having a “normal” or “traditional” co-educational high school experience, they all stayed due, in part, to the

sisterhood. Alumnae indicated that they still keep in touch with their peers and remain connected to their all-girls community even today.

Among their peers, participants described feeling safe and supported to be their authentic selves. Natasha observed that many of them were young when they started at the all-girls school, and they explored and learned about gender identity together,

> I think [attending Friendship Academy] allowed everyone to find their true self because we were so comfortable with everyone. I've known a lot of girls that discovered that they might not identify as female, they might identify as non-binary, and they might not be attracted to men, and might be attracted to just anyone. We all learned there's a spectrum of genders, there's a spectrum of who you like and what you're attracted to, and that's something we all figured out together... it's something that we felt comfortable doing together.

Kayla felt that students were very "accepting and loving of their LGBTQ sisters" on her campus. None of the alumnae reported feeling conflicted about their gender identity despite attending single-sex campus. Aleah, who identifies as being gender queer, shared,

> I've always been person who's been critical or curious about the way that gender is talked about and represented, from a very young age…at the same time being at an all-girls school, even though there was a big emphasis on sisterhood, in some ways I didn't think about my gender as much in the way that I do [now], or would have, being at a coed school.

Participants also felt that in the all-girls environment, they were less pressured to engage in risky adolescent behaviors. Words used to describe the campus included "sheltered" and a "bubble."

"It allowed us to be girls, it allowed us to be kids, and it kept our innocence." Further, alumnae indicated that attending an all-girls school allowed them to feel safe in speaking up, which afforded them confidence in finding and using their voice.

> I really enjoyed the lack of distractions. I also liked that we were able to speak freely with one another without worrying about the other gender's input. I also felt like we were able to bond and just become closer with each other. Of course, we were all in each other's business; but I feel like at the end, that really tied us towards being like true sisters.

Alumnae expressed increased willingness to speak up in class, ask for help, and have open conversations about personal and/or challenging topics. They had an increased sense of advocacy, agency, and confidence. "I think it's definitely taught me to be more confident because everyone was female so I was like, 'I can just speak up and say this.'" Participants described a tendency for young women at co-educational campuses to default toward seeking male assistance for challenging tasks, an option unavailable to students at the all-girls school "We all did everything ourselves…nobody felt like, we're women, so we can't do it or don't want to do it." Mya also asserted that students who attended traditional, co-educational schools were "less aware of a lot of women that are prominent figures in history." She was surprised when some of her peers from other campuses lacked awareness about women who she deemed as well- known, such as Marie Curie, and was grateful for the integration of influential women throughout the curriculum. In addition to feeling like they could speak freely, participants recalled feeling heard. "Were we 100% heard every time we expressed ourselves? I think it just depended on the circumstance or the situation, but I would say a good 90% of the time, [faculty] heard us."

Feeling Seen and Celebrated

Overall, alumnae felt that their campus made them feel empowered in relation to their womanhood, and they specifically mentioned feeling empowered by partnerships with organizations that specifically catered to girls, and celebrations during women's history month. Alumnae highlighted opportunities they experienced and wished to have regarding being seen and celebrated racially across the larger campus community. Several alumnae also acknowledged that their school instituted several opportunities for moderated conversations about race which students found beneficial. Alumnae also referenced spaces, such as Black student affinity groups, where they were able to build community with their other Black peers. "We started an African American Association at our school because of the lack of Black awareness that we were having." Another alumna shared that with the establishment of the African American Student Association she hoped to create programs to uplift students. She reflected on the importance of that space. "With the murders of Black men and women, to be able to talk about that and grieve together, heal together, and even if they don't create programs, to just be with each other."

Alumnae also expressed appreciation for campus-wide and community events that brought awareness to and celebrated Black History. Participants specifically addressed programming during Black History month that was supported not only by school administrators and teachers, but the larger community. "I thought that it was pretty cool that people came out to see how it was," as she described the excitement surrounding bands and cultural foods. Another participant shared,

> I think it was a positive experience; and it made me feel proud when it got accepted that we would have a Black History Assembly and that all students will be required to go. That made me feel seen and important...it made me feel very positive about my school.

One area in which alumnae desired increased exposure and support in relation to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Alumnae referenced minimal

opportunities for college visits to HBCUs in comparison to PWIs and felt that this exposure was critical to making informed college decisions. Several alumnae perceived discouragement and shame from the school community when students applied to, or accepted admission offers from HBCUs. Alexia shared:

> So, when it came to applying for college, some girls weren't even comfortable enough to even state that they were going to an HBCU, or that they applied to an HBCU because it was frowned upon - not by our college advisor, but by our other peers, [and] other teachers - they didn't know much about an HBCU. There were people who didn't even know what HBCU stood for. When you look back, it's almost shameful for other girls to have to want to hide the fact that they're applying to an HBCU or that they're going to an HBCU so that they won't feel bad about a choice that they're making as far as wanting to go to a Historically Black College. That's ridiculous.

Alexia's college advisor identified as Black. Joyce had a non-Black college advisor and shared similar sentiments about her school community:

> There was not a lot of emphasis to go to HBCUs at my high school…we talked about HBCUs and they were like, 'well, what about these [other] schools," or if they suggested schools for you in an area, none of them would be HBCUs. I vividly remember a conversation with some of my other Black friends in high school talking about how [our college bound advisor] never helps us find scholarships to HBCUs or she never talks about students who go to HBCUs, we just felt like nobody talked about it enough.

Alumnae described positive feelings surrounding belonging and emotional safety at their all-girls campuses, but also recognized areas for growth.

Emergent Theme 3: Body, Beauty and Behavior Standards

Alumnae sometimes fell victim to Eurocentric beauty, body, and behavior standards during their adolescent years when they attended their respective single sex schools. Several participants referenced personal and societal preferences toward lighter skin. One participant shared feelings she had as a young child:

> I used to think I'd be so much better if I was [a] lighter skin tone…that's internalized antiblackness and colorism of being able to understand at a very young age that lighter is more beautiful and darker is not.

Another participant indicated that she felt like only Hispanic/Latinx students and light-skinned Black students were selected as representatives for school-related events or opportunities. Two participants indicated that they and/or some of their friends used skin lighteners while in high school due to perceptions that having lighter skin was more attractive. "[I've become] more proud of being a dark-skinned woman. In high school, I personally knew a lot of people who used skin lighteners, and I used [them] too." Black hair was another aspect of their bodies they felt was criticized.

> I was in high school, and I was starting to go more natural, and I just got my hair done and one of the teachers, a White woman, gave a compliment; but it was one of there moments where it's a compliment but there's that underlying racial—I wouldn't call it a back-handed compliment, but it's like 'oh, your hair looks good like *that,*' as in, the other ways that maybe I wore my hair were less acceptable.

She also recalled hearing ignorant comments from students, such as, "I heard that Black people's hair doesn't grow," which complicated her feelings of belonging and made her experience of being Black and a minority in the school even more real and apparent. She noted, "Black hair and all the things that are done to, and that Black girls and women do, to their hair to fit in with certain beauty standards, that was definitely a part of my childhood growing up."

The school uniform served as another area of contention for several students as they felt policed by the school personnel who aimed to reinforce the strict dress code policies. Unlike most other public schools in their school districts, the all-girls schools required specific uniforms, and several participants indicated that they disliked this aspect of the school, likely because it hindered their freedom of expression and choice. The uniform policies regulated the color and type of socks, for example, which several alumnae alluded to as being excessive. There was also an impression that Black students were disproportionately disciplined for their uniform violations, which they considered as less serious than behavioral issues. “I got in trouble so much, and it would be for things that I thought were simple like dress code violations...but as far as respect, I was always super respectful.” A third alumna had similar experiences with the uniform policy on her campus, “I think the aspect of [my school] that I absolutely hated was all the policing around uniform and dress code and demerits…all that stuff is so silly.” This may have contributed tension in relationships with some of the educators that heavily enforced these policies. “[Policing] happens at schools across the country and in different ways.” While she acknowledged that the school wanted to present itself in a particular way, she did not enjoy that the policing aligned to a specific archetype of what they proposed a young woman or student should look like. She described an instance of policing around sexuality that complicated these feelings:

> I had this best friend. We were pretty close, and we would hold hands; and remember one time we were walking into the cafeteria, we were holding hands, and the principal was like, “ladies we don't do that here.” So, we unclasped our hands, but it was one of those moments, where I was like, that's dumb. I didn't appreciate that. The policing that goes on at that school, I think, is a bit much.

Participants also recalled positive experiences related to beauty in high school. “We [had] a health and wellness week where we talked about how it’s okay to not wear makeup, it’s okay to be comfortable in your natural skin.” Another alumna indicated, although she sometimes struggled with her concepts of her weight in middle and high school, she was grateful and supported by her friends who noticed, “I think we were all really body positive.” Another shared that attending an all-girls school contributed to her self-confidence and worth, “Being at [my school] really showed me that your self-worth truly comes from within, despite any external obstacle, or external comment, or experience might contribute to any negative feelings.” Four participants indicated that their spiritual beliefs also served as a standard for developing their own beliefs about themselves and Black womanhood. One alumna shared about the societal pressures imposed by the media in relation to her beliefs:

> In a world full of a culture that's telling you to conform to plastic surgery and that your natural body isn't enough and that the way you think is not enough...it can be difficult, sometimes to think, “Am I doing this the right way?” I’m a Christian so most of my beliefs are foundational [from] the Bible...and when it comes to me figuring out who I am, it's an everyday thing.

In addition to positive messaging around womanhood and race, all-girls schools must consider the explicit and implicit messaging around body and beauty standards.

Emergent Theme 4: Adjusting to College Life

Developing skills for college and life was a prominent feature of the all-girls school missions, and participants expressed a connection to this aim. Alumnae indicated that the college preparatory focus of the single-sex campuses served as a major driving for their enrollment, along with the promotion of STEM education. All nine alumni expressed appreciation for the rigorous academic preparation that forged the development of organization, positive study habits,

and time management skills, in addition to providing relevant content knowledge for success in college. Four participants majored in STEM fields for their undergraduate degree, and five participants are presently pursuing or intend to pursue an advanced degree. Academically, alumnae felt equally as prepared as their peers. In terms of social preparation, however, they felt like they lagged behind in comparison to their peers. In addition to typical adjustments, such as larger class sizes and more freedom, participants mentioned having to adjust to a different cultural environment, particularly in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. This was particularly true for students who attended PWIs.

> You know, going to Predominantly White Institutions and being in predominantly White spaces, I never feel 100% comfortable and I don't know if that's something that I could feel when we're in this society that's highly racialized and hierarchical; and they're all these unspoken things in a space when you're the minority in that particular space-when most of the people in that space are White.

In discussing her transition to a PWI, another participant indicated, "It was an interesting transition, but it didn't last for too long. It took me a while to find my group, though." Another alumna shared that she discovered a stark contrast in her socioeconomic status in comparison to her White peers in her dormitory. "I don't mean this in a negative way, but I'm pretty sure I was one of the poorest students there." This created some social isolation, until she found a group that she felt she could relate to. "It still was a shock as to the degree of people that I was seeing on a daily [basis] that were different from me."

Classroom Interactions

While academically they felt comfortable in a college classroom, several participants indicated that they were unimpressed by what they perceived as male egos in the classroom. "I do think academically I was more intolerant to what I felt like were dumb answers, or just

unnecessary comments. It definitely made me miss being in that [all-girls] environment where you don't have someone just saying something just [be]cause." They described a learning curve of working with men on group projects who sometimes exhibited "arrogance and cockiness." "They wasted time because they didn't want to ask questions." Even so, one participant mentioned feeling slightly less comfortable speaking up in classes than she did in high school. Another participant shared that she felt like she had to be more ladylike than at her all-girls school. "You can't just go out and burp out loud or something like that." In addition to an adjustment inside of the classroom environment, alumnae indicated that they also experienced an adjustment with men outside of the classroom, particularly in terms of relationships.

Dating & Friendships

Alumnae indicated that attending an all-girls school influenced their interactions with men, but they differed in the degree to which their interactions were affected. One participant acknowledged, "there's always a risk when interacting with men," a sentiment shared by several participants. Another participant reflected on her interactions with men in comparison to her peers, "maybe I am more reluctant to interact with the opposite gender unless one of my friends introduces them to me or if we have to work on a project together. I feel like maybe that's the only difference." Although to varying degrees, alumnae felt that dating relationships were most affected by attending an all-girls school.

Several alumnae shared that their narrow focus on academics while in high school hindered their availability to entertain dating relationships with men. One participant shared "I did not feel like I had the time to have any kind of romantic relationship." Another participant shared a similar sentiment, indicating both time and inexperience as a barrier:

> I don't know how to navigate that territory, just because I was so busy and I never really thought about it growing up…I always left it on the back burner and I'm still kind of

> doing that…my mom's always been like 'guys are going to be here forever, they're not going to go extinct, you can just wait until you're done graduating.' That's something that I'm perfectly fine with doing because I just don't have the time or energy to put toward another human being right now.

Another alumna indicated that attending a single sex school was one factor out of many that prevented a dating relationship:

> I definitely do think it influenced dating. I am not in a relationship now. I've never been in a relationship. I am straight, so I obviously didn't date in high school because I was a homebody so I just went to school and that's it. I didn't really do anything [else] to expose me to the other gender. I wasn't on social media that much either, so that's also something that kind of inhibited me from getting into a relationship. And then my parents, at that time, didn't want me to get into relationships until I was over 16, so it's just a lot, but now… I do feel like I don't really know how to interact with the other gender dating-wise. I feel like there's something missing because I went to an all-girls school.

Other alumnae indicated that her all-girls schooling experienced influenced her dating life because she looked for partners who were feminists and aware and open to female experience.

> It did affect my dating because I feel like since I've been in the eighth grade there's certain things I haven't had to hide, just about being a female, and I'm not interested in doing that anymore…I feel like girl things are more natural now…so I think I'm more frank and honest and I'm only accepting of other people who are aware of that and are not ignorant to the things I have to go through being a female.

Another participant indicated that she was most interested in men who portrayed the female empowerment values that were instilled in her from her all-girls school. For example, she asks

potential suitors for their perspectives on the pay gap and beliefs about women's abilities. "I [am] looking for a guy who was a feminist, basically…On a subconscious level those values were instilled in me, and I think that is [what] I look [for in] mates." Another alumna indicated that single-sex schooling influenced her dating life because it allowed her to learn more about herself. "I feel like going to [my school], it made me realize why I don't want to date girls, being around them so much all the time. I kind of realized that's not for me."

Based on their experiences, alumnae indicated the need for intentional programming to facilitate interactions with men and inform students about healthy romantic relationships. Some participants spoke of experiences where they were sexually victimized due, in part, to their inexperience in romantic interactions. Joyce suggested that the all-girls schools create additional interactions with the all-boys schools. "I think that it would have been beneficial for us to have more interactions with them that weren't just dances, like to do projects together... so that we can have that social aspect." Kisha suggested mandatory events that encourage students to interact with peers of other races and genders. She stressed the importance of *actually* interacting and getting people to work together, versus just having them be around each other. Alexia shared:

> I think it is very important that before the girls leave to go to college, [Friendship Academy] makes a firm foundation of what it means and what it looks like to be in a consensual interaction or relationship when it comes to a male. Because if you haven't been around guys for so long…you might be gullible, or you might be naive to certain advances that guys are making that aren't consensual if that hasn't been taught in your household.

Even so, Alumnae expressed a level of comfort in maintaining friendships with men. Participants indicated that they enjoyed having male friends and the male perspective. "Being at an all-girls school for so long… it's important to have some male friends to just neutralize

everything." Most alumnae indicated that their current friend group consists mainly of Black and/or Hispanic/Latinx women, which is generally consistent with who they were friends with during high school. However, they indicated having friends of other races and genders and a willingness to be friends with anyone they were comfortable around and had things in common with.

Emergent Theme 5: Synchroneity of Pride and Pain

The intersectionality of participants' experiences as Black women was evidenced through declarations of pride, confidence, and empowerment coupled with sadness and pain when describing their own race and gender identities and their interactions with people of other racial and gendered identities.

Race and Gender

Alumnae expressed tremendous pride in both their race and gender identities. However, in the same way that Black women experience the inextricable intersectionality of their race and gender identities, participants' pride in being Black women was ineluctably tied to their marginalization. Alexia shared about her pride "I love being Black, I think it's a blessing to be Black," and followed by sharing about a racist encounter in high school, "it was heartbreaking, but it made me realize this ain't over; some people are still stuck in this same mindset." Mya described both happiness and sadness about her Blackness. "I've always loved being Black. Recently, with all of the things that are happening [...], I have moments of sadness, for being Black. [...] Sometimes I do feel hopeless or not important, and it makes me really sad." Mya hopes to spread the message that, "although black women are essentially looked down upon in our society, that there's nothing that we cannot do." Kisha shared how the racial climate has influenced her experiences in college and has exposed the differences between the Black experience and the experience of other races. In light of these inequities, she shared, "I do

definitely think that we have a different lens on us than other racial groups and since I'm so proud of my Blackness, I just want to live up to other Black figures." Kayla shared that she feels empowered both by being a woman and being a Black woman, but also stated, "I feel like we have a lot of work to do as a society for women, especially in terms of the pay gap." Kayla feels that her experience as a woman is complexified by her Blackness and delves into this intersectionality. Although she is generally described as a warm, bubbly person, she feels that there is a serious side to her demeanor that sometimes gets linked to the "aggressive, assertive, sassy, stereotype" that commonly gets ascribed to Black women. "I feel like it's one of the most empowering positions but also one of the most emotionally draining ones because not only do you have to deal with racial tension experiences, but also differences between being a Black man and a Black woman." Kayla identifies the marginalization that women experience both from being Black and female that differs from Black men (and White women).

India describes her perceptions of the dichotomy of pride and pain in being Black. "People seem to judge you for having melanin in your skin. They are quick to give you your whole life story just by how you look and not even get to know you as a person." India continued by sharing, "I love being Black. I wouldn't want it any other way… Now as I'm growing older and I see all the hatred there is, I feel more privileged to be my race." Joyce shared, "being African American, being Black, it feels powerful to me. It's loaded in that not everybody has the same experience, but sometimes everyone is seen the same way." In sharing her feelings about womanhood, she stated, "I think being a woman is complex. I think there's definitely the intersectionality of being black and being a woman." Joyce further expands on this complexity. "I often think that being a woman is powerful in that being confident in my womanhood has often gotten me compliments, whereas me being confident in being Black gets me questions."

Natasha shared about the pride and injustice she feels in being a woman, "I feel proud to be a woman. I think it comes with a lot of stress, a lot of things we can't control…but that doesn't have to change the way you treat yourself or the way you treat others." She compared how she views herself to how others view her:

> When I think of myself, I think of mainly just the positives that come with being a woman, and a young Black woman; and how I can impact other people that look like me and have the same drive and want of success; and how I can lead the way to show them. But, when I think of other people looking at me, I hope that they see the way I see myself; but obviously that isn't always true, only because of the prejudice everyone has when they see someone.

Breonna shared that she is very proud of being African, but that it was also a source of bullying, exemplifying the pride in her heritage and related external harassment:

> Growing up my parents made sure that they taught me about my race and my culture, and they tried to make me proud of who I am. Obviously, going to school, people kind of tweaked that, for me; but my parents always made sure that I knew that being Black was a good thing and that I should be proud and confident.

Aleah shared about the beauty in being Black and also the struggle associated with Blackness:

> What it means to be Black is to be a part of a history and a lineage of really beautiful, powerful, and resilient people. Black is beautiful. Black is deep. And, I'm definitely proud to identify with being Black. I think I'm constantly in awe of the history of Black people and all the people who have come before me; not only honoring and appreciating their struggle, but through their struggles the wisdom, the fight, and the love they've also passed on.

Interactions with others

Despite the inequities they have faced and the tension of society's racial climate, alumnae agreed that value comes from interacting with people of other races and genders. A similar synchroneity existed between the benefits of being open and cautious. Aleah shared,

> there's a certain kind of social capital that you can gain from being able to be in environments where you're interacting with different types of people from different racial backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and gender identities.

Natasha shared that even if it might be uncomfortable, "Putting yourself in those situations will allow you to have growth." Mya shared, "I think uncomfortable situations can really be a learning experience." She acknowledges that whether a situation is positive or negative, "you can always take something away within interacting with another race." Mya believes in maximizing opportunities to learn about a person's race and culture "because that is the first thing that we are born into, and we really cannot change that. Even gender has become something we can change now but, you cannot change your race, you cannot change your ethnicity." Similarly, Breonna shared that comfort comes with exposure, "Being able to communicate with different people is a good thing. It's a good learning experience." Joyce shared, "I think perspective comes from interacting with people of different backgrounds. However, I do think that boundaries are also important." Joyce indicates that though it might be uncomfortable, it is also important to be safe. Alexia shared a similar sentiment:

> I'm a little apprehensive when it comes to interacting with some older people outside of my race because I don't know how they were raised…I'm going to be respectful, I'm not going to hope for the worst, but at the same time, I'm not going to be naive to it either.

India also expresses comfort in interacting with other races, and approaches people with an open mind.

> Whenever I’m with another race, I don't automatically think that they don't like me because of my skin. I'm just neutral. I just go in and be nice, that’s all I can be; and then once I see their true colors and I feel like they are being kind of racist, I just leave the situation.

In relation to peers her own age India shared that her interactions are generally positive. “People my age are more woke to like what's happening.” Alexia shared, “if we have a mutual respect for each other, regardless of if I agree with your beliefs or your standpoint, I still have to respect you at the end of the day, because you're a person and I'm a person.” Kisha shared, “as long as they're not disrespectful, maybe you can find some way in which y'all agree, even if your views are different.” Overall, alumni indicated that interactions with other races and genders are important and should be centered around mutual respect.

In this chapter, I presented individual narratives of each participant and cross case analysis of the five themes: (1) the importance of women and Black women role models, (2) belonging and emotional safety, (3) body, beauty, and behavior standards, (4) adjusting to college life, and (5) synchroneity of pride and pain. The next chapter will provide a discussion about the emergent themes.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion of Results

This study investigated the influence of all-girls schooling on race and gender identity development and interactions with others from the perspectives of Black alumnae. Through analysis of my findings, five themes emerged (1) the importance of women and Black women role models, (2) belonging and emotional safety, (3) body, beauty, and behavior standards, (4) adjusting to college life, and (5) synchroneity of pride and pain. These themes are integral to better understanding and supporting Black girls.

Intersectionality of Race and Gender

Black girls and women are keenly aware of the complexity that derives from being both Black and female, which influences how they understand their racial and gender identities (Rogers et al. 2021). Even in studies where participants are asked to consider race and gender separately, participants commonly layer their racial and gender identities (Mims & Williams, 2020; Rogers et al., 2021), further supporting the intersectionality of the Black female experience. Participants in this study proved no exception to this phenomenon and they frequently interwove their Blackness with their womanhood. This study also showed that participants interlaced their pride with their marginalization.

Alumnae described several common factors that contributed positively to their race and gender identity development. Participants indicated that role models, particularly successful Black women, offered empowering examples of what they could aspire toward. Alumnae recalled uplifting conversations and words of advice from guest speakers who spoke at their all-girls campuses and positively influenced their mindsets. Participants also identified various educators and family members who impacted their self-worth by promoting their high potential. Several studies show that role models and mentors who emphasize positive racial messaging and

self-worth contribute to positive self-perceptions for Black girls (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Joseph et al., 2019; Ricks, 2014; Rivas-Drake et al., 2020), especially in STEM fields (Martin & Fisher-Ari, 2021). Positive relationships with teachers at the all-girls school not only influenced participants during their enrollment, but also influenced their actions after they graduated. For example, alumnae indicated that their high school teachers facilitated their ability to form relationships with college professors and inspired pursuit of advanced degrees. Throughout the interviews, alumnae easily recalled meaningful words and interactions from various role models who encouraged them in their personal and professional pursuits. Black girls thrive when educators show intentional and genuine care (Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020; McArthur & Lane, 2019).

Comparatively, however, alumnae easily recollected racist or culturally insensitive situations with educators from their all-girls campuses. Although these incidents did not appear to predominate the totality of alumnae's experiences at their all-girls schools, they undoubtedly influenced aspects of their racial and gender formation. Too often, Black girls are criminalized for their behavior when it does not align to Eurocentric cultural schemas (Gibson & Decker, 2019). The effects of racism and prejudice in the classroom are detrimental to the identity development and lifelong trajectory of Black girls (Joseph et al., 2019). With the overwhelming negative representation of Black women in mass media, positive representations of Black women and Black womanhood remain critical (Paule & Yelin, 2022).

In the same way that Black girls deserve opportunities to envision positive examples of their future selves and, Black girls also deserve opportunities to showcase their intellect and abilities. In many schools across America, Black students are frequently denied the opportunity to engage with challenging academic material because they are often viewed as incapable of completing it (Neal-Jackson, 2018). However, participants at the all-girls campuses described the

curriculum as challenging and they also generally described themselves as "smart." Alumnae shared that their academic preparation in high school allowed them to believe that they could break generational familial cycles. One participant shared, "I definitely saw [this school] as my way out of certain cycles of poverty and incarceration." Black alumnae in this study rose to the high expectations set for them and experienced academic success. This data was consistent with recommendations in literature stemming from the inequitable treatment of Black girls in schools (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Gholson & Martin, 2014; Neal-Jackson, 2018). Joseph et al. (2019) suggest that Black girls are collective learners whose identities are developed in part by how they view themselves, and how they view themselves is determined in large part by their educational experiences. The all-girls environment that participants were exposed to, coupled with consistent messaging about their abilities likely played a significant role in the racial and gender identity development of Black girls.

Alumnae indicate that positive contributions to identity development stemmed from intentional programming that celebrated womanhood and Blackness. Alumnae appreciated women accomplishments featured in curriculum and throughout daily experiences. Alumnae also reported feeling seen and important when race was celebrated, specifically through Black History programs that engaged the entire school community. Alumnae expressed a desire to be seen and heard which often directly results from the hypervisibility and invisibility that plagues Black girls' experiences in society (Gadson & Lewis, 2022; Rogers et al., 2021). Positively showcasing Blackness helps to affirm Black girls' racial identities. Alumnae referenced the formation of Black affinity groups as another source of racial affirmation. Many alumnae viewed them as "safe spaces." This is consistent with research from Watson (2016) who encourages the establishment of affinity groups as safe spaces that allow Black girls to build self-esteem and positive relationships with peers. While Butler-Barnes et al. (2019) also suggest that affinity

groups are typically developed as a way to celebrate Blackness and increase visibility, they also caution that affinity groups are sometimes formed as a way to cope with negative racial treatment. School leaders should be vigilant in ensuring that affinity groups are formed as complementary safe spaces and not because of toxicity in the school community.

Although several alumnae noted isolated incidents with classmates that targeted their race, several alumnae also acknowledged intentional and productive conversations about race with their peers on campus. This speaks to the culture of their all-girls school, as it is challenging to have meaningful conversations about race among students without a safe and supportive community. Alumnae indicated that they felt a strong sense of sisterhood among their peers that directly emanated from the all-girls environment, and that this experience positively contributed to their identity development. hooks (1986), in one of her formative works, describes a common oppression of sexism and racism towards women and asserts that building sisterhood mobilizes the feminist movement toward combating these injustices. Opie & Livingston (2021) describe unity among women as a "shared sisterhood," and similarly suggest that it engenders the collective advancement of women.

With the strong emphasis on womanhood and female empowerment at the all-girls campuses, it was expected that many students graduating from these schools would develop strong identities in relation to girlhood, feminism, and woman empowerment. However, it was surprising to learn that alumnae felt positive peer support regarding variations from normative gender identities at the all-girls schools. Overall, alumnae reported minimal negative experiences related to gender identity while at school.

One area in which participants did struggle with their identity was in terms of societal expectations regarding physical aspects of their femininity. The intersectionality of Black womanhood emerges in this struggle as race is linked to physical traits. Society places unrealistic

standards on the physical characteristics of all women, and Black women encounter the added layer of racial and gendered microaggressions rooted in Eurocentrism (Gadson & Lewis, 2022). While alumnae felt that attending an all-girls school alleviated some social pressure associated with beauty standards, some students still grappled with the effects of Colorism. Colorism elevates Eurocentric traits, such as straighter hair and more slender bodies and positions them as superior and more attractive (Rosario et al., 2021). Several alumnae reported using skin lighteners and desiring different body shapes and sizes ascribed to Eurocentric aesthetics. One participant also noted comments made about her natural hair that promoted colorism. Throughout history, Black women have experienced systemic stigmatization, harassment and violence surrounding their hair that contributes to devaluation (Gadson & Lewis, 2022; O'Brien-Richardson, 2019). It is imperative that educators utilize culturally responsive lenses when addressing Black hair, especially with Black students.

Further, alumnae felt that educators policed their bodies and behavior in ways that were culturally irresponsive. One example included an instance when a student was holding hands with another student and was told by the principal that this was unacceptable. The students did not fully perceive the rationale for the admonishment, but assumed it was linked to either a lack of support for public displays of affection or a rejection of non-heteronormativity. Exploring teachers' perceptions at all-girls campuses and training them to support all aspects of students' identities could be an area of future research.

Another example of policing centered around the school uniform. Several alumnae reported often being in trouble for dress code infractions. However, alumnae alluded to the superficial or subjective nature of the violations, which included the wrong color of socks or, as one participant indicated, a perception that Black students were aiming to be "promiscuous." Another stated, "I feel like our uniform made me feel like if you don't dress in a specific way-we

didn't have a lot of male teachers, but they were like 'make sure you cross your legs, especially in these classes.'" In some ways, alumnae's perceptions of their experiences with the uniform are consistent with the hypervisibility and hyper-sexualization of Black girls that often leads to increased policing and punishment (Irvine-Baler et al., 2019; Morris 2016). Morris and Perry (2017) found that Black girls were punished more often for uniform violations in comparison to their White peers, even when infractions occurred at the same rate. While uniforms are often implemented as a method to mask differences in socioeconomic status, decrease teasing, and increase sense of belonging (Jones et al., 2020), poorly implemented policies can impose negative health and educational outcomes, particularly for girls and gender diverse students, and students of lower socioeconomic statuses (Reidy, 2021). Further, enforcing dress codes centered around skirts commonly dispels notions of comfort and practicality and emphasizes messaging on modesty and not "distracting" males, which reinforces gender stereotypes (Blain, 2017). The language in uniform policies commonly promotes implicit racist and sexist values that further marginalize Black girls (Knipp & Stevenson, 2022). Correspondingly, expectations in schools and the development and enforcement of school policies are commonly linked to Whiteness. Educators must recognize this so that they avoid employing colorism, implicit bias, or other detrimental ideologies toward Black students through their policies (Kalu, 2021).

Overall, alumnae also indicated that attending an all-girls school significantly influenced student's sense of empowerment and perceptions of their womanhood. Alumnae suggested that by attending an all-girls school they were able to "keep their innocence" and felt less pressure to engage in risky behaviors. Further, alumnae felt confident in their abilities as women. Though the participants sometimes felt that they had to try twice as hard as their male and/or white counterparts, they also felt equally as intelligent and capable as male and perceived that they had a stronger sense of female empowerment than their peers at co-educational schools.

Cross-Racial and Cross-Gendered Interactions

The thematic findings if this study show that all-girls schooling may contribute to the interactions that students have with people of other races and genders.

Interacting with Other Races

According to state and district reports, each all-girls campus included in this study served a student body that was composed of at least 85% students of color. Data from this study suggest that the single-sex aspect of the school had a lesser effect on participants' interactions with people of other races than the historical and societal implications of the student body's demographics. Aligned with the NCLB Act (NCLB, 2002) and as expressed by several alumnae, these all-girls campuses were initially established to support young women of color; however, this messaging has seemingly been excluded or removed from the campuses' official communications. The campus websites and district reports do indicate that most of the students are economically disadvantaged, and many are first-generation college students. Though participants alluded to demographic diversity on the campuses in terms of religion, socioeconomic status, and family structure, students enrolled on these campuses seemingly had limited daily exposure to many peers from a large variety of other races and cultures. The schools' demographics are consistent with literature that suggests that Black and Brown students across the country historically attend school with other Black and Brown students (Orfield et al., 2016).

When considering their friend groups in high school, many participants indicated that their friends identified racially as Black or Brown. This was not surprising given the racial demographics of the campuses. However, in college, alumnae also indicated that many of their close friends were Black and Brown, even if they attended a PWI. One participant postulated that the racial identities of people's friends in college reflected the group of people they grew up

around. While there may be some validity to this notion, research suggests that friendships are typically homophilous for gender or race, among other characteristics (Dunbar, 2018; D'Onofrio, 2020; Parkinson et al., 2018). This raises questions about whether participants' friend groups would have the same racial composition if the single-sex campuses had a different distribution of racial demographics. This notion along with the friendship dynamics of students from all-girls schools and the impact of these friendships on student outcomes should be considered as areas for future research.

Alumnae shared that they chose close friends who made them feel comfortable in being themselves. This may also be a contributing factor to the reported racial identities of participants' friends. Experiences with racial discrimination often cause Black students to seek solace and emotional support in other Black friends who have a mutual understanding (Marshburn & Campos, 2022). Crabbe et al., (2019) proposed that in-group bias by White students also influences cross-racial friendships, as Black students are commonly viewed as an out-group, especially in predominantly White spaces. Nonetheless, the participants expressed openness to friendships with people of all races and valued the benefits of interacting with people of other races. Lewis et al. (2018) found that cross-racial interactions promote benefits for Black students and non-Black students alike. Although Roksa et al. (2017) speak to the benefits of positive cross-racial interactions, they warn against the potential cognitive harm that can result from negative cross–racial interactions. They call for educators to be intentional about cultivating opportunities and environments that encourage positive interactions. Though alumnae recognized the possibility of pitfalls and challenges, they presented resilience by recommending confidence in "putting yourself out there" and highlighting the potential for growth that results from cross-racial interactions.

Interacting with Other Genders

Though girls tend to have better social skills than boys (Tan et al., 2018), alumnae noted an adjustment to interacting with men in college. Alumnae experienced varying levels of socialization with men outside of school that likely contributed to the nature of these interaction, but regardless, all alumnae indicated that attending a single sex school influenced their interactions with men to some degree. Wong et al. (2018) suggest that students from single-sex schools tend to have higher mixed gender anxiety in both romantic and non-romantic situations. One participant shared that she was uncomfortable around men, "I think that because I went to [my school], I do not know how to socialize very well with young men." Though the stance is highly debated, this aligns with some research that suggests that all-girls schools hinder socialization and relationship development with other sexes (Kocak, 2020; Wong et al., 2018). Participants indicated that dating and/or romantic relationships were most affected by attending an all-girls school. Several participants alluded to discomfort when a male relationship shifted from a friendship to something more intimate. While participants indicated that a focus on academics while in high school shifted their attention away from dating, some participants also alluded to a level of caution stemming from negative encounters or experiences. De Meyer et al. (2017) propose additional contributing factors, such as a lack of emotional, physical or cognitive readiness to engage in dating relationships or stereotypical dating norms that promote power dynamics or mistreatment. Societal gender inequities contribute to ideologies that masculinity in a dating relationship is superior to femininity which precipitates physically and emotionally unhealthy relationships. Resisting these gender stereotypes in same-sex and different-sex relationships can lead to positive relational outcomes.

Alumnae also indicated experiencing an adjustment in interacting with men in educational spaces. These interactions were considered more like nuisances than barriers or hindrances to constructive interactions. Most alumnae suggested that they exhibited self-

confidence in co-educational postsecondary environments. One participant described a situation when she took a lead role in a group project. This behavior counters existing literature that suggests that girls tend to allow boys to "take charge" during group activities, especially in STEM fields (Wieselmann et al., 2020). This participant expressed frustration by the egotistical behaviors of men in her group, including failure to ask questions when needed and thinking that their methods were the only correct approach.

Further, while alumnae indicated that they were proud of their womanhood, they recognized the marginalization that was connected to it. These feelings sometimes influenced how they interacted with men. Some alumnae indicated that they felt that they had to do more to prove themselves around men, but that they also felt more empowered to do so than some of their female peers. Even so, all alumnae indicated that they maintained and appreciated male friendships and the perspective men offered. Several alumnae echoed the sentiment of caution when choosing male friends. They indicated that they met most of their male friends through a trusted friend and were unlikely to engage with men if they did not have a mutual friend. Several researchers suggest that mixed-gender friendships are beneficial and encourage educators to facilitate spaces where harmonious and positive interactions may occur (Andrews et al., 2018; Field et al., 2017; Li & Wong, 2018)

Limitations

This research centers the perspectives of Black alumnae from all-girls schools and offers valuable insights into their experiences that can be beneficial to educators across the country. However, the findings presented in this research are not generalizable to all single-sex schools. Data in this study were gathered from nine participants from three single-sex schools that were all localized to one geographic region. Expanding the area in which the campuses are located and increasing the sample size of participants and the number of all-girls campuses

included in the study may influence the results as the experiences and perspectives of Black girls may vary by region.

Further, for this study I relied on participant recollection of events that may have occurred over five years prior to the interviews. This may contribute to self-report bias including false narratives or exaggerated recollections of lived experiences (Jürgens et al., 2020). Given participant confidentiality and the nature of the study, I could not verify any statements made by participants. Participant selection also served as a limitation. Participants who elected to be a part of the study probably had strong feelings about the all-girls campus, which may have skewed results.

Researcher bias was another limitation. As a Black woman, I can personally relate to many of the experiences that these participants experienced; and in my experience as an educator, I have personal connections to single-sex schools.

COVID-19 also played a role as it interrupted the progression of my study and caused part of my data collection to pan out differently than I had originally planned. One major factor was that I was unable to conduct campus visits as I had intended due to COVID-19 restrictions at the campuses. I also believe that principals' preoccupation in dealing with unprecedented COVID-19 crises contributed to their lack of response to my recruitment requests which ultimately delayed my participant recruitment process and created challenges in scheduling the remainder of my study. In my dissertation proposal, I had intended to complete a final focus group to provide participants with a final opportunity to review the emergent themes and provide any closing thoughts. However, the initial delays created limitations for this process. Even so, I collected ample data through the analysis of interviews and documents to answer my research questions. Despite these obstacles related to methodology, the findings of this study contribute to the dearth of literature on Black students' experiences in all-girls schools.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Five themes emerged from this study: (1) the importance of women and Black women role models, (2) belonging and emotional safety, (3) body, beauty, and behavior standards, (4) adjusting to college life, and (5) synchroneity of pride and pain. Each of the thematic findings suggest implications and recommendations for educators.

The Importance of Women and Black Women Role Models

Alumnae's racial and gendered interactions at the all-girls schools were predominantly predicated on relationships. Positive relationships with adults inspired self-worth and positive identity development for participants. This aligns with literature that suggests the importance of positive role models and mentors for Black girls (Edwards, et al., 2016; Hurd et al., 2017; Ricks, 2014). Alumnae specifically mentioned the importance of Black principals which speaks to the importance of Black women in educational leadership. Educational leaders must be intentional about providing role models in schools that Black girls can look up to by providing time and space within the school day dedicated to these mentorship and role model opportunities. If diverse role models are scarce within the school, educators can consider partnering with other organizations to offer this support to students. Guest speakers also serve as great resources for offering diverse representations of role models to students, and they should be utilized effectively. In the same way that it is important for Black girls to see positive representations of their future selves, it is important for other students to see positive representations of women and Black women which contributes to challenging negative stereotypes and moves toward increased inclusiveness.

Belonging and Emotional Safety

Educators should work to cultivate school communities that prioritize camaraderie. Participants in this study indicated that the all-girls environment provided a positive school

culture that made them feel connected to their peers, and they suggested that educators fostered belonging by allowing them to feel seen and heard. It is important for educational leaders to create intentional spaces where students' voices are recognized, prioritized, and honored. Opportunities that highlight student voice in the school community can strengthen relationships between students, as well as between teachers and students (Mayes et al., 2019), and help to build and sustain relational school communities (Butler et al., 2017).

Participants also shared that they were empowered to engage in male dominated courses, such as STEM. Educators who encourage, support, and recommend Black girls for participation in STEM fields, gifted education, advanced programming, and other spaces where they are often underrepresented contribute to belonging and positive race and gender identity development (Collins et al., 2020). Participants valued high expectations that reinforced their intelligence and capabilities and challenged traditional gender stereotypes. It is imperative for educators to celebrate and promote the successes of Black girls and counter the deficit language and lenses that are often associated with Black girls in schools and in the larger society. School leaders should prioritize opportunities for all cultural identities to be seen and celebrated on campus, especially in terms of racial and gendered identities and expressions.

Body, Beauty, and Behavior Standards

Participants highlighted ways in which their all-girls schools benefited and hindered their personal views related to body, beauty and behavior. While seemingly innocuous policies, such as dress codes, can serve as equalizers for students, culturally negligent implementation can be detrimental to the development of students' identities. Strict uniform policies in all-girls schools can send messaging that overemphasizes physical appearance and deemphasizes physical activity and gender expression (Blain, 2017). School leaders should ensure that uniform policies are inclusive and supportive of all races and genders, are enforced equitably across races and

genders, and that costs for diverse socioeconomic statuses are considered (Knipp & Stevenson, 2022). Educators should ensure that policies policing or targeting race, gender or sexuality are excluded from their schools.

Schools often mirror societal expectations, but school leaders should consider the type of school that society needs (Biesta, 2019). Race and gender are inextricably linked to societal expectations around beauty, body, and behaviors standards. Educational leaders can contribute to healthy ideologies related to Black girls' perceptions of beauty, body, and behavior by providing culturally responsive training focusing on relationships, curriculum, pedagogy, and/or policy enforcement. A keen awareness of the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism allows school leaders to better fight against it. Gibson & Decker (2019) provide examples of training activities that could include discussions, role play, and presentations. Training for parents could also be considered to support families in making informed decisions that best support the identity development of their Black girls.

Adjusting to College Life

As suggested by alumnae, school leaders should create intentional opportunities for students in single-sex schools to engage and socialize with students of other races and genders. Based on the data presented in this study, leaders in all-girls schools should offer explicit non-heteronormative education on healthy relationships and provide ample opportunities for students to interact socially and academically with peers of other races and genders. Research shows positive implications for mixed gender (Wong et al., 2018) and mixed-race (Park et al., 2017) interactions. These interactions should be coupled with opportunities to challenge racial tensions and negative stereotypes and reinforce cultural pride (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019). Positive interactions with peers and adults of other races and genders, provide opportunities for learning

and growth, and such opportunities promote the development of antiracist and antisexist ideologies (Karras et al., 2022).

Synchroneity of Pride and Pain

Participants were both dignified and indignant in describing their race and gender identities and experiences. Awareness of the intersectionality of the experiences of Black women and girls is the first step in recognizing how to support them. Educators must take time to listen to the voices and the stories of the Black girls they serve. Centering Black girls and their experiences serves as a protective factor as they continually battle the convergence of racism and sexism in society. Silencing Black girls enables oppression and prevents healing and justice (Wilcox, 2020). Rogers et al. (2021) highlight the need for educators to recognize Black girls' strengths and resilience in order to promote empowerment and liberation.

Implications for Additional Research

While the research findings provided answers to the research questions, they also proffered areas of additional research. This research study focused on race and gender identity development of Black girls and their cross-racial and cross-gendered interactions. Future research could explore the influence of single-sex schooling on the identity development of other races as well. Future studies could also include an in-depth cross-analysis of practices and outcomes across campuses. Specifically, a deeper analysis of disciplinary practices could contribute to the literature on eradicating societal disciplinary disproportionality for Black girls. National data shows that Black girls experience disproportionate punitive and exclusionary discipline (Gibson & Decker, 2019; Morris & Perry, 2017), however, participants in this study did not explicitly mention experiencing exclusionary discipline, even in instances where they indicated "getting in trouble a lot." Alumnae only tangentially referenced disciplinary policies at

the all-girls campuses, which suggests that the types of discipline being used at the all-girls schools, trends over time, and student outcomes require increasing attention.

Additionally, the topic of gender identity development in single-sex schools deserves additional consideration, particularly in terms of supporting the diversity of students' gender identities and expressions in these spaces and promoting positive gender identity development. Additional research could investigate the influence of race and gender identity at all-boys schools and the impact on cross-racial and cross-gendered interactions in comparison to girls. With Black boys experiencing similar but different forms of marginalization in society, it could be impactful to hear their perspectives on the influences of all-boys schooling on their identity development.

Conclusions

Black girls and women are often excluded from discourse regarding the social definitions of Black womanhood and girlhood (Owens et al., 2019). This study allowed Black women to offer their perspectives and contribute to literature. By privileging Black girls' voices, we can better understand how to holistically support them (Rogers et al., 2021). In investigating the influence of all-girls schooling on race and gender identity development, data showed strong implications for positive gender identity development, and the potential for positive racial identity development. The pervasiveness of the marginalization that Black girls experience through their unique intersectionality of identities weaves a delicate web that requires consistent and intentional reinforcement to adequately support Black girls' identity development.

In reference to cross-racial and cross-gendered interactions, attending all-girls schools influenced mixed gendered interactions more than mixed race interactions. Power dynamics coupled with injustices, such as discrimination and stereotype threat, inevitably play a role in many of Black girls' interactions; however, alumnae in this study exhibited resilience by

acknowledging that engaging with diverse cultures contributes to personal and professional growth, even though there is a risk of challenging, uncomfortable, or even harmful interactions. Educational leaders of both all-girls schools and co-educational schools have the responsibility of creating intentional opportunities for all students of all backgrounds to be able to learn and grow from each other. The best practices suggested for Black girls in this study mirror the best practices for supporting all students. It is imperative that our future leaders and decision makers are knowledgeable about the diverse citizens of the world, so they can make more informed and more equitable decisions for our society.

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