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By

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Committee in charge:
Professor Na'ilah Nasir, Chair
Professor Jabari Mahiri
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Doctor of Philosophy in Education University of California, Berkeley

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Abstract:

The current historical moment is marked by extreme forms of racialized violence, antiblackness, and political repression on the one hand, and a surge of highly-energized, highly-visible race-specific forms of political and racialized resistance on the other. Situated within the contradictions, tensions, and possibilities of the times, several exclusively Black counterpublics have emerged in the San Francisco Bay Area in the form of intentional all-Black classes, spatially situated within a larger school. These spaces provide an exceptional opportunity to explore the transformative potential of spaces that eschew theories of a colorblind, post-race society and confront race and racialization directly.

To this end, I utilize BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016), Fraser's (1990) subaltern counterpublic, and hooks' (1990) notion of homeplaces and the margin, to theorize about what I call, *Black educational sovereign spaces*, intentional all-Black counterpublics constructed within the context of multi-racial/ethnic, diverse school settings for the purpose of supporting Black students in racially-specific ways. Drawing on interviews with Black girl students and a Black woman educator, and classroom observations, this study explores one distinct Black educational sovereign space: An all Black, all female, young women's studies class at a public high school in an urban district in Northern California. This manuscript constructs an ethnographic case study that explores both the ways Black girls are racialized and hypersexualized in schools, and also, the numerous ways their production of *Black Girl Space* facilitates a reimagining of a Black girl identity, and the development of a radical Black subjectivity. This work contributes a theorization of Black space in education and findings have implications for our understanding of the ways purposefully constructed Black educational sovereign spaces can serve to mitigate students' racialized experiences and facilitate students' construction of identities that reimagine problematic notions of blackness that confront them in society and in school.

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# Education for Liberation: An Introduction

**Introduction**

*"Its real hard. They look at us bein', the opposite or somebody who different. Like they see Mexicans and whites and Tongans and they just one whole. But it's like, we just a complete separate - you got a big old piece of pie and it's just that one lil piece just sittin' out. I don't know how to really explain it. It's like, they show like different type of feelings towards like black people then there would be like to a normal like white person or something" – LaShonda*

Black students like LaShonda are often painfully familiar with what it means to be "sittin' out" or seen as *something* completely separate from the larger public sphere. In the current historical moment, where Black death has once again become public spectacle[1], we as education scholars may be encouraged to examine more deeply the myriad ways Black youth are racialized in schools and the connections between anti-blackness in schools and anti-blackness en masse. While this work is a critical component of supporting a broader agenda on educational equity, I wish to signal the magnitude of also exploring emergent counterpublics, or "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). Specifically, in the San Francisco Bay Area several exclusively Black counterpublics have emerged in the form of intentional all-Black classes, spatially situated within a larger school. These spaces provide an exceptional opportunity to explore the transformative potential of spaces that eschew theories of a colorblind, post-race society and confront race and racialization directly.

The first of these spaces on my radar was the Manhood Development Program (MDP) classes administered by the Oakland Unified School District. Faced with problematic trends in outcomes of African American males in the district, the OUSD created the African American Achievement Task Force (AAMA) in 2010. In an attempt to capitalize on links between attendance and performance and disciplinary indicators, the mission of the Task Force was to increase attendance rates, lower suspension and expulsion rates, promote self-awareness, and help cultivate healthy identities among Black male students (AAMA, 2013). In the spring of 2011, AAMA established a program at three high schools in the Oakland district; targeting African American male students who had low academic performance (but were not truant), school administrators selected cohorts of approximately 20 ninth-grade Black males at each site to engage in a Manhood Develop Program (MDP) class, for which they received elective credits.

From the beginning, the district presented the course to students as a leadership opportunity and encouraged, but didn't require, them to participate. The class was held daily during school hours, and an African American male from the local community led

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[1] Emerging research has sought to draw a comparison between the history of lynching as public spectacle and the current onslaught of Black deaths caught on video and reproduced for public viewing via the media.

the class at each site. The course's curriculum was designed to address student needs across a variety of domains – physical, emotional, academic, and social. It was aimed at encouraging students to learn more about themselves, their cultural and racial history, and their communities with the goal of helping them think differently about their education. Class activities centered on discussions of contemporary issues, critical analysis of popular media like songs and movies, and discussions about race and managing social and academic situations. Each class was organized to include several key roles; for instance, the "culture-keeper" was responsible for keeping track of the group decision and norms. Instructors varied in how much the relied on the curriculum provided versus creating their own activities together with students[2].

In 2010, Na'ilah Nasir convened a small collective of Black graduate students to explore these new racially and gender exclusive spaces and over the course of three years, we conducted ethnographic research in these classes at five different high schools in the OUSD[3]. Our work spanned four broad areas and generated findings with respect to racialized discipline, identity (re)formation, student-teacher relationships, and the teaching philosophies of critical Black male educators.

In our first article, we explored transformative resistance to racialized discipline disparities in the MDP setting and theorized the racialized nature of discipline in schools, and how a reframing of discipline within this alternative setting provides a counternarrative to how Black male students are typically perceived to respond to school discipline (Nasir, ross, McKinney de Royston, Givens, & Bryant, 2013). In our second article, we examined the process by which stereotypical mainstream representations of black males (as hard, as anti-school, and as disconnected from the domestic sphere) were reimagined in MDP classes (Givens, Nasir, ross, & McKinney de Royston, 2016). In our third article, we explore the ways the teacher-student relationships between African American male students and instructors were characterized by a "politicized caring" approach that reflects instructor's political clarity, cultural connection and affirmation of students, and appreciation of students as vulnerable children working within racialized conditions (McKinney de Royston, Vakil, Nasir, ross, Givens, & Holman, in press). Finally, we examined the teaching philosophies and racial-educational understandings of critical Black male educators of Black male students in MDP and the ways Black suffering informed their philosophies of reciprocity and (re)humanization (ross, Nasir, Givens, McKinney de Royston, Vakil, Madkins, & Philoxene, 2016). While varied in their focus, implicit in each of these articles is a fundamental concern for what happens in these exclusively Black spaces and what that may suggest for the dialectic relationship between public schools and a liberatory Black educational experience.

Hence, there is a need for educational scholarship to also take up, empirically and theoretically, the recent reemergence of Black specific educational spaces in particular, and race specific programs more broadly. To this end, my dissertation is an ethnographic study that critically examines what I am calling *Black educational sovereign spaces*, intentional all-Black counterpublics constructed within the context of multi-racial/ethnic,

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[2] Program description excerpted from Nasir et al, 2013

[3] Between 2010 and 2013, the program expanded and was offered in six schools.

diverse school settings for the purpose of supporting Black students in racially-specific ways. This work contributes a theorization of Black space in education and findings have implications for our understanding of the ways purposefully constructed Black educational sovereign spaces can serve to mitigate students' racialized experiences and facilitate students' construction of identities that reimagine problematic notions of blackness that confront them in society and in school. Still, in building upon the understanding that Black students continue to be systematically denied the educational opportunities of their white counterparts and that the reappearance of Black-exclusive spaces are in direct response to this, this study critically examines *both* the possibilities and tensions of Black educational sovereign spaces and the complex and nuanced intersections that surfaced as a result of examining Black space in public schools.

Still, the focus of these race-specific projects tends to be on Black boys. Even on a national level, programs like the My Brother's keeper initiative of the Obama administration, aims to address the opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color. While this work is a critical component of supporting a broader agenda of educational equity, it can also inadvertently obfuscate the egregiousness of the racialized experiences Black girls have in school. While scholars, public intellectuals, and even musical artists (see for example, Beyoncé's "Lemonade") have begun to highlight the obstacles facing Black girls and women more broadly, this dissertation focuses specifically on an exclusively Black girl space; it aims to resist the narrative that Black girls are alright (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015), while also illuminating the ways Black girls experience and produce what I am calling *Black girl joy* – a concept often missing from scholarly work that focuses solely on the ways Black girls experience white supremacy. Still, in the current historical moment, we must also wrestle with the ways Black girl joy is suffocated by atrocities like the recent violent attack of a Black girl by a security resource officer in a South Carolina Classroom (Fausset & Southall, 2015). We must wrestle with what it means to engage in what Hale (2001) refers to as "learning while Black" – where Black girl innocence is unimaginable and Black girl defiance is grounds for a symbolic "whipping."

Pushing back against the "single story" (Adichie, 2009) of the Jezebel, hypermasculine, unsophisticated, angry, defiant, disruptive, loud Black girl, this manuscript constructs an ethnographic case study that explores both the ways Black girls are racialized and hypersexualized in schools, and also, the numerous ways their production of *Black Girl Space* facilitates a reimagining of a Black girl identity, and the development of a radical Black subjectivity.

My dissertation then, focuses then on one Black educational sovereign space: An all Black, all female, "women's studies" class, led by a Black woman instructor at Jefferson[4], a public high school in a large city in northern California. This study will examine the following research questions:

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[4] I identify geographic region, but use pseudonyms for school names and students so as to protect the confidentiality of the students and educators.

1.	How does this Black woman educator in this purposefully constructed all-Black female space perceive the space? How does she understand the work she does? What frames, philosophies, or theories guide her pedagogy? What pedagogical tools does she employ in this space?
2.	What norms, values, and cultural practices guide the space? How do Black girl students in this space perceive them? How are they beneficial or detrimental to Black girls?
3.	What is the relationship between this exclusively Black female space and the broader ways race and gender play out in society?

Taken together, exploring these questions help to facilitate our understanding of the ways this educator and her students construct and experience this exclusively Black space, and the significance of its presence in the context of this local high school.  Following, addressing these questions in this particular space, push us to consider the implications of the presence of exclusively Black educational spaces in the current context more broadly.

**Preface**

Upon Emancipation, African Americans[5] fought to exercise their right to an education and went to great lengths to ensure a path toward the kind of schooling they had been systematically denied during enslavement.  The zest African Americans possessed for education during enslavement proliferated rapidly after the downfall of the slave system as education was seen as a pathway to liberation (Douglas 2000). Newly freed men, women and children were eager to assert their humanity within society and they recognized education as intimately tied to citizenship and personhood (Anderson, 1988; Butchart, 1988). In fact, former enslaved Africans were the first to campaign for universal, state supported education. Anderson quotes Du Bois noting that in the south, universal state supported public education was a "Negro idea." Although the idea of universal schooling had yet to be actualized, African Americans developed their own Black staffed educational collectives and associations and were "unwilling to allow their educational movement to be controlled by 'civilized' Yankees" (Anderson, 1988 pg. 6). Even prior to the Emancipation Proclamation or the end of the Civil War, Black men and women organized clandestine educational spaces, some dating back as early as 1833 (Anderson, 1988). Hence before and after the brief period of governmental support for universal schooling, African Americans were determined to educate themselves and their children, even pooling their minimal financial resources for the benefit of the larger community. Unfortunately, the historical trajectory of African American education reveals the educational aspirations of Black people in America were largely made impossible by state supported institutionalized racist educational policies. White terror in the form of lynchings, mob violence, repressive labor contracts, vagrancy laws and Jim Crow laws (to name a few), allowed the government to exclude African Americans from

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5 The terms "African American" and "Black" will be used interchangeably throughout.

4

public schooling efforts and relegated the Black community to a separate but (un)equal educational experience (Anderson, 1988; Bond, 1934; Wilkerson, 1955).

**A Road Map**

While African Americans were committed to a liberalist notion of universal schooling before whites, they have also always maintained their own Black educational spaces. When systems of universal (segregated) schooling became available, African Americans utilized the minimal resources they were afforded in segregated schools to create meaningful educational opportunities for Black students; at the same time, African Americans continued to resist de jure segregation – a fight that culminated in the historic *Brown v Board of Education* victory. While *Brown* was an undeniable triumph in the centuries old denial of Black educational justice, many African Americans were wary of the experiences Black children would have in desegregated schools and were uninterested in relinquishing Black educational spaces. Further, in the immediate aftermath of *Brown*, in the decades following, and in the current context, Black folks have continued to conceptualize a liberatory Black educational experience for African American students, that has oftentimes taken the form of salvaging, creating and/or reconstructing all-Black educational spaces.

Utilizing a theoretical framework that builds upon BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016), Fraser's (1990) subaltern counterpublic, and hooks' (1990) notion of homeplaces and the margin, this study contributes to our understanding of what exclusively Black spaces have meant historically and what they mean in the current context. Further, as these spaces remain undertheorized, I offer framing ideas for how we might conceptualize Black educational sovereign spaces and what their presence in the current context signals about the educational experiences of Black students more broadly. To that end, this study contributes to our creative thinking around the role Black educational sovereign spaces may play in the construction and maintenance of a more liberatory Black educational experience.

In the first section of this dissertation, I explore scholarly literature that examines the tension between the liberalist desire for integrated integration, and the push for the creation of strong exclusively Black educational spaces. I examine the myriad ways scholars have articulated a Black educational purpose as well as the various ways these purposes were actualized in the form of formal Black exclusively Black spaces including Afrocentrism, programs of community control, and nationalist schooling endeavors. Finally, I examine scholarly work that explores the experience of African Americans in segregated schools prior to desegregation. This exploration lays important groundwork for the current study. In chapter two, I explicate the theoretical framework this study builds on; taken together, BlackCrit, the subaltern counterpublic and homeplaces and the margin, are useful for theorizing Black educational sovereign spaces. In chapter three, I discuss my methodological approach, methods, setting and context, and research participants of this study; in part, I build on critical race theory as methodology to consider the usefulness of BlackCrit as methodology. Chapters four, five, and six, address research questions one, two, and three respectively. Chapter four focuses heavily on the

teacher at my research site. This chapter explores the way she perceives the space and the school more broadly, the way she understands the work she's doing, the educational philosophies that guide her work, and the pedagogical practices she employs in this space. Chapter five shifts the focus to the Black girls in the study. Here I examine the ways they perceive the space, the norms, values, and cultural practices that guide the space, and the ways students understand the spaces at beneficial or detrimental. In the sixth chapter, I consider the relationship between this exclusively Black female space, and the broader ways race and gender play out in society. I deliberate what these exclusively Black spaces are in response to in the local school context, and the ways students experience antiblackness in their schools. I also problematize and trouble often assumed notions of people of color solidarity. Utilizing students' own experiences with non-Black people of color within the school, I consider the benefits of an antiblackness frame (in relation to other possible frames). Finally, in chapter seven I consider what this work means for educational policy, and Black educational futurities. I also discuss the limitations of the study and engage directions for future research.

**Relevant Literature**

      **Brown and the Failure of Integration.** African Americans' relentless fight for equal educational opportunities culminated in the historic *Brown v Board of Education* decision, and the significance of *Brown* for the collective advancement of society cannot be underestimated. Anderson (2006) notes, "B*rown* redeemed promises of constitutional equality that had been rejected since the Declaration of Independence" (15). *Brown* could be construed as the twentieth century's Emancipation Proclamation; effectively ending *Plessy* and ruling segregated schools were inherently unequal was a critical victory for the Black community and represented a step toward dismantling white supremacy and racial inequity (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Still, efforts to desegregate were often slow, non-existent, or met with extreme violence. In instances where schools were actually desegregated, the version of integration available to Black students often necessitated assimilating into white schools (white supremacist institutions), and accepting an inferior status (Du Bois, 1935; Ture & Hamilton, 1967; Breitman, 1989). Darling-Hammond, Williamson, & Hyler (2007) point out that as opposed to being the "answer" to Black America's problems, "some redefined desegregation as a philosophy that ignored questions of power and worked to deprive the Black community of the skills and energies of its most productive members" (287). Where policymakers have historically been unwilling or unable to establish programs that effectively lead to racial integration and educational equality (Barnes, 1997), African Americans are left to question the tangible benefits of Brown. Gunier (2004) argues that "the tactic of desegregation became the ultimate goal, rather than the means to secure educational equity." (95). Bell (1977) notes that the constitutional objective is to rid segregation without regard to educational outcomes for Black students. Black students paid a high price for desegregation including the closing of important Black institutions, the burden of bussing, the dismissal of Black teachers and administrators and increased disciplinary action in white schools (Days, 1992). The focus on integration was rooted in the notion that absent the presence of white

students, the larger racialized society had no imperative to ensure Black students would receive a quality education (Bell, 1976) and what any parent wants for her/his child is a quality education. Unfortunately, the dreams of *Brown* remain elusive and Black education remains in a state of (constructed) crisis.

While scholars nearly unilaterally celebrate the tremendous efforts of the NAACP and civil rights lawyers in the *Brown* victory, they also raise questions about the efficacy of Brown and whether its legacy is even marginally related to the original ruling. Specifically, activists and scholars alike have contended with what equal opportunity actually means for Black students who have been systematically denied the educational opportunities of their white counterparts. Scholars have explored the differences between equality and equity (Brayboy, Castagno, & Maughan, 2007; Crenshaw, 1988), the purpose of Black education (Sizemore, 1973; Shujaa, 1994; Woodson, 1933) and the varying models to achieve said purpose including ideas of Afrocentrism (Asante, 1991; Lee, Lamotey and Shujaa, 1990), nationalist projects of community control (Perlstein, 2004) and Black Panther schools (Williamson, 2005). Finally, a small number of brave scholars have also investigated the positive aspects of segregated schooling pre integration mandates. While these scholars articulate different routes Black education has taken in its quest for genuine equality, one aspect they all have in common is an implicit or explicit examination of Black educational counterspaces and the role they have historically played in the struggle for educational justice.

**Equity and equality**. One of the central arguments against segregated schools was that they were materially inferior and were not provided the same economic resources as white schools. In attempting to explore what educational economic parity would look like, Crenshaw (1988) examinees two conflicting visions of anti-discrimination law: the expansive view and the restrictive view. While the expansive view understands equality as a result and pays particular attention to the real consequences for African Americans, the restrictive view sees equality as a process and downplays the significance of actual outcomes. Brayboy, Castagno, & Maughan (2007) frame this in the educational context as the difference between equality and equity. While they define equality in education as children having the same access to resources and opportunities, equity, in contrast, is a redistribution of unequal resources in order to create greater potential for equality. While equality may achieve the goal of sameness but remain incapable of achieving justice, equity achieves the goal of justice through unequal means. Still, the ideal of ensuring all students receive equal resources, opportunities and treatment, has become hegemonic and this notion of colorblindness interferes with policies and/or practices that distribute resources unequally based on race. In fact, Gunier (2004) argues that advocates of colorblindness invoked the formal equality principle of Brown to equate race-conscious decisions with de jure segregation and "changed Brown from a clarion call to an excuse not to act" (93). Bell (1976) argues that it is precisely this problematic iteration of equality that "fails to encompass the complexity of achieving equal educational opportunity for children to whom it so long has been denied" (239). With the growing number of "apartheid schools" (Darling-Hammond, Williamson, & Hyler, 2007) that serve racial and ethnic minorities exclusively, the goal of educational funding equity for students of color remains elusive. Thus, if schools remain largely

segregated, and nearly every state funds schools based on property taxes that ensure dramatic disparities in funding between schools in poor neighborhoods vs. schools in wealthy ones (Ladson-Billings, 1998), attempts to ascertain the material differences between segregated schools pre-*Brown* and contemporary de facto segregated schools may prove a difficult undertaking.

**On Black Educational Purpose.** More than contending with notions of equal vs. equitable funding in public school education post-*Brown* (and the virtual impossibility of achieving equitable funding), scholars have examined what constitutes a quality education for Black students more broadly. Activists and scholars alike were quick to level criticisms concerning what African Americans were learning (or not) in integrated schools. Woodson (1933) was perhaps one of the first to discuss the miseducation of the Negro in the context of formal schooling. He argued that something was severely wrong with the way Black students were being educated and that an education that denied Black students knowledge of the race's history and contributions to society was bankrupt. As the ideal of integration gave way to the disappointing reality of *Brown*, many scholars raised similar concerns to the ones Woodson broached twenty years prior to *Brown*. In questioning the core of Black educational purpose, scholars explored what constituted a meaningful education for Black students and examined what aspects of a productive curriculum were absent from desegregated public schools and what approach should be taken to ensure African Americans received a meaningful education.

In thinking about what constituted a meaningful education, scholars articulated the difference between the concepts of schooling and education (Shujaa, 1994). Whereas schooling was seen as a process that perpetuates and maintains society's existing power relations (Shujaa, 1994), education relates to a process that enables students to recognize themselves in a positive cultural and communal context (Akbar, 1982; hooks, 1994). Sizemore (1973) articulates a project of liberatory education renames the world and transforms it: "A liberation curriculum utilizes the assets and talents of the learner: his language, cultural life style and modes, role models, organizing theories, histories, literature, concepts of land, life, liberty, and religion, his growth and development patterns, methods of child rearing, manners, morals, and social and psychological goals" (398). In addition to articulating a more holistic approach to Black education, scholars also concerned themselves with particular aspects missing from mainstream curriculum – including but not limited to the way African Americans were excluded from or misrepresented in history. King (2006) argues "The way Africa and black experience and culture are normally taught institutionalizes a dangerously incomplete conception of what it means to be African and what it means to be human, which obstructs Black students' opportunities to identify with their heritage" (343). Quoting Robinson (2000), King (2006) writes, "We are history's amnesiacs fitted with the memories of others. Our minds can be trained for individual career success but our group morale, the very soul of us, has been devastated by the assumption that what has not been told about ourselves does not exist to be told." (346). The project of Black education then, must be one of rehumanization (Wilcox, 1969).

**Afrocentrisms.** One of the ideas scholars and activists proposed to create a purposeful Black educational program was Afrocentrism. Proponents of Afrocentrism

outlined a program of African centered education necessary to resist the Eurocentric attitudes, racism and white supremacy that remain hegemonic (Lee, Lamotey and Shujaa, 1990). Afrocentric scholars insisted that education is supposed to socialize the learner and that schools are reflective of the societies that develop them (Asante 1991). Asante points out that "Hegemonic Eurocentric education can exist only so long as Whites maintain that Africans and other non-Whites have never contributed to world civilization" (177). Hence, Afrocentrism is not anti-white but rather against racism, ignorance and monoethnic hegemony in education; Afrocentric curriculum is essential as it restores the truth to what African American students learn and responds to the absence of true Black history in African American students' education (Hilliard, 1992; Lee, Lamotey and Shujaa, 1990). While Afrocentric education centers the African worldview and very explicitly uses African principles of life as a shared value system and way of being (Asante, 1987), Afrocentrists are not anti-multiculturalism; rather, they understand Afrocentrism as a pre-requisite to the possibility of a multicultural program. If African Americans are going to be "whole" participants in world culture or multiculturalism, they must first be rooted in their own culture, history and sense of self-worth (Madhubuti, 1999) and must (like other ethnic groups) proceed from a position of strength and solidarity (Johnson, 1993; Toure & Hamilton, 1967).

**Nation Time.** While Afrocentric models of education have been applied to a number of independent Black institutions successfully, (Lee, 1992), scholars raised important questions about whether liberatory education could occur within desegregated public schools for the multitude of African American students. Where public schools in a white supremacist society have no imperative (or perhaps in many situations no ability) to engage students in the practice of liberatory education, it becomes even more important to create Black institutions and maintain institutional autonomy (Lee, 1992; Shujaa, 1987). Lee (1992) argues, "Institutions validate knowledge, help to shape visions, inculcate values, and provide the foundation for community stability" (161). Many scholars believed that the de facto version of integration mandated by Brown required a willingness to lose one's self-racial identity by merging with the dominant group (Wilcox, 1969) and that the ideal of integration could *only* be achieved through separate institutions (Johnson, 1993). Rather than creating permanent separate institutions, many understood nationalism as "an ideology that uses separatism as a means to inclusion" (Sizemore, 1973, pg. 390). Johnson (1993) boldly asserts, "simply put, Brown was a mistake" (1402) and notes that integrationism has failed our society because it "conflates the process of integration with the ideal of integration" (1402). Rather than employing a "quick fix mentality" to African American education, autonomous institutions can take a more holistic approach to Black education (Lee, Lamotey & Shujaa, 1990). Lee (1992) notes that while the potential for all Black children to be educated in independent Black schools is highly unlikely, public schools could learn valuable lessons from autonomous African American institutions where the presumption of ability, excellence and communal responsibility are foundational principals.

However, many in the Black community were not convinced of the potential for desegregated schools to articulate a positive and productive project of Black education. In some instances, mounting frustration with the country's unwillingness to actualize de jour

desegregation have manifested in parent and activist calls for community control of segregated schools. Perlstein (2004), for example, details the struggle for community control in Brownsville, New York. As it became clear that New York School Board did not intend on actualizing a meaningful integrated school system, parents began to articulate an argument for community control of segregated schools. With the school board failing to actualize its promise to integrate and continually acquiescing to segregation, parents argued that if they could not have true integrated schools, then they could at least have power in running the segregated ones. While the idea of community control initially received widespread support across racial lines, attempts to practice community control led to mounting tensions between Black activists and the predominantly white United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the Board of Education. After a bitter, highly racialized struggle that pitted Black activists and parents of Black children in public schools in New York, against white teachers, the UFT was successful in organizing to abolish the project of community control. The "decentralization" law that was enacted in 1969 effectively ended community control, ensured the UFT was the dominant figure in community schools and eliminated the possibility of local control over professional staff (Perlstein, 2004).

Like community control advocates, the Black Panther Party condemned the public school system and its unwillingness to provide Black students with anything more than a Herrenvolk education. At the same time that community control over the education of Black children was demolished by white teachers, the Black Panther Party was embarking on its own vision of the critical components necessary to create a meaningful education for Black children (Jones, 1998; Newton, 2009). The Panthers understood education as a means through which all oppressed people could contend with their oppression and acquire the knowledge and tools necessary to fundamentally change society (Toure & Hamilton, 1967). While the Panthers sponsored educational initiatives inside and outside of the public school system, their outside initiatives such as the Free Breakfast Program and the Liberation Schools operated an overtly radical political standpoint and utilized non-traditional pedagogies (Williamson, 2005). Panther schools were clear about what they thought the goals of Black education should be and they enacted an educational program that offered students the space to critique white supremacy and economic oppression. Perlstein (1999) argues that what distinguished Panther schools from public schools was less about the pedagogical techniques they employed and more about developing an educational program that would not perpetuate racism and other forms of oppression, but would centralize the importance of social change.

**A Look Back.** While scholarship on Afrocentrism, and overtly nationalist Black educational projects offered an alternative model to mainstream U.S. public schooling, other scholars have explored segregated schools prior to desegregation mandates. Siddle Walker (1996) in particular, challenges this paradigm through a close examination of the history of a segregated school in the rural south, revealing some of the little known information about the unintended positive consequences of segregated schools.

Siddle Walker's (1996) study focuses on the relationship between community and school, the significance of relationships between principals, teachers and students, the

professional preparation and orientation of teachers and the affects of the 1968 court order to desegregate the school in her study. Whereas most of the writing one may find on segregated Black schools focuses on their lack of economic resources, Siddle Walker notes that the total reality of these schools was perhaps richer and more nuanced than the resource focused studies could reveal. Further, she notes that the conclusions of resource-focused studies could mistakenly conflate a lack of economic resources with low standards – a conclusion she contends lacks supporting data.

Siddle Walker's work centers on a formerly segregated school in rural North Carolina originally called Caswell County Training School. Revealed in her interviews with previous students, teachers and administrators, is the relationships fostered within the school were a positive force in the students' lives. Many of the students commented on the extent to which their teachers demonstrated care for them, encouraged them to do their best and held them to extremely high standards. More importantly though, the school became a haven for those students navigating overt white supremacy and Jim Crow laws in the larger society. Siddle Walker notes, "although the students lived in a world outside the school that offered negative appraisals of what they were capable of doing, the teacher functioned to counter these messages and offer new ones of hope and possibility through education" (122). Siddle Walker contends that teachers interacted with students like family – that they were raised to care for members of their communities and they extended this way of being into the classroom. Teachers "responded to the emotional, affective, and financial needs of their students in addition to responding to their intellectual needs…[they] interacted with their students like any responsible Negro adult related to children within the communities they knew as children" (126). If teachers' caring about their students was largely an extension of their interactions with their own families, their churches and the Black community at large, a shared African American experience and culture become central motivating factors behind this positive dynamic.

While Siddle Walker's study is perhaps the most comprehensive, other scholars examine the significance of the relationship between Black students and teachers that was lost upon desegregation (Morris, 2006; Foster, 1998). Fultz (2001) also contributes to the lesser told story of the positive aspects of segregated schools in his detailing the vigilant fight for Black teachers in Black schools in Charleston, South Carolina, where the Black community remarked on Black teachers' ability and white teachers' inability to enter into sympathy with African American children. Petitions demanding Black teachers often cited the need for "reciprocity in love, affection and sympathy between teacher and pupil" (640). Fultz notes that the African American community vehemently protested when white teachers were placed in Black schools and were successful in minimizing white infiltration into Black educational spaces. In addition to encouraging and fostering new ambitions and aspirations in African American students, Black teachers served as "living textbooks" and utilized their own experiences to role model new possibilities for their futures. While there were some in the Black community who believed the insistence on Black teachers would solidify segregation, the majority of this Black community took the position that "We don't like it when you enact legislation to segregate *us*, but we reserve, through our right to self-determination, the prerogative to choose to organize

self-help endeavors *of our own and for ourselves*, activities for our mutual benefit and which convey no stigma against others" (Fultz, 2001 pg. 646, emphasis in original).

**The loss of Black teachers**. While the historic *Brown v Board of Education* decision represented a critical victory for the Black community, one troubling aspect of the *Brown* legacy, however, was the widespread loss of Black teachers. Researchers have also documented the characteristics of successful Black educators of Black students more broadly. Effective Black teachers rely on the cultural and social underpinnings of the Black community and have cultural solidarity beyond shared race (Foster, 1994). They also have strong attachments to the Black community and deep understandings of their own racial, political, and cultural identities (Foster, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1991a, 1991b; Milner, 2006; Murrell, 1999). Academically, Black teachers hold high expectations for Black students (Beady & Hansell, 1981; Irvine, 2003) and link their students' lived racial and cultural experiences to classroom content (Foster, 1994; Henry, 1998; Ladson Billings, 1991a, 1991b; Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990; Milner, 2006). The classrooms of Black educators featured as an important political space in the Black struggle for freedom (Anderson, 1988). Although their actions were not always public displays of protest, their politicization of Black students and the liberatory praxis they employed reflect what Kelley (1996, p. 8) has called "infrapolitics"—the hidden and discrete resistance of oppressed groups, which may take place off stage, at times even couched in a façade of conformity. Black teachers also engage in racial socialization work. This includes teaching strategies to navigate racial discrimination (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995) as well as reframing Black students' behaviors that others may consider defiant (Nasir, 2004), resulting in fewer behavioral referrals (Henry, 1998; Milner, 2006).

*Other mothers, other fathers*. The notion of caring and teaching has often been associated with women and likened to mothering. Scholars have examined the ways African American women may take on the role of "other mother" within their immediate families, extended families and the community at large (Collins, 1990; Gilkes, 1986; James, 1993). Education scholars have taken up this term to explore how Black women teachers may take on the role of other mother or "warm demander" with their students (Foster, 1993; Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2002, 2006), particularly within schools where the climate did not support Black children. By serving as other mothers, "black teachers demonstrated a historic and cultural aspect of what has been described in the moral development literature as an ethic of caring" (Ware, 2002, p. 37). Irvine (2002) makes an important distinction between what researchers often identify as teacher identification or surrogate parenting and the other mothering of African American teachers. Irvine (2002) notes, "These African American teachers were attached both to the individual as well as the race. Their willingness to 'adopt' was *not* solely because of their desire to help a child but also to advance the entire race" (p. 142, italics in original). In this sense, the other mothering African American teachers may perform can be understood as a politicized form of resistance that recognizes the racialized experiences of Black youth in a school climate and society that may adultify, stereotype, or otherwise neglect them.

The "other mothering" that Black women do is significant to consider in examining the politicization of teaching and to highlight the role of Black women in

creating and nurturing spaces for resistance (hooks, 1990). Still, the term "other mothering" implies that solely Black women teachers perform this role. Ware (2002) and Siddle Walker (1996) point out that historically male instructors also took on the role of parent surrogate. Contemporary accounts of African American male mentors in out-of-school contexts have also described them as "surrogate fathers" to African American male youth (Dance, 2002). Similarly, ross et al (2016) explores how Black male instructors may assume the role of "other father" and/or "other brother." Examining these roles and forms of caring for African American males is critical in lieu of racialized stereotypes about Black males as anti-domestic, anti-social, and criminal (Givens et al, 2016).

Hence, although segregated Black schools historically suffered from racialized economic policies that rendered them materially inferior, the human relationships between teachers and students (Foster, 1998; Morris, 2001; Siddle-Walker, 1996) and the mutual project of racial struggle (hooks, 1994) created an educational environment that supported the personal and academic growth of Black students. Research has documented the histories, philosophies, and pedagogies of Black teachers who understood themselves as participants in racial uplift (Foster, 1998; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1991a, 1991b; Morris, 2004).

Siddle Walker quotes Irvine and Irvine (1983) in saying "the segregated black school was thus…an educational institution that addressed the deeper psychological and sociological needs of [its] clients" (Siddle Walker, 1996, p. 4). Given the increasingly documented excessive antiblackness Black students experience in public schools today, we may be encouraged to consider whether Black students still possess "deeper psychological and sociological needs" without an "educational institution" to address them. Siddle Walker's work raises important questions that the field of education should contend with if it seeks effective answers to difficult, and sometimes painful, questions about the relationship between the Black students and the current public school system. More importantly, her detailed study offers a critical entry point into an examination of the historical significance of exclusively Black educational spaces and potential role in the current educational context.

**On Moving Forward: A Statement of P**

**urpose.** Whether approaching the desire for a liberatory Black educational experience through the vantage point of Black nationalism, Afrocentric education, or the importance of examining what worked in segregated schools prior to desegregation initiatives, each of these have in common the articulation of a particular Black educational project. They all explore the possibilities for exclusively Black educational spaces to transcend the failure of the U.S. to create an equitable educational reality for African American students. Albeit in different ways, these varying Black educational projects are a part of the struggle to recover Black humanity. They begin with a fundamental understanding of the relationship between the school and the transformation of Black consciousness and life. They understand that teaching and educating is always a political project and must always be rooted in antiracist struggle.

Still, the historical context in which these past iterations of exclusively Black educational projects unfolded, was one of more explicit racial segregation – of more overt

racialized repression in the educational context, and in society more broadly. This dissertation considers the significance of the presence of exclusively Black educational spaces in the current context, more than sixty years after the *Brown* victory promised a more inclusive and uniform educational experience for all students. Given the significant ways in which projects of Black resistance have shifted educational policy, and the lived educational realities of many Black students, what is the role of an exclusively Black space in today's society? How do instructors and students understand and experience it? What does its presence signal, or aim to address? Further, what theoretical tools may be useful in conceptualizing a theory of Black educational space? In the next chapter, I consider the ways Dumas & ross (2016) theory of BlackCrit in education, Fraser's (1990) theory of subaltern counterpublics, and hooks (1990) theories of the margin and of homeplaces, move us toward a more robust theorization of what I am calling Black educational sovereign spaces.

# Theorizing Black Educational Sovereign Spaces

When considering the meaning behind the presence of exclusively Black spaces in education, it is critical to think deeply about the dialectic relationship between from whence they came and what actually happens within them. In this particular all-Black girl space, it is important to understand how the instructor understands the space and the work she does within it, the myriad of ways students perceive and experience the space, and what its presence reveals about the broader ways race and gender play out in society. I argue that extant theories of how race and racialization function in urban schools would benefit from a more precise exploration of blackness and anti-blackness. To that end, I employ Dumas & ross' (2016) theory of BlackCrit in education, to consider the ways a Black critical theory moves us beyond white supremacy, toward an understanding of what it means for Black students to navigate antiblackness specifically. Further, I utilize the three framing ideas of BlackCrit to conceptualize what it means to construct Black exclusive spaces (as opposed to people of color spaces for example), and the ways what happens within these spaces are critical for Black students in *particular*. Fraser's (1990) theory of the subaltern counterpublic is helpful in considering the potential in moments of exclusivity, and the ways short-term separation can facilitate a longer-term goal of genuine integration. Finally, hooks' (1990) notions of homeplaces and existing within the margin are key in understanding the place of Black exclusive spaces within the ongoing struggle for a liberatory Black educational experience. I first discuss each of these theoretical tools individually; following, I offer some thoughts on how they are particularly useful for this study. I conclude this chapter with some framing ideas for conceptualizing a theory of Black educational sovereign spaces.

## BlackCrit[6]

I begin by exploring the ways that CRT engages blackness and anti-blackness, emphasizing how it speaks to a BlackCrit without explicitly naming or theorizing it. I then discuss the notion of a Black/white paradigm, and the ways this led to the proliferation of other racialized crits. Following, I briefly describe the contributions of LatCrit, TribalCrit and AsianCrit to the field of education, and I explore the minimal literature that has emerged on BlackCrit (all outside of education). Bringing all these ideas together, I highlight three key framing ideas that might emerge in a more robust BlackCrit, and how these might be useful in critical race analysis in education.

In introducing Critical Race Theory (CRT) to the field of education, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) invoke Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. DuBois as two foundational intellectual progenitors of analyses that use race as a theoretical lens to understand and explain social inequities. Woodson is perhaps known best for advancing the study of Black history, and for his critical exploration of both Black education and *mis*education in the United States (Woodson, 1919, 1933). DuBois, of

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[6] This section excerpted from Dumas & ross (2016)

course, is the preeminent sociologist, activist and Pan-Africanist scholar who authored *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), the first major study of a Black community, and *The Souls of Black Folk (1903)*, which articulates the Black experience of "double consciousness," which DuBois describes as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (2). Inspired by Woodson and DuBois, and drawing on the explication of CRT in legal studies, Ladson-Billings and Tate offer an extended explanation of how schooling becomes a site in which whites exercise their "absolute right to exclude" (p. 60) Black children. They conclude by echoing Black liberationist Marcus Garvey's pronouncement that "in a world of wolves," anti-Black oppression requires a defensiveness in which Black people commit to "the practice of race first in all parts of the world" (quoted in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62).

Thus, Critical Race Theory enters the field of education as a decidedly *Black* theorization of race. That is, even as CRT is offered as a tool to analyze race and racism in general, it is, at its inception in education (and arguably, in legal studies as well), an attempt to make sense of and respond to the horrors of racism as endured by Black people, *specifically*. Therefore, one might be tempted to argue that CRT is—inherently— a *Black* Critical Theory. But it is not a theorization of blackness or even the Black condition; it is a theory of race, or more precisely, *racism*, based on analysis of the curious administration of laws and policies intended to subjugate Black people in the United States. Although heavily imbued with concern for the psychic and material condition of Black subjects, individually and collectively, CRT in education functions much more as a critique of white supremacy and the limits of the hegemonic liberal multiculturalism (McLaren, 1995; Melamed, 2009) which guides policy, practice and research in the field. Understanding this distinction between a theory of racism and a theory of blackness (in an anti-Black world) is key: while the former may invoke Black examples, and even rely on Black experience of racism in the formation of its tenets, only critical theorization of blackness confronts the specificity of *anti*-blackness, as a social construction, as an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance, and perhaps most importantly, as an antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-in-itself (but not person for her/himself) in opposition to all that is pure, human(e) and white (Wilderson, 2010; Gordon, 1997).

Here, we want to take what seems to us implicit in Ladson-Billings' and Tate's advancement of CRT analysis in education, and make it explicit in a call to revisit and articulate the foundations of a Black Critical Theory, or what we might call *BlackCrit,* within, and in response to CRT. Of course, this brings to mind the number of other racialized "crits" which proliferated in response to CRT's initial formulation—namely, LatCrit, AsianCrit, and TribalCrit. In some sense, all of these emerged as critiques of the perceived "Black-white binary" of Critical Race Theory, and as efforts to more precisely name and address the racial oppression of Latino/as, Asians and Pacific Islanders and Indigenous peoples (Brayboy, 2005; Chang, 1993; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997). At their best, these "crits" deepen and complicate our understanding of how race is employed ideologically and materially, and extend the theoretical and empirical utility of CRT. However, their existence either presumes that CRT functions in the main as a BlackCrit,

or suggests that "race" critique accomplishes all that Black people need; Black people become situated as (just) "race," while other groups, through these more specifically named crits, offer and benefit from more detailed, nuanced, historicized and embodied theorizations of their lived racial conditions under specific formations of racial oppression.

BlackCrit becomes necessary precisely because CRT, as a general theory of racism, is limited in its ability to adequately interrogate what we call "the specificity of the Black" (Wynter, 1989). That is, CRT is not intended to pointedly address how anti-blackness—which is something different than white supremacy—informs and facilitates racist ideology and institutional practice. More, it cannot fully employ the counterstories of Black experiences of structural and cultural racisms, because it does not, on its own, have language to richly capture how anti-blackness constructs Black subjects, and positions them in and against law, policy and everyday (civic) life. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) insisted 20 years ago, citing the title of Cornel West's (1993) book, "race matters," *and*, they quickly add, citing David Lionel Smith, "blackness matters in more detailed ways" (1993, cited in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 52). Advancing BlackCrit helps us to more incisively analyze these "more detailed ways" that blackness continues to matter, and in relation to CRT, how blackness matters in our understanding of key tenets related to, for example, the permanence of racism and whiteness as property. And, in conversation with the critique of multiculturalism offered by Ladson-Billings and Tate, BlackCrit helps to explain precisely how Black bodies become marginalized, disregarded and disdained, even in their highly visible place within celebratory discourses on race and diversity.

**The Black/white paradigm.** From its inception, Critical Race Theory sought to demystify racism and racial oppression. CRT scholars seek to understand and challenge the ways race and racial power are constructed and reproduced in American society (Crenshaw, 1995), question the very foundation of the liberal order (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) and articulate their critiques and challenges through specific insights and principles. Specifically, the acceptance that racism is not an anomaly but rather the norm in American society (Delgado, 1995) where everyday acts of racial inequality and discrimination are firmly rooted in white hegemony (Taylor, 2009), allows CRT scholars to interrogate domination from a standpoint that acknowledges race as the organizing principle of society (Leonardo, 2004) and privileges the racialized experiences of people of color.

Although the original tenets of CRT refer to people of color en masse, Phillips (1998) argues that the original Critical Race Theory workshops, held annually between 1989 and 1997, may have privileged the experiences of African Americans and heterosexuals. While the workshops were originally conceived of by Kimberlé Crenshaw and organized by scholars with leftist orientations, in the early 1990s, non-Black scholars of color began to critique CRT for its "Afrocentrism," or the centering of the Black experience to the extent that the experiences of other peoples of color were ignored (Phillips, 1998). At the CRT workshop in 1992, non-Black CRT scholars of color formed a caucus and challenged the workshop's Black scholars for "[overemphasizing] the history and present circumstances of black people, with an unprincipled neglect of the

conditions of non-black peoples of color" (1252). These scholars argued that "the scholarship and discourse produced under the rubric of 'Critical Race Theory' generally and effectively has equated African American 'blackness' with 'race' and measured that experience against Euro-American 'whiteness' without examining how Asian American, Latina/o and Native American experiences or identities figure in the race/power calculus of this society and its legal culture" (Valdez as quoted in Phillips, 1252-3). In short, non-Black CRT scholars critiqued Black CRT scholars' conflating "race" with "Black" to the exclusion of other "outgroups."

Much of this critique was contextualized within the notion of a black/white paradigm. Perea (1997) for example, sets out to identify and critique what has been called the black/white binary or black/white paradigm of race and the ways it excludes Latinos and Latinas from full participation in racial discourse, diminishes Latino/a history, and perpetuates negative stereotypes of Latina/os in the U.S. Perea points to the robust scholarship on race that focuses solely on African Americans and whites to illuminate how the black/white binary shapes race thinking and reifies the black/white binary paradigm. Perea notes, "The mere recognition that 'other people of color' exist, without careful attention to their voices, their histories, and their real presence, is merely a reassertion of the Black/White paradigm" (1219). Perea painstakingly evaluates the work of Black scholars such as Andrew Hacker, Toni Morrison, and Cornel West, and suggests that as a result of focusing almost exclusively on whiteness and blackness, they marginalize other outgroups, ignore the ways non-Black people of color are racialized in the U.S., and reify the black-white binary.

Farley (1998) however, argues that the use of the phrase "black-white paradigm" is a serious flaw in LatCrit theory and risks alienating Black people. Farley contends there is in fact no such thing as a black-white paradigm except as a "tool for the master" (171) and that discussions of moving beyond the black-white paradigm may be heard by whites "as a way to relieve themselves of the burden of having to speak of their former slaves" (172). While Farley points to the importance of examining the ways white supremacy injures non-Black people of color, he suggests reframing the language in a way that forces white supremacy center stage. Hence, rather than moving beyond the black-white paradigm, discussions that focus on moving "beyond the white supremacist language of black-or-white"(172) or "White Over Black paradigm" (Phillips, 1998) nestle the responsibility within dominant racial ideology.

Further, given the significance of African American ethnicity to U.S. political and social contexts and the "centrality of anti-black racism to the patterns of domination we call white supremacy" (Espinoza & Harris, 1997 pg. 1596), attention to anti-blackness is a critical component in resisting white supremacy. In fact, Nakagawa (2015) argues, "anti-black racism is the *fulcrum* of white supremacy" (emphasis added). While acknowledging that focusing on black and white may reify a false racial binary that disregards the experiences of non-Black people of color, Nakagawa points to a real binary in which white people occupy one side – "the side with force and intention" and "the way they mostly assert that force and intention is through the fulcrum of anti-black racism." Nakagawa notes that the very structure of the U.S. economy has its roots in race slavery and numerous other structures such as the U.S. concept of ownership rights, the

federal election system, criminal codes, and federal penitentiaries, are fueled by anti-black racism and in the case of national politics, a fear of Black people.

Still, all race scholars agreed on the necessity of interrogating the specific oppressions of non-Black outgroups within a white supremacist society. In other words, regardless of the problematic notion of moving beyond the so-called black/white binary, the need for critical race theory focused explicitly on non-Black people of color, was indisputable. Hence, these early critiques of the "Black/white paradigm" or "Black/white binary" in CRT lay the foundation for the proliferation of other "racecrits," namely, LatCrit, AsianCrit, and TribalCrit. These racecrits sought to address the experiences of Latinas/os, Asians, and Indigenous people in ways CRT had failed to do. These "crits" worked to advance our understanding of the ways non-Black people are raced and draw our attention to issues such as language, nativistic racism, and colonialism.

**Development of other "racecrits."** LatCrit was born out of a desire to explore critical legal thought from the Latina/o perspective (Hernandez-Truyol, 1997). At a colloquium held on Latinas/os and critical race theory, several Latino/a law professors convened with the hope of developing a non-essentialist model that would move beyond the black-white binary (Espinoza & Harris, 1997) and address the invisibility and silencing of a Latina/o viewpoint. Just as Ladson-Billings and Tate introduced CRT into education, LatCrit scholars began to examine the various ways LatCrit could be helpful in articulating the experiences of Latino/Latina students. In their seminal piece, "Examining transformational resistance through a critical race and LatCrit theory framework Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context," Solorzano and Bernal (2001) describe LatCrit in education as a theory that challenges the hegemonic discourse on race and racism in education by exploring the ways educational theory and practice are utilized to marginalize Chicana and Chicano students. They argue that LatCrit theory is distinct from CRT in the sense that it "is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity and addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality" (311). Hence, LatCrit theory allows scholars to explore the places where racism intersects with other forms of the oppression central in the experiences of Latinos and Latinas. As scholars have defined LatCrit theory in education as a social justice project, research has explored both the ways educational institutions oppress Latino and Latina students, and also the ways these students engage in resistance (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Fernández, 2002). Scholars have also built upon techniques from Critical Race Theory such as counterstorytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2006) and augmented them in ways that were helpful in exploring educational experiences specific to Latinos and Latinas such as Critical Race Testimonio (Perez-Huber, 2009).

Likewise, AsianCrit scholars sought to explore the ways Asian Americans' distinct oppression in American society positions them as eternal foreigners (Takaki, 1989). For example, Chang (1993) advanced a theory of AsianCrit in critical legal studies to address issues such as the model minority myth, nativistic racism, and perpetual foreign status. Museus & Iftikar (2013) build on existing CRT tenets as well as knowledge of the racial realities of Asian Americans to put forth seven tenets of AsianCrit including, Asianization, which "refers to the reality that racism and nativist

racism are pervasive aspects of American society and that society racializes Asian Americans in distinct ways" (p. 23). AsianCrit has also been taken up by education scholars to address the ways Asian American students generally, and various ethnic subgroups specifically, experience higher educational institutions (Liu, 2009), high schools (Chae, 2004), and predominantly white schools (Quach, Jo, & Urrieta, 2009).

Finally, TribalCrit takes perhaps the largest departure in forefronting colonialism as opposed to race. In an attempt to develop a theoretical construct that can directly address the issues salient to American Indians, Brayboy (2005) elaborates a Tribal Critical Race Theory or TribalCrit. TribalCrit is "rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically- and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities…while simultaneously recognizing the range and variation that exists within and between communities and individuals" (p. 427). The nine tenets of TribalCrit serve to address the nuanced relationship between American Indians and the U.S. federal government and illuminate the liminal status of indigenous peoples as racial and legal/political groups and individuals. Like the original proponents of LatCrit, Brayboy argues that CRT was developed to address the civil rights of African Americans and thus conceptualized race along a Black/white binary. Still, while LatCrit and AsianCrit accept CRT's premise that racism is pervasive in society, TribalCrit emphasizes that colonization is pervasive in society while acknowledging the role played by racism (Brayboy, 2001, 2005).

According to Brayboy (2005), TribalCrit's primary tenet, "Colonialism is endemic to society" refers to the hegemony of European-American thought, knowledge, and power structures in U.S. society. Brayboy argues that the ultimate goal of the interactions between U.S. society and American Indians has been to colonize or civilize American Indians so that they can become more like those in power in dominant society. Hence, the sixth tenet of TribalCrit is a recognition that educational policies and governmental policies have historically had the troubling goal of assimilation. TribalCrit explicitly rejects policies that aim to assimilate American Indian students into educational institutions and replace cultural knowledge with academic knowledge.

Brayboy hoped that TribalCrit would be a more helpful tool for researchers frustrated with current methods and theories available to study the experiences of indigenous students in educational institutions. Indeed, TribalCrit has been taken up by education scholars to examine hostile school policies (Cerecer, 2013), Native youth perspectives on socio-culturally responsive education (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010), higher education policies around mascots and ethnic fraud (Castagno & Lee, 2007), and interrogate uncritical multiculturalism (Haynes Writer, 2008).

Just as LatCrit and AsianCrit explore the specific lived racial conditions of Latinos and Asians, Brayboy (2005) asserts that TribalCrit likewise has an explanatory power and may provide a more useful theoretical lens through which to explain the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples. LatCrit's attention to issues such as language and immigration, AsianCrit's attention to issues such as nativistic racism and perpetual foreign status, and TribalCrit's shift of focus from race to colonialism, fill a critical gap in CRT's explanatory capacity.

**BlackCrit.** Still, as other racecrits began to emerge, some African American scholars began to question whether it was necessary to have a line of critical race theory that explicitly focused on the Black experience. In other words, the proliferation of these other racecrits either meant that CRT was considered the same thing as a critical Black theory, or that a theory of race and racism was enough to encompass the experiences of Blacks in the U.S. While CRT may have privileged the experiences of African Americans at its inception, the notion that it could (or should) suffice for theorizing Blackness, became increasingly problematic – both ideologically and practically.

While the emergence of other racecrits served to deepen our understanding of the racialization of non-Black "outgroups," it also effectively shifted the focus away from the Black experience. Phillips (1998) notes that Black history and politics were further decentered in the 8th and 9th CRT workshops and suggests that the only attention given to Black folks at this time were "critiques of black homophobia and chastisement of blacks for our role in enforcing repressive aspects of the Black/White paradigm" (1253). Further, Phillips notes that at the conclusion of its first decade, CRT had completely aligned itself with what LatCrit was at its inception. Where the experiences of Blacks are decentered (or pushed out), Phillips questions, "What institutional arrangements are suited to our articulation of the particular culture and needs of African Americans, which may or may not come to be called 'BlackCrit,' but which should definitely take into account the convergence between the politics of the Critical Race Theory Workshop and LatCrit theory" (1254)? While Phillips does not articulate what a potential BlackCrit may involve, the notion that its development had become necessary was clear.

Indeed, some scholars began to consider the potential of its explanatory power for underscoring the specific forms of racial oppression Black people experience, both in the U.S. and abroad. For example, Lewis (2000) notes, "The strand of Critical Race scholarship that I am labeling 'BlackCrit' addresses the significance of racial attitudes toward Africans and peoples of African descent in the structure and operation of the international human rights system" (1076). Lewis was concerned with expanding iterations of the racialization of Black folks to include Black people outside the U.S. context. In other words, just as violence and material racism against Black people in the U.S. has been effectively muted, so have these forms of oppression been ignored against Black people in Africa and the Caribbean for example. Lewis argues that BlackCrit human rights theorists have created or built upon at least three significant critiques of human rights law including a deeper recognition of the role of race in human rights law, or the problems with so-called race-neutral laws, the ways race and gender intersect with human rights, and the primary role of United States in human rights violations both in the U.S. and abroad.

Still, other scholars' discussion of the development of a BlackCrit situates it within the context of anticipated (or actual) objections. While Phillips (1998) understands why there may be a need to carve space to articulate the specific culture and needs of African Americans, she argues for its development within the CRT workshop rather than as a separate entity or organization. Phillips points to concerns about a regressive Black nationalism that may deny sexism in the Black community, legitimate homophobia, and deny the possibility of African Americans being racist toward non-Black people of color

and whites. Another potential danger in constructing a BlackCrit theory is the notion that it would necessarily be essentialist. Roberts (1998) notes, "BlackCrit could erroneously imply that Blacks share a common, essential identity; it could erroneously attribute to all people of color the experiences of Black people; and it could reinforce the white-black paradigm as the only lens through which to view racial oppression" (p. 855). Still, Roberts cautions against allowing such fears to prevent scholars from developing a theory that is Black specific. In other words, "writing about Black people is not essentialist in and of itself. It only becomes essentialist when the experiences discussed are taken to portray a uniform Black experience or a universal experience that applies to every other group" (p. 857). Citing the usefulness of a BlackCrit, Roberts notes that studying the relationship between reproductive policies and Black women would have been impossible outside of a Black-specific theory:

> I could not have adequately described these policies without focusing on black-white relationships and on the particular meaning of blackness. These repressive reproductive policies arose out of the history of the enslavement of Africans in America. The institution of slavery gave whites a unique economic and political interest in controlling Black women's reproductive capacity. This form of subjugation made Black women's wombs and the fetuses they carried chattel property. The process of making a human being's very reproductive capacity the property of someone else is not replicated in other relationships of power in the United States. (p. 858)

Ultimately Roberts warns about the dangers in advocating an anti-essentialism that becomes a detaching from Blackness. Roberts notes, "We should be concerned about avoiding blackness when so many people still feel uneasy about 'loving blackness'" (p. 862).

Still, over fifteen years later, the notion of a BlackCrit remains woefully undertheorized. Particularly in an age where technology often renders brutal anti-blackness visible as public spectacle, and calls of "Black lives matter" echo in the streets, we must ask, what are the theoretical tools that will assist us in an examination of the specificity of the Black. More importantly, for the purposes of this paper, what does a BlackCrit in education do for us? Surely Ladson-Billings & Tate's (1995) introduction of CRT into education twenty years ago raised significant questions about the ways structural racism excludes Black children *specifically* from equitable educational opportunities. Still, how can we build on this initial focus on blackness, and conceptualize a Black theoretical framework that distinguishes racism from blackness, and expands CRT's ability to illuminate the specificity of blackness in an anti-Black world?

**Framing ideas of BlackCrit.** While resisting the inclination towards prescribed "tenets," BlackCrit engages three central framing ideas. We begin with a foundational idea that is probably inherent to any possible formulation of BlackCrit: *anti-blackness is endemic to, and is central to how all of us make sense of the social, economic, historical and cultural dimensions of human life*. Of course, this is a more specific iteration of the

CRT tenet that asserts that racism is normal and permanent in US society (Bell, 1993; Delgado, 1995). But anti-blackness is not simply racism against Black people. Rather, anti-blackness refers to a broader antagonistic relationship between blackness and (the possibility of) humanity. The concept is most developed in an intellectual project called Afro-pessimism (although not everyone who writes in, or in relation to this project would define themselves as Afro-pessimists). Afro-pessimism posits that Black people exist in the social imagination as (still) Slave, a thing to be possessed as property, and therefore with little right to live for herself, to move and breathe for himself (Gordon, 1997; Hartman, 1997, 2007; Sexton, 2008; Wilderson, 2010).  In fact, there is no Black Self that is not already suspect, that is not already targeted for death, in the literal sense and in terms of what Orlando Patterson (1982) calls "social death," in which the participation of Black people in civic life, as citizens, is made unintelligible by the continual reinscribing and re-justification of violence on and against Black bodies. A full explication of anti-blackness is beyond the scope of this paper, but the essence of anti-blackness is that Black people are living in what Saidiya Hartman calls "the afterlife of slavery," in which Black humanity and human possibility are threatened and disdained "by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago" (2007, p. 6). To insist that anti-blackness is endemic and permanent means that BlackCrit intervenes at the point of detailing how policies and everyday practices find their logic in, and reproduce Black suffering; it is also to imagine the futurity of Black people against the devaluation of Black life and skepticism about (the worth of) letting Black people go on (see, for example, Moten, 2013, who posits a Black optimism, not so much *against* Afro-pessimism, but certainly in necessary tension with it).

We offer a second framing idea for BlackCrit: *Blackness exists in tension with the neoliberal-multicultural imagination*. After World War II, the United States began to slowly dismantle laws that overtly inscribed racial discrimination. By the mid- to late-1960s, with the signing of various federal and state civil rights measures, and the end of Jim Crow, the nation came to assert itself as officially antiracist (Melamed, 2009).  In this new embrace of multiculturalism, the state first took an active role in the establishment and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, and even implemented a number of programs (e.g., affirmative action, Head Start) intended to correct generations of racist policies and practices. With the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, the state began to retreat from an active role in addressing racism, and instead entrusted the market with advancing diversity and opportunity for all. An emergent neoliberal multiculturalism celebrated the opening of various markets to a broader range of racially diverse consumers. It is presumed that racism is no longer a barrier to equal opportunity; thus, those groups which do not experience upward mobility and greater civic (and buying) power are presumed to have failed on their own, as a result of their own choices in the marketplace and/or their own inability to internalize national values of competition, and individual determination and hard work.

In this context, Black people become—or rather, remain—a problem, as the least assimilable to this multicultural imagination. The relative successes of some other groups of color are offered as evidence of the end of racism. Persistent joblessness, disparities in educational achievement, and high rates of incarceration are all seen as problems created

by Black people, and problems *of* blackness itself. Here, then, Black people are seen to stand in the way of multicultural progress, which is collapsed here with the advancement of the market, which in turn, under neoliberalism, is presumed to represent the interests of civil society and the nation-state. In our view, then, BlackCrit proceeds with a wariness about multiculturalism (and its more current iteration, diversity) as an ideology which is increasingly complicit with neoliberalism in explaining away the material conditions of Black people as a problem created by Black people who are unwilling or unable to embrace the nation's "officially anti-racist" multicultural future. We do not mean to suggest opposition to coalitions amongst and between groups of people of color, or even to endorse a kind of essentialist racial separatism. However, we want to recognize that the trouble with (liberal and neoliberal) multiculturalism and diversity, both in ideology and practice, is that they are often positioned against the lives of Black people (Dumas, 2016; Sexton, 2008).

Third, we offer that *BlackCrit should create space for Black liberatory fantasy, and resist a revisionist history that supports dangerous majoritarian stories that disappear whites from a history of racial dominance (Leonardo, 2004), rape, mutilation, brutality and murder (Bell, 1987).* Fanon (1963) notes, "You do not disorganize a society….if you are not determined from the very start to smash every obstacle encountered" (p. 3). In the wake of the brutal killings of Eric Garner or Natasha McKenna, for example, we may understand Tupac's (1991) call for "every nigga on my block [to] drop two cops" as a manifestation of Fanon's theory in a way that makes sense in the lived reality of people raced as Black today—people who navigate the constant threat (and reality) of police terror. Still, in reflecting upon this, we understand it not (as it may appear) a fantasy of murder or the destruction of human beings. We do not see this as a desire on Shakur's part to witness the death of police officers or to know their families' grief. Rather, it is a fantasy of the eradication of a prison and the beginning of a necessary chaos. It represents the beginning of the end. It is the first taste of freedom.

This glimpse of freedom stems from the potential of attacking the army of whiteness and the wondrous possibilities of the pandemonium. Fanon notes, "Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder" (p. 2). Although Shakur's suggestion is not an end-all solution to racial oppression, it is the disruption of a power dynamic that becomes the ray of hope for larger systemic change. Hence, as we celebrate the "peaceful protests" against the numerous recent police murders of Black men, women, and children, we must also acknowledge the place of Black liberatory fantasy in collective Black struggle. Fanon writes, "The work of the colonist is to make even dreams of liberty impossible for the colonized. The work of the colonized is to imagine every possible method for annihilating the colonist….for the colonized, life can only materialize from the rotting cadaver of the colonist" (p. 50). Hence, BlackCrit should also make space for the notion of chants becoming battle cries, tears becoming stones in clenched fists, and the hand-written signs machine guns—for the idea that the blood of whiteness must flow in the streets.

**Toward BlackCrit in education.** In outlining a critical race approach to education policy analysis, Kristen Buras (2013) argues for "racial realism" (following

Derrick Bell), in which we historicize policy within the context of white supremacy, map out the confluence of racial and legal logics that create the infrastructure for policy, use concepts from CRT to analyze policy formation and implementation, and draw on counterstories to highlight how racially oppressed people are targeted by, and act agentially in challenging existing policies. BlackCrit is consistent with this racial realist project, and aims to contribute to this work by encouraging policy analysis and advocacy that attends to the significance of blackness in the social construction of white supremacy, and then in education specifically, how anti-blackness serve to reinforce the ideological and material "infrastructure" of educational inequity—the misrecognition of students and communities of color, and the (racialized) maldistribution of educational resources. Such work is not meant to displace a broader theorization of critical race policy analysis, nor is it intended to reify a Black-white binary, which not only marginalizes other communities of color, but also hurts Black liberation by offering whiteness a privileged place as the standard-bearer of racial excellence and normativity. For us, BlackCrit takes its place within the broader critical race project, and at the same time, necessarily occupies a location of its own, similar to the other racecrits, in a way that provides space for further development and imagination.

**Subaltern Counterpublics**

Fraser's (1990) theory of the subaltern counterpublic is particularly helpful in understanding both the relationship between the presence of Black educational sovereign spaces and the broader ways race and gender play out in society, and also, the ways the instructor and students may understand and experience them. According to Fraser, subaltern counterpublics are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). In other words, where a certain group of people, their experiences, their voices etc. may be excluded from public discourses, they may create separate spaces where they grant themselves permission to exist as they are, and to create and circulate counter-hegemonic ideologies. Further, Fraser's work aids in our understanding of how these spaces that are admittedly exclusive, may actually create greater space for equitable and meaningful inclusivity. Fraser notes, "insofar as these counterpublics emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, they help expand discursive space…In general, the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive contestation, and that is a good thing in stratified societies" (67). In other words, the concept of a subaltern counterpublic actually operates against separatism:

> In stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides" (68).

Hence, counterpublics, while admittedly purposefully constructed separate spaces, may also serve to increase and enhance participation in the larger public sphere. While we generally talk about diversity and inclusion, Fraser's notion of the counterpublic reveals that inclusivity may require periods of exclusivity. In other words, the ability to retreat and engage in collective (and elective) separatism, can be understood as a necessary perquisite for more precise and direct action toward larger systemic change.

## Homeplaces *"Sometimes I feel like a motherless child/a long ways from home"*

In her chapter entitled, "Homeplace," bell hooks (1990) describes the journey she traveled as a child to her grandmother's house. She discusses how she would have to walk through a poor white neighborhood to get there – past that "terrifying whiteness – those white faces on porches staring [them] down with hate" (41). She describes the feeling of "safety" of "arrival" and of "homecoming" when she arrived at her grandmother's house. She notes, "such a contrast, that feeling of arrival, of homecoming, this sweetness and the bitterness of that journey, that constant reminder of white power and control" (41). Hence hooks begins her chapter with a story about what it means to traverse the outside racially hostile world, and finally arrive safely to the homeplace her grandmother made.

Yet what hooks refers to is not simply a house – or even a home in the colloquial sense. For hooks, the homeplaces Black women created were a deeply political and particularly essential component of Black resistance. She writes:

> Historically African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of dominance, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world.
>
> This task of making homeplace was not simply a matter of black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that 'hompelace,' most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture out spirits. This task of making a homeplace, of making home a community of resistance, has been shared by black women globally, especially black women in white supremacist societies (42).

For hooks, the homeplaces Black women have historically created were fundamentally political – a site where Black folks were safe enough to heal from the experiences of existing as Black in a white supremacist society, and resist the dehumanization they faced in the outside world. When hooks notes the ways folks could "restore the dignities" denied outside of these homeplaces, she refers to the impossibility of Black humanity in the larger anti-black society and the ways these homeplaces provided a space for people to "affirm one another" and heal each other's racially inflicted wounds. As a part of the impossibility of Black humanity, she asserts the unfeasibility of Black self-love within the context of white supremacy; the homeplaces then, became spaces where Black folks could reimagine blackness and develop healthy Black subjectivities.

**The Margin**

When considering all-Black spaces in the context of antiblackness, we may consider hooks' notion marginality as we think about Black educational sovereign spaces as homeplaces. Where homeplaces offer a space for resistance, hooks (1990) argues, "Opposition is not enough. In that vacant space after one has resisted, there is still the necessity to become. To make oneself anew" (14). What hooks is referring to is the transformative process of making oneself a subject – in the Millsian sense, of becoming person – *a real human being*. I employ hooks' exploration of the "margin" as a space for the recreation of a radical Black subjectivity to conceptualize Black educational sovereign space in the current context.

The margin hooks refers to is a "site of radical possibility, a space of resistance…a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words…a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" (149-50). I want to suggest that Black educational sovereign space is located in these margins – where yearning and imagining meet and become. Black space fuels itself in the margins and claims "the ground on which we are constructing, 'homeplace'" (19), where "we can best become whatever we want to be while remaining committed to liberatory black liberation struggle (20); it is that "counter-hegemonic marginal space where radical black subjectivity is seen, not overseen by any authoritative Other claiming to know us better than we know ourselves" (22, italics in original). Hooks notes, "When Bob Marley sings, 'we refuse to be what you want us to be, we are what we are, and that's the way it's going to be,' that space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer, no the downpressor, is located in the margins (150). The margin then, becomes a space where Black folks can articulate a politics of refusal, and reimagine themselves in opposition to anti-black blackness. Here, BlackCrit might envision a liberatory fantasy in which Black subjects respond to anti-black hegemonic Black girl discourses with a "decided, 'Hell naw' and then 'I said, Hell naw!' with the same decided defiance that The Color Purple 's Miss Sophia rejected Miss Millie's offer to serve as her maid. And, we might throw in a direct punch to Miss Millie's husband's face as well, regardless of the cost: 'Hell naw!' to going where we are

hated and beaten down" (Dumas & ross, 2016, pg. 19).

Still, hooks cautions us that there is an important distinction to be made between marginalities imposed by oppressive structures, and the marginalities we choose for ourselves or make our own.

> "I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights and fulfills desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location to articulate our sense of the world" (153).

It is within these margins, within Black educational sovereign spaces, that we may find responses to hooks' call for a reexamination of the factors that have historically given life meaning in the face of the brutalization of white supremacy.

**Tying it all Together**

Dumas & ross' (2016) theorization of BlackCrit, helps us to understand the significance of exploring Black educational sovereign spaces through a decidedly Black critical theory. Distinguishing antiblackness from white supremacy, and acknowledging the endemic nature of antiblackness, serves to get at the specificity of what these spaces are in response to – of the context that they are born out of. Highlighting the tensions between blackness and the neo-liberal multicultural imagination, helps us consider the significance of all-Black spaces as opposed to people of color spaces for example. Illuminating these tensions also serve to push back against notions of presumed non-white solidarity, and aid us in analyzing Black students' very real anti-black experiences with other non-Black students and teachers of color. Finally, we must consider the ways Black educational sovereign spaces make room for Black liberatory fantasy – for ideas and discussions disallowed in the larger world – the ways Black space nurture the Sophias in whatever way they decide to articulate a politics of refusal.

Fraser's (1990) notion of the subaltern counterpublic becomes particularly useful in thinking about what it means to construct separate spaces. The counterpublic becomes a space where Black students and educators are permitted to create counterhegemonic discourses that serve to reimagine blackness and reveal the expansive possibilities of Black girlhood and boyhood. Still, these moments of exclusivity, if you will, may serve to reshape the ways Black students participate in the larger public sphere. Thus, while scholars have theorized the significance of multicultural counterpublics in education (Fine et al), and even historical exclusively Black counterpublics (Dawson, 1990; Dumas, 2007), the reemergence of these spaces – particularly in a post-*Brown* purportedly color-

blind era – represents a fascinating opportunity to explore a potential structural shift in the education world at large.

Still, hooks' (1990) ideas of homeplaces and existing in the margin, help us to step back and consider Black educational sovereign spaces outside of their potential to interact with the larger public sphere. In other words, their revolutionary potential is in and of themselves. When considering various programs in public schools, education scholars often evaluate their usefulness based on the ways they interact with standard measures of academic success (i.e. does the program raise test scores? Does it increase attendance? Does it decrease disciplinary incidents and so forth)? Hooks' work encourages us to consider the usefulness of these spaces for Black students in anti-black schools and in an anti-black world. If we consider the reemergence of these Black exclusive spaces within larger public schools as the political act of constructing homeplaces, we are able to consider their usefulness for being a refuge for Black students who face the impossibility of Black humanity – of Black self-love in the context of antiblackness. Further, hooks discusses extensively the significance of constructing homeplaces in the context of oppression and domination and the ways that dominant forces in society always ensure the impossibility of the oppressed constructing homeplaces. Hooks notes, "An effective means of white subjugation of black people globally has been the perpetual construction of economic and social structures that deprive many folks of the means to make homeplace…for when a people no longer have the space to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance" (46-7). This point is particularly significant; if we conceptualize Black educational sovereign spaces as "homeplaces" as "radical sites of possibility," we must consider the ways these spaces are generally disallowed, and what it means when we are able to carve them out, to maintain them in schools and in a society that takes a legal and ideological stance against them.

Taken together, these theoretical tools help us to analyze the ways these spaces encourage students to contest, disrupt, and reimagine problematic notions of blackness. At the same time, they assist in exploring the potential tensions of these spaces, such as how particular ways of engaging in ideas of "Black womanhood" may reify the adultification of Black children and how the perception of shared racial and gender backgrounds may facilitate practices that exclude particular students or downplay the tensions that exist given varying complexions, hair types, and life experiences for example. Ultimately though, with their complexity and challenges, Black educational sovereign spaces provide a revolutionary antidote to the rampant anti-blackness prevalent in our nation's urban schools, or what hooks (1990) would call a "radical site of possibility." To seize this possibility, in this specific historical moment, is to embark on empirically rigorous and theoretically principled explorations anchored in fundamental concerns about the education of Black children in U.S. public schools.

**Theorizing Black Educational Sovereign Spaces**

While I want to resist the inclination toward a Black space cookbook, I want to offer some initial framing ideas that might inspire and serve us well in conceptualizing

Black educational sovereign spaces, while leaving space for further scholarship and collective deliberation. In other words, this will not be a "how to make Black space," cookbook, but rather, an exploration of what it means to create Black educational sovereign spaces in education with the hope that we may move from this initial conceptualization to an even richer theorization. Although this may go without saying, Black educational sovereign spaces are comprised of students and adults who identify as Black or African American in whatever way they choose to take up these identities. While non-essentializing, they are deliberately and unapologetically exclusively Black spaces.

First, I utilize the term "sovereign" because purposefully constructed exclusively Black spaces in education exist in the margin, outside of the auspices of the larger school. That is, in recognizing that antiblackness is endemic to all aspects of society, they are born, created, and in direct response to the rampant antiblackness in the larger world, and in U.S. public schools; they serve as makeshift land, and provide makeshift citizenship to people whose humanity is consistently made impossible on the outside. They offer a reprieve from the gaze of white supremacy – from the brutality of antiblackness. They are momentary escapes from antiblackness – homeplaces – (anti) anti-Black spaces. As such, these spaces create their own rules and guidelines, including disciplinary practices, often in tension with the policies of the larger school. Further, these spaces focus on the sharing of Black history in a myriad of ways; as such, they also serve as makeshift textbooks for Black students whose history is largely absent from mainstream curriculums.

Second, Black educational sovereign spaces engage in struggling, in reimagining, and in becoming. More than assembling Black people together ("places" with all Black people can still be anti-Black), Black space is always inherently political. Created as "revolutionary antidotes" to antiblackness, Black space in education commits to the arduous process of reimagining blackness, of working collectively to develop radical Black subjectivities. As a part of these processes, Black space engages Afro-futurisms, and considers blackness beyond the past and present – it nurtures the political act of Black dreaming. While Black space is often produced in a specific place (the classroom in this study for example), it is not a place in and of itself. Black space is fluid, embodied, and can travel beyond the places in which participants produce it.

Third, Black educational sovereign spaces exist in tension with notions of school "reform." Black space is created, precisely because it acknowledges the ways antiblackness precludes Black humanity. In the educational context, it recognizes the ways schools inherently position Black children as uneducable. Without diminishing educational policy initiatives that may serve to ameliorate the educational experiences of some Black children, Black educational sovereign spaces give reform efforts a proverbial "side eye", and view the possibilities of school reform for Black children with a healthy skepticism. These spaces trouble and problematize the possibility of conceptualizing educational policies that create liberatory schooling experiences for Black students in an anti-Black world. In acknowledging the egregiousness of antiblackness, Black educational sovereign spaces necessarily wrestle with the reality of what it really means to resist it.

While Black educational sovereign spaces are not limited to these three framing ideas, I offer these initial thoughts as an invitation to continue the collective conversation around what it means to conceptualize an educational project for Black students in particular – about what it means to consider the ways we may produce and reproduce spaces of anti-antiblackness. In the following chapter, I explore the utility of BlackCrit as methodology, discuss the methods utilized in this study, and give an overview of the setting and context of my research site.

# Methodology

This study takes the position that there is no "neutral research" and outlining a clear methodological approach is an indication of the author's guiding ideological framework. Leonardo (2013) argues, "Methodology is a framework for the ideological underpinnings of race research. It is an ontological position on the question of reality, such as whether or not racism is structural in nature or defined as expressions of individual prejudice" (1). One of the most important functions of methodology then, is to substantiate the objective and project of social research. Here I build on Solórzano & Yosso's (2002) explanation of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as methodology, and Leonardo's notion of the Racial Contract as methodology (within CRT) to consider the ways in which we may conceptualize BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016) as methodology.

**Critical Race Theory as Methodology**. While Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is often hailed as a compelling theoretical or explanatory framework, CRT can also be employed as a powerful methodology. Solórzano & Yosso (2002), extend critical race theory to include a "critical race methodology." They define critical race methodology (in part) as

> A theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process…(b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color…(22)

In laying out a methodology that "foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process," Solórzano and Yosso argue that the exercise of developing critical race methodology must begin with a definition of race and racism. Still, while defining race and racism is significant, issues of race and racism are often confined to conscious discriminatory acts against an individual by racist people or the implementation of racist laws (i.e. Jim Crow) (powell, 2012). Moving beyond the notion of racism, many scholars have chosen to consider the explanatory power of white supremacy.  For example, hooks (1989) asserts that she cannot remember when racism ceased in being the appropriate term to describe Black exploitation – when white supremacy became that term. Mills (2010) notes that using the concept of white supremacy "puts front and center the most important thing about race: that it is systemic, structural and oppressive, and that whites are privileged by it" (page 172).

**Racial Contract as methodology**. Leonardo (2013) notes, "CRT offers a way of conducting research that speaks against current objectifications of race, not just a way of interpreting it" and offers Mills' Racial Contract as methodology for critical race theory. The Racial Contract is both a theory and an actual contract whereby "the general purpose of the Contract is always the differential privileging of the whites as a group with respect to nonwhites as a group, the exploitation of

their bodies, land, and resources, and the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities to them"(Mills, 1997, p. 11). While the racial contract is not a literal contract that whites have signed, in the current political context, whites benefit from it even if they are not signatories. Leonardo (2013) notes that the Racial Contract is "an apprehension of an arrangement that amounts to a lived reality. It is not a *hypothesis* but a *methodology* to unveil what Mills insists on calling a sociopolitical system of 'White supremacy', and not merely 'racism' in general or 'White racism' in particular" (8). Mills' Racial Contract encourages an epistemology grounded not in an ideal society, but in society as it actually exists; "the RC is not cynical or pessimistic but realist and materialist, a willingness to 'look at the facts without flinching'" (8).

For Mills, understanding the polities structured by the Racial Contract, is heavily predicated on the concept of subpersonhood. He defines subpersons as "humanoid entities who, because of racial/phenotype/genealogy/culture, are not fully human and therefore have a different and inferior schedule of rights and liberties applying to them" (Mills, 1997, p. 56). The ability of persons (whites) to dominate subpersons (non-whites) is rooted in non-whites' lack of humanity and hence, lack of rights and considerations. Yet, subpersonhood is more than a physical distinction. Mills notes that in Rousseau's social contract, there is a presumed equality in man's ability to understanding natural law (naturally required for social cooperation). In the Racial Contract, "subpersons are deemed cognitively inferior, lacking in the essential rationality that would make them fully human" (59). Likewise, Leonardo (2013) utilizes Ferguson's (2001) notion that Black children are "adultified" in schools and punished for vague defiances white *children* are excused from, to point out "the fundamental distinction between students (children) and teachers (adults) does not hold for Black children" (9). Leonardo argues that in the same way Mills' theory of racially proscribed personhood designates whites persons and non-whites subpersons, within the educational Racial Contract, non-white children may be understood as substudents. Where subpersons are deemed cognitively inferior, substudents are deemed uneducable. The potential power of Mills' Racial Contract as a formidable weapon in Critical Race Theory as methodology is an exciting proposition.

> CRT, especially when married with Mills' description and explanation of the RC, is a methodological candidate for revealing the real terms of the Educational RC. It makes possible the act of signing off the contract as a gesture toward reconstituting the category of human and, therefore, the student… In education, it begins with a methodology that questions commonsensical notions, such as the 'human' and 'student', for their political moorings with respect to who can be saved or in this case, who can be taught. (Leonardo, 2013, pg. 10-11)

**BlackCrit as methodology.** Here I want to consider what it would mean to envision BlackCrit as methodology, in the same way Solórzano & Yosso understand CRT as methodology, and Leonardo (2013) conceptualizes the Racial Contract as

methodology. The utility of CRT as methodology lies in its ability to move beyond interpretation, and offer a way of conducing research that speaks against current objectifications of race. Likewise, the Racial Contract as methodology moves beyond notions of race to reveal the sociopolitical system of white supremacy and force an epistemology grounded in the reality of the larger white supremacist society. Similarly, BlackCrit as methodology, as opposed to centering race and racism, or even white supremacy, would necessarily center antiblackness. BlackCrit begins with the idea that anti-blackness is endemic to, and is central to how all of us make sense of the social, economic, historical and cultural dimensions of human life. To insist that anti-blackness is endemic and permanent means that BlackCrit intervenes at the point of detailing how policies and everyday practices find their logic in, and reproduce Black suffering; it is also to imagine the futurity of Black people against the devaluation of Black life and skepticism about (the worth of) letting Black people go on. BlackCrit then, might remix CRT as methodology in this way: BlackCrit as methodology is a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds antiblackness in all aspects of the research process; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of Black students; (c) considers the possibilities of Black futurities; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of Black students. If we return to Leonardo's (2013) assertion of methodology as an "ontological positioning," BlackCrit as methodology is helpful in explicating the objective of this research, and the significance of utilizing antiblackness as a frame to understand the experiences of the Black girls and the Black teacher in this study.

**Research Methods and Design**

This study employs a qualitative approach centered on two data sources: ethnographic classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with students and educators. These data sources were utilized to answer the following research questions:

1. How does this Black woman educator in this purposefully constructed all-Black female space perceive the space? How does she understand the work she does? What frames, philosophies, or theories guide her pedagogy? What pedagogical tools does she employ in this space?
2. What norms, values, and cultural practices guide the space? How do Black girl students in this space perceive them? How are they beneficial or detrimental to Black girls?
3. What is the relationship between the presence of this exclusively Black female space and the broader ways race and gender play out in society?

**Observation and participant observation.** Both observation and participant observation was utilized as a technique of data collection. The structure of the classes allowed me to take detailed handwritten fieldnotes; in instances where fieldnotes may have interrupted the flow of the class I employed the technique of creating "scratchnotes" (Sanjek, 1990) where time and circumstance permitted and directly after leaving the

school. I also kept a reflection log in which I regularly documented my reflective process and recorded my "headnotes" (Ottenberg, 1990). Additionally, during class periods where taking fieldnotes proved particularly difficult, I took audio recordings of the day's class. Finally, I also utilized my iPhone to create voice memos (audio recordings) of my thoughts directly after class. In instances where I did not have time in class to record the *way* I was thinking about a particular occurrence, the audio recordings were helpful in recording multiple thoughts at once.

The course was taught during 5th and 6th period, and over the course of one school year, I volunteered in the class for two hours, twice per week, totaling four hours per week. For each class session, I provided snacks for students and the teacher. At the completion of the school year, I had attended each class period 78 times.

As a part of classroom observations, I observed class discussions that unearthed student and educator perceptions of the classroom space and identified salient pedagogical practices and student-student and teacher-student interactions. Still, as a Black woman in an all-Black female space, I also participated in class discussions as a member of the space, and assisted students and the teacher in various group and individual activities. My participation was at once necessary as a component of adhering to the norms of the discussion based classroom space, and also, desired as a Black woman in community with Black girls and another Black woman.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Observation and participant observation allowed me to observe this exclusively Black girl/woman space in action and also informed the interview protocol and follow-up prompts. All participants were invited to participate in the interviews, contingent upon their submission of the parental or adult consent forms. All students who turned in the consent forms and were present during the scheduled interview days were interviewed. This resulted in a sample of ten student interviews and one interview with the instructor after the school year concluded.

For both student and instructor interviews, I utilized semi-structured interview questions, and open-ended questions (Moustakas, 1994) when necessary. During all interviews, I leveraged my positionality as a participant observer in the space to both enhance the experiential foundation from which I generated questions, and also, to encourage interviewees to be more comfortable throughout the process. Further, in my questioning, I moved in and out of Black English[7] as I desired, or as I deemed necessary for articulating a question in a way that didn't translate to standard English the same, or for increasing the comfort level of an interviewee. All interviews were audiorecorded and later transcribed in totality.

While my formal interview with the instructor took place toward the end of the school year in her classroom, I also conducted numerous informal "check-ins" with her throughout the year, during which she would share information about the course, the students, the school etc. I say that to signal the ways the instructor's interview in the larger sense, was a combination of her formal interview and these more casual check ins. Interview questions centered on understanding the frames, philosophies and/or theories

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[7] For an explication of Black English, see for example, Jordan, 1988

that guided Ms. C's pedagogy, the way she perceived the space, and the school more broadly. Our interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours.

Student interviews were conducted in an empty room within the school and took place during students' class period. Interview questions centered on how students perceived the space, and the school more broadly. Interviews were generally approximately one hour in length. At times, slight variation in questions resulted from interactions/incidents captured in the fieldnotes that were student-specific.

**Analytic Approach**

All interview and observational (fieldnotes, audio recordings) data were interpreted qualitatively. I independently open coded the transcripts (for both formal interviews and audio recorded class sessions) and fieldnotes (Emerson et al. 1995; Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1997). All data were then iteratively coded and analyzed using the software HyperRESEARCH. Subsequent rounds served to create a final set of codes, and to develop sub-codes as particularly salient perspectives became apparent. In engaging in this process, I attended to both the discourse and the explicit verbal exchanges, but also to the implicit meanings, seeming norms, and subtle modes of communication.

**Transcribing.** The participants in this study most commonly spoke Black English and in transcribing their words, I do my best to represent their speech phonetically. I deliberately chose not to attempt to "standardize" their speech because I wanted to represent their words exactly as they spoke them. This decision was at once political and practical. Politically, opting to change one's speech to what is deemed "correct" or "proper" may invalidate one's linguistic choices and speech patterns as inherently wrong. Further, in exploring ideas of Black space in education, "standardizing" participants' language choices effectively erases Black English as an integral component of the space. Practically, in attempting to "translate" Black English to Standard English, I may have inadvertently changed the meaning of a sentence, or lost important subtext behind a respondent's words. For example, if someone said, "Yo hair is fly," that is how it appears on paper; I did not change the sentence to, "*Your* hair is *very nice*" or even "*your* hair is fly." Where I deem it necessary, I have included footnotes that define slang words, and explain the way particular verbs are used in Black English (the "to be" verb for example). I define these words and grammatical rules based on my own understanding of them as a Black woman who often speaks Black English with friends and family. That said, it is possible that there are other definitions for certain words, or other ways of interpreting particular verb usage. Absent a collectively constructed (and approved) Black English dictionary, a reader may interpret a phrase differently than I have. Likewise, where I attempt to represent respondents' speech phonetically, there is no "correct" spelling. For example, when students use a phrase that indicates "I'm going to," I write the word phonetically as "Imma" whereas someone else may write the word as, "I'm uh" for example. These words are footnoted in each chapter, and also included in the table below.

Transcribing respondents' words exactly as they spoke them also necessitates documenting thinking words such as "umm" or "uh." Where respondents pause in their

speech, I include the word, "pause" in brackets. In instances of longer pauses, I use the phrase "long pause" in brackets. If there was laughter before or after a sentence, I include the word, "laughter" in brackets. Where a respondent spoke in interrupted sentences, I represent the break with a dash (i.e. "I went – no I was going to the store"). In instances where a participant elevated their voice, I include the word "elevated voice" in brackets. I may also capitalize all letters to indicate increased volume. Likewise, excerpts from field notes are always italicized. In instances where I share a perception that moves beyond documenting an occurrence, that reflection is bracketed. For example, *Ms. C continuously fidgets with her shirt [she seems uncomfortable with the sleeves]*. Finally, the words, "Black" and "African American" are used synonymously; while I identify as "Black" and not "African American," many of the respondents used the word, "African American" when talking about themselves or other Black people in the U.S. Further, many of the scholars whose work I build on here, also utilize the term African American for themselves and for Black people in the U.S. context more broadly. Hence, I capitalize "Black" when referencing Black people in the same way I capitalize "African American."

Table 1

*A Transcription Glossary*

| Symbol/Word | Description or Definition |
| --- | --- |
| — | Interruption, including self-interruption |
| ALL CAPS | Elevation in voice |
| [xxxx] | Pauses, laughter, etc. |
| Mm hmm | Indicates "yes," or an affirmative reply |
| Mm-mm | Indicates "no," or a negative reply |
| Uh-huh | Indicates "yes," or an affirmative reply |
| Nuh-uh | Indicates "no," or a negative reply |
| " " | Reading aloud |
| ' ' | Someone recounting something someone else said |

Table 2

*A Black English and Slang Glossary*

| Black English or Slang Word | Standard English Definition |
| --- | --- |
| Aight (pronounced like ahhh-ight) | Alright |
| Betta | Better |
| Bootsy | "Whack" or "uncool" or something that makes one |

| | look undeserving of respect |
|---|---|
| Bruh | Does not directly translate to "brother" as it is used towards girls as well. It is used as a way to refer to someone else or as a way to accent something you're saying similarly to "you know what I'm saying?" |
| Cuz | Because |
| Dead ass serious | Very serious – as serious as one can be |
| Emotionals | Emotions |
| Eva | Ever |
| Fa sho or fasho | For sure or most definitely |
| Feelin some type of way | Generally indicates strong feelings toward something – often negative feelings |
| Finna | About to (for example, "he finna graduate" = "he's about to graduate") |
| Funkin | To have a problem with someone – to be in some form of ongoing feud |
| Gon | Going to (as in "you gon get in trouble") |
| Gone go | Will be great (for example, my poem gone go!) |
| Gonna | Going to |
| Gotta | Have to or have (as in "she don't gotta be here" or "I gotta job") |
| Hate on or hating on | To attribute negative feelings towards someone or something in particular – usually because you're jealous or envious in some way. |
| Hecka | Cleaner version of "hella" – meaning, "a lot" or "very" |
| Hella | A lot of |
| Homegirl | A way to refer to another girl, sometimes one's friend (as in, "that's my homegirl") |
| Hot ass mess | A really big or serious mess |
| I'm not trippin | "I'm not bothered by it" or "I'm good" or "Whatever" |
| I'on | I don't |
| Imma | I'm going to |
| Keeping it 100 | Keeping it real or being honest and straightforward |
| Kinda | Kind of |
| Lemme | Let me |
| My day one | Someone one has been close to for a long period of time – someone one grew up with. |
| Nah or Naw | Most simply, "no." Can also indicate a change of direction in conversation (i.e. "nah, let me stop talking about that…") |
| Outta | Out of ("you're going to run outta chances") |
| Ratchet | Ratchet is used in the same derogatory way "ghetto" is. It normally refers to a (Black) girl who behaves in |

| | ways people associate with ghetto behavior |
|---|---|
| Shit on him | Shot him down in some way – made him feel low |
| Sho | Sure (as in "You sho did!") |
| Smash on someone | To smash on someone is to tell them off or let them know something in a very authoritative way |
| Thirsty | Someone who craves sexual or romantic attention and appears desperate |
| Throw it back | Repeat what you said |
| Tryna | Trying to |
| Turn up | Party heavily; can also be used as a noun to mean a big party |
| Wanna | Want to |
| Woomp woomp woomp | Etc. etc. or so on and so forth |
| You got that good good | You are particularly good in bed |

## Setting and Context

In this section, I discuss the way the course was organized, the neighborhood in which the site was located, the site itself, and the classroom specifically. While the Manhood Development Program was a formal district initiative, the woman's studies class was an anomaly. Ms. C, the course instructor, was asked to create a space for Black girls as a result of increasing disciplinary incidents involving Black girls. While Ms. C was initially hesitant, fearing she could not count on the administration for the support she needed, in the end she agreed to teach the course every day – one class during fifth period and one during sixth period.

The course was presented to Black girls (grades 9-12) as a "women's studies" class (for which they would receive elective credit), and girls were encouraged, but not required to participate. The course's curriculum was designed to address student needs across a variety of domains – physical, emotional, academic, and social. It was aimed at encouraging students to learn more about themselves, their cultural and racial history, and their communities with the goal of helping them think more expansively about Black girlhood. Class activities centered around discussions of contemporary issues, critical analysis of popular media like songs and movies, discussion about race, gender, sex and sexuality, complexion, hair, security guards, police, sexual harassment, love and relationships and so forth. Finally, many classes centered on the needs of the girls in the class on that particular day, and curriculum was always fluid when and where necessary.

As a result of administrative turnover, the principal who asked Ms. C to develop the course, was no longer at the school as the fall approached. Fearing even less structural support, Ms. C limited the course to 10 students per period (or 20 students total). While each class was initially full, by the end of the first semester, there were 12 students remaining. Those 12 students remained in the course for the entirety of the second semester. Importantly, of the 8 girls who dropped the course, 7 did so as a result of no longer being a student in the larger school. Two of the students moved out of the city altogether citing safety concerns. The one student who remained in the school but not in

the course, dropped the course very early on. After stealing from multiple girls in the space, and also sharing confidential information with students outside of the class, she may have felt unwelcomed (by the other girls) to return.

The girls in this study (like the school, city etc.) are identified using pseudonyms to protect their identity. All twelve remaining girls identified as Black or African American, and all identified with the "she pronoun." The girls ranged in their complexions and sizes, from particularly thin to extremely overweight – from a deep dark chocolate to a lighter caramel. Girls also varied in their hairstyles; the majority of the time most girls wore wigs or weaves, although a few girls would sometimes have their hair braided (with extensions), or straightened without any extensions or weave. The bulk of students were in the 11$^{th}$ and 12$^{th}$ grades, with one freshman student, and one sophomore student. Although I did not ask explicitly, circumstantial evidence intimated that all students were living well below the poverty line. The girls are identified here as Nakia, Shaunté, Laquita, Daronda, Tanesha, LaShanda, Timone, Ebony, Charisse, Ashani, Dalesha, and Kenosha. A younger woman in her early 20s, Janine, also frequented the space; she served as a mentor for some of the Black girls in the class and other Black girls in the larger school.

**Ms. C.** Ms. C was a petite Black woman with a caramel complexion and an infectious smile. She would often dress in clothes that signaled her connection to youth culture, mixing in her own Afrocentric flare. She had also begun the process of locking her hair (developing dreadlocks); interestingly, as opposed to cutting her hair and beginning with short twists (as many people do), she decided to begin the process with her shoulder length, curly (but not quite kinky) hair. I signal this only because for many months, it was unclear what she was doing with her hair; this became a reoccurring point of conversation between Ms. C and the girls in the class. The general consensus was that she was "ruining" her hair and should cease with the dreadlocks business immediately! She would sometimes wrap her hair in a headwrap or pull it back into a ponytail. She had a few different pairs of glasses, each one with its own quirky shape or pattern. Her nose was pierced with a small gold hoop and she often wore large, dramatic earrings. Overall, she presented as a healthy mix of Afrocentric, urban, and quirky.

Ms. C was in graduate school at the time, completing her masters in women's spirituality, a program that combined gender/women's studies, ethnic studies, philosophy, social justice, and spirituality. Prior to her role as the instructor for the women's studies course, she was an English teacher at Jefferson High School for one year. Prior to that, she taught English/literature for seven years at two other public high schools in the Bay Area. Ms. C took extreme pride in being a teacher and she understood the work she did with students as necessarily always extending beyond the classroom. Still, she was always in her classroom long before I arrived, and she always left hours after the bell rang.

**The city**. Each time I visit Jefferson High School, as I exit the freeway, I am immediately aware that of my surroundings. As I descend the few blocks down the hill, I notice the usual markers of a low-income, racially segregated neighborhood. As I capture the images in my mind, I can't help but already feel trite as I envision writing down my thoughts. Imagining my surroundings as that scene from a movie where the actors find

themselves in the "hood," all of the props are there. Run down liquor store, check. Older homeless man sitting on curb, check. Graffiti, check. School-aged children hanging out in front of aforementioned liquor store, check. Still, I write.

There are no trees that line the block and this has the effect of highlighting the gray of the concrete, making the surroundings look like a perpetually cloudy day.

As I sit at the stoplight waiting to make the right turn onto the street where the school is located, I notice an empty lot. The lot is closed off by a black metal fence. The buildings that enclose the lot have various graffiti spray painted across them. Some portions of the walls have been painted over white and re-graffiti'd .To my left there is a drive in liquor store with one of those "we buy houses" billboards protruding from its rooftop. In front of me there is a diner with a beautiful plum awning. The outside of this building is painted with a colorful mural with two brown hands holding the word, "respect."

As I make the right turn and continue to drive, there is another liquor store, a Baptist church, a mini mart, an auto shop and various apartment buildings with graffitied walls surrounded by black steel fences. There is what may be a hairshop – a tiny turquoise building with the phrase, "OMG who did your hair" spray-painted on the outside. There is a barbershop advertising tapers, fades, razor, and a word I can't make out because most of it has peeled off. Every building has either a steel fence to enclose it, metal bars on the windows, or both. The bars range from gray to black.

**The school site**. The school itself is a two-story building painted a pale yellow and orange separated by rows of gray windows in between. The purple doors feel out of place although they are complimented by the purple trash can at the entrance. There is a huge green lawn in front of the school and a few perfectly manicured bushes in a dirt patch lining the walkway. Two of these bushes are in the shape of a spiral staircase. There are a few other scattered planted bushes lining the long length of the school. There is normally at least one police car parked in front of the school.

As you enter the school, there is always a security guard in front. The doors are sometimes locked and in these cases, you have to knock to gain entrance. One security guard, Tammy, is the person I see most often when I come to the school. She is about 5' 3" with a stalky build. She is brown-skinned with a noticeable moustache. She normally has her hair slicked down in what we used to call finger waves, or she has a long pony tail weave. Sometimes she smiles slightly, most times she hands me the sign in sheet without saying a word. Every now and then I see other Black male security guards at the front instead of Tammy. They do not ask me to sign in. They open the door, say hello and allow me to head to my classroom.

The students seem to be a good mix of Black, Latino, and Polynesian[8]. Students are generally congregated in racially segregated groups. A normal passing period consists of students talking, laughing, rough housing, and capping on one another. I often see boys walking with their arm around a girl trying to "spit game."[9] This feels like it's mostly

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[8] Jefferson High is in fact, 51.5% Latin@, 40% Black, 6% Polynesian, 1.5% Asian, 0.5% white, and 0.5% mixed race.

[9] "Spit game" = Converse, in the hopes of future interactions.

done in jest – something they do just to do it. Then there are the boys who comment on various things girls are wearing. For example, a boy may tell a girl "all that ass, damn!" Girls' responses seem to range from laughing it off to being annoyed that they are the focus of said boy's attention.

There are pictures of previous students who have graduated above the office door decorated with festive purple construction paper. They all appear to be Latina females.

**The classroom.** Stepping into Ms. C's classroom feels like stepping into another world. Her room has windows lining an entire wall and there is a lot of natural light that gives the space a bright and airy feel. Throughout the classroom, the walls were covered with appeared to be a deep purple wallpaper. Directly above the wallpaper, a 2 inch strip of Kente cloth borders the entire room. Pink butterflies seemed to be scattered about the walls, filling empty space or framing various pictures and art pieces hung around the room. There were four green potted plants in the room – one on every side. Two were smaller table-top plants and two were larger floor plants. The wall hangings ranged from flyers about events such as an upcoming women of color conference, or a Black family summit, to pictures of various Black women such as Dorothy Dandridge, Lauryn Hill, or Assata Shakur. There were also numerous collages the girls created that featured images of Black women from magazines and various pasted together positive words or phrases such as "Black women are beautiful" or "succeed," "power," "love" etc. On one side of the room toward the back, there was an alter featuring a picture of Ms. C's deceased mother, some candles, one of the potted plants, and a few small African figurines. In the corner of the room, there were a number of colorful yoga mats; at times, Ms. C led the girls through a variety of yoga poses to begin the day. Directly above, there was an old fashioned television connected to the wall that was never used. On this same side of the classroom, there was a large bookshelf with sets of books that were presumably for the class such as Assata, an Autobiography. None of these books were used.

The front of the classroom featured a large white board on which Ms. C always wrote (in impeccable cursive) a question or quote students were required to complete a short journal entry to. Additionally, she would write the date, any assigned homework, and the agenda for the day. To the left of this, students would sometimes write little notes to Ms. C such as "I love Ms. C, love Tanesha." Eventually, this portion of the board turned into an RIP wall, where students would write RIP and the name of various people in their lives that had been recently murdered. As the list grew, the class turned this into a tree. The tree featured a tree trunk that bled into a few roots, and leaves. On the trunk/roots, the words included, "missing parents, inner pain, oppression, abuse, guns, sexual assault, hopelessness, fear, high schools, animosity, gangs, and drugs." The leaves then featured R.I.Ps for numerous people murdered that year. Interspersed between the leaves were words like "hope, college, home, justice, married, and life." The word "succeed" was featured at the top of the tree.

To the right of the whiteboard, the "Sister's Code" was featured on pieces of white paper, taped to lime green construction paper, and encased in sheet protectors. Each paper was framed by pink, purple, yellow, blue, or orange butterflies. There were six aspects of the code that the students and Ms. C created together. The code read as follows:

1. We respect, love, and care for each other as **sisters** would. We keep our conversations confidential and don't spread gossip from this class. We listen to each other when we speak.
2. We understand that our struggles are connected, but our people are (the next line is whited out) conflict and come together. We stand in **solidarity**, making connections to sisters of other races and backgrounds.
3. We are growing and changing, all the time, inside and out. WE make the commitment to change for the better. We understand that when we **transform**, our families and communities transform too.
4. We take the time out to focus on the positive and **encourage** one another through our struggles.
5. We don't quietly accept our oppression. We stand up for ourselves and for each other. We challenge ourselves, and those around us, to **resist** all the things that hold us down.
6. We put our education first and do our best. We know that no one can save us but ourselves. We look for jobs, we work hard in school, we prepare for college, and we NEVER GIVE UP on our path to **succeeding**!

The acronym for S.I.S.T.E.R.S. from this code became the basis for a class t-shirt that read: "Sisters in solidarity transforming, encouraging, resisting, succeeding."

The back of the classroom featured an additional whiteboard with five columns, one for each day of the week. Every field was always filled in so that students had a sense of what the week would look like. In the middle of the whiteboard, there was the famous black and white mugshot of Rosa Parks, centered on a sheet of hot pink construction paper. On the desk beneath the white board, there were two older model Dell computers that students sometimes used when working on class projects. To the left of this, there was another desk with an additional two computers that I never saw any students use. I am not sure whether they were functional or not.

# Ms. C on Teaching

In this chapter, I take up research question #1: How does this Black woman educator in this purposefully constructed all-Black female space perceive the space? How does she understand the work she does? What frames, philosophies, or theories guide her pedagogy? What pedagogical tools does she employ in this space? In the first section of this chapter, I give voice to Ms. C by exploring how she understands and articulates her racialized and gendered work with Black girls. I wish to highlight both Ms. C's teaching philosophies, and also, the ways these philosophies inform and "show up" in her pedagogy. In the first section, I attend to four specific philosophies: *Reimagining, becoming, reciprocity*, and *struggle*. In the second section of this chapter, I examine Ms. C's pedagogy and the pedagogical tools she employs in this space. The six aspects of Ms. C's pedagogy I discuss in this chapter are: 1. *Alternative disciplinary methods, 2. Playfulness, 3. No put downs & active put ups, 4. Reciprocity & diminished hierarchy, 5. Love and expression, and 6. In-house conflict resolution.*

## Teaching Philosophies

In exploring the frames, philosophies, or theories that guide Ms. C's pedagogy, I highlight critical aspects of the ways she frames her Black girl students, the job of teaching and working with them, and the ways she describes and conceptualizes her teaching practices. By describing Ms. C's commitments, values, and philosophies, I explore the ways that reimagining, becoming, reciprocity, and struggle, are part and parcel of her approach to working with her students. In line with the first framing idea for Black educational sovereign spaces, exploring the "sovereign" in these spaces, I examine the ways in which Ms. C's philosophies and pedagogy exists in the margin, and functions to mark the space as its own entity outside of, and generally in opposition to, the larger school. In line with the second framing idea, I examine the ways that Ms. C's philosophies and pedagogy engages in struggling, reimagining, and becoming, and commits to the painful process of reimagining blackness.

In order to conceptualize what it means to reimagine oneself, I examine the myriad of ways Ms. C employed a politics of refusal of societal narratives of Black girls, and her fierce commitment to modeling and making space for, new and differentiated Black girl identities. Following, to consider what it means to "become" in Black space, I explore the ways in which Ms. C approached her work with an explicit recognition of antiblackness and racialized patriarchy and recognized this space as revolutionary antidote to the rampant anti-blackness prevalent in our nation's urban schools, or what bell hooks (1990) would call a "radical site of possibility." I then explore her philosophy of reciprocity, and the ways the space necessitated a shift in her positionality, and demanded an obliteration of a normalized teacher-student hierarchical relationship. Importantly, I also signal here the ways her positionality was necessarily *with* her students and *against* the administration. Finally, to understand the ways in which the production of Black space necessarily involves struggle, I explore the ways Ms. C

articulates her own struggles within the space, and also, how she required everyone in the course to accept struggle as a necessary and ongoing component of the space.

      **Reimagining.** The process of reimagining, necessarily begins with employing a politics of refusal against racialized narratives that constrict Black girlhood within the "single story" (Adichie, 2009) of the Jezebel, hypermasculine, unsophisticated, angry, defiant, disruptive, loud (and so forth) Black girl. Ms. C was clearly aware of the antiblackness Black girls face and she discussed it as a critical component of her raison d'etre as an adult Black woman in the space. When I asked Ms. C, "So what were you trying to create with this class," she responded,

> Hmmm [pause]. I wanted a space where I could kind of give them an opportunity to show up in a different way than maybe how they were showing up in other classes throughout the day or even as how they saw themselves. Because before this class, one of the things I noticed as a teacher that um really stood out to me was how those moments when young people, it was like an a-ha moment, you know when they see themselves in a different way. And, you know, as soon as that reflection happens and there's people around to witness it, it's almost like they change in that moment. It's like transformation…all of my aspirations boiled down to that one thing, just a space where they could show up differently and be reflected differently, as a space to open up freedom and say, 'well Who am I? And am I this narrow sliver society has shown me, and a lot of time people around me have shown me?'

Ms. C is critically concerned with making space for the transformative possibilities each student comes to class with. When students are able to "show up differently," within that, alternative identities become available. Further, when students "try on" different identities, and they are "reflected" back, these moments confirm that one's choice is accepted – at least within this space.

      When I asked Ms. C to elaborate what she meant by "narrow sliver," she continues,

> Umm, I meant that really literally because I'm incorporating everything into that. I mean media representations, I mean um, even literature that they're exposed to in school, that they read. Um, out of the, there are very few black authors or black arts that are presented in the schools, and out of that, it's just focused usually on slavery and abolition, and there just isn't the full range of the black experience that they're exposed to. And I could go on and on about how narrow that sliver is to me, in terms of what is reflected about who they are and who they could be.

What Ms. C is articulating is that Black girls are both denied access to a wealth of information about themselves, while simultaneously being exposed to media or literary representations of themselves that reinforce dominant racialized narratives that disparage

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who they are. As an example, Ms. C notes, "I feel like woman that aren't black are allowed to be soft and weak, and that's how they're seen, but black women are not, we always have to be the rock. We always, you know, that's a limitation that not only society puts on us, but a limitation that we also put on ourselves." Here Ms. C articulates the ways Black women aren't allowed entry into womanhood – a spatial sanctuary reserved exclusively for non-Black women. Further, she articulates both what society precludes Black women from doing, and also, what we then in turn, take on ourselves. One of her philosophies then, is deliberately modeling Black womanhood in ways that reshape and reimagine the possibilities for alternative forms of blackness.

While Ms. C explicitly acknowledges the discursive violence Black girls experience in society and in schools, she also signals the significance of modeling expansive ways of being that may allow the girls in her class to re-envision the kinds of behaviors deemed acceptable and even desired. In discussing the deliberacy with which she engaged in various behaviors, she notes,

> And a lot of times they bucked against me, but I see the progress, even though they couldn't verbally say, 'I see you, I get why we're doing this.' I mean, it was often uncomfortable for them to be with emotion, or for me to bring it up, like yeah Imma[10] be emotional right now, I don't care. Yeah you're gonna[11] look at me and see these tears because these are the same tears that you would like to cry if you could, and I want to model that for you.

Here Ms. C is explicit in her desire to model an expansive sense of sharing and showing emotion for the Black girls in her class. Harkening back to her previous statement signaling the ways Black girls often exist in tension with hegemonic notions of girlhood or womanhood, Ms. C ensures that she models comfort with emoting as a Black woman. Also implicit in her statement is the idea that while Black girls are prevented from participating in the full aspects of their potential selves, she perceives their desire to understand ideas of girlhood generally preserved for girls and women racialized as non-Black. By declaring her desire to "model" for the students, Ms. C articulates both an understanding that her students want more, and also, her commitment to ensuring she becomes a part of the possibility. She notes, "I wanted them to see me as a black woman who shares some of their struggles and this is how I navigated it. You might chose to navigate it differently, but you should see different models of that." Here, Ms. C leverages her shared racial and gender identity to facilitate students' awareness of different modes of navigating common struggles. Importantly though, Ms. C makes space for the students to take a different approach. In other words, the aim of modeling here is not to encourage students to copy her behavior; rather, it is about helping students become aware of alternative modes of being; it is about guiding students toward an understanding of self that is more expansive than that "little sliver." This is particularly

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[10] Imma = I'm going to
[11] Gonna = going to

significant when considering a politics of respectability that can manifest in Black role modeling. Rather than saying you could be *this* kind of Black girl, Ms. C is helping students understand that there are infinite possibilities for who one can choose to be.

**Becoming.** Recognizing the egregiousness of antiblackness becomes a prerequisite for understanding why these spaces are so significant for Black students. Moving beyond what she hoped to help students push back against within the space, Ms. C also articulates the magnitude of Black educational sovereign spaces themselves. She notes, "I really believe strongly in having our own spaces and I think that it's really important to have a space for folks who identify as such and can just be them…I believe in the concept whole-heartedly." A part of "just being them" entails the creation of a space where Black girls can hash out what it means to be themselves in an anti-black, patriarchal society. For example, Ms. C recalled a previous mixed-race English class where the text prompted a dark-skinned Black girl to discuss her experience as a dark-skinned girl and how she felt like she was treated as a result. As one of only two Black girls in the class, Ms. C lamented the girl's story "falling flat" within that space because "the space couldn't really hold it." She continues, "and so in this kind of group you can go there and we did. We had days where we just talked about skin tone and complexion and it was beautiful because I know you can't do that." Implicit in Ms. C's recognition that Black girls "can't do that," is the understanding that this is likely the only space where these kinds of conversations can happen and not "fall flat." Ms. C continues, "So the monoracial space brings up an intensity, but at the same time though, I feel like it has to happen. So I felt like there's some things that girls can get here that they couldn't get in a mixed race space. There were some things that we would never talk about, ever, even if other people were bringing it up." For Black girls attempting to navigate a school, and a broader society where they may represent the antithesis of an aesthetic norm, openly discussing the aspects of yourself that mark you unattractive or undesirable, can be particularly traumatic. This is especially true for Black girls, as girls and women are more likely to be valued (or not) based on their physical appearance. Yet, in this course, a part of creating Black girl space was the ability to engage in difficult but critical conversations about how we navigate existing as ourselves in hostile environments.

Still, the focus of most race-specific projects tends to be on Black boys. Even on a national level, programs like the My Brother's Keeper initiative of the Obama administration, aims to address the opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color. While this work is a critical component of supporting a broader agenda of educational equity, it can also inadvertently obfuscate the egregiousness of the racialized experiences Black girls have in school. Ms. C notes,

> All black girls deserve it. It shouldn't be like an extra thing or they get it and then they don't. I had girls coming and begging me, 'can I be in your class, can I be in your class?' And it just wasn't space or opportunity, it was such a continuous thing. So I feel like there was a high demand, like it wasn't just these girls. Like they hear us from outside or they see what we were doing and there was such a high interest. 'What are you doing? What are you guys doing?' From all the girls. So I feel like there was such a

high need and I really feel like they deserve it, and I feel like um the fact that um the African American Male Achievement is so focused on the males is really missing, they're missing a lot when they do that, with what's happening with Black girls, and I think it's problematic that they're only framing it that way…I'm a little disappointed and irritated that people are not talking about Black girls

Ms. C's work aims to resist the narrative that Black girls are alright (Crenshaw et al, 2015) and ensure that they have access to the kinds of resources that will facilitate a healthy and expansive identity development. While acknowledging that work with Black boys is also critical, Ms. C notes that these kinds of spaces should be available to Black girls as well; she notes that like the Manhood Development Classes, they should be offered consistently and organized in such a way that more students may have the opportunity to participate.

**Reciprocity.** In order to actualize this work however, Ms. C also held reciprocity as a necessary philosophy in her classroom. Having been a classroom teacher for 8 years prior to serving as the instructor for this women's studies course, Ms. C describes how her role within this space necessarily shifted.

My role in this class is more like mentor. I stepped down from that; I'm more used to being like the teacher, that held the space, and I felt like I kinda[12] had to step down from that kinda soapbox and just, you know, be with them, but that kind of meant I had less power in some ways to say, no, zero tolerance, you can't use that [language] in here. Because the tradeoff was seeing them more fully for who they were.

This space, as opposed to one of her regular classrooms, had a different kind of aim. Supporting students in the development of a radical Black subjectivity, required Ms. C to "step down" and diminish the power dynamic generally present between teacher and student. A part of this process involved disassociating with the larger school and administration and positioning herself *with* her students *against* potentially antagonistic forces. In other words, where students often found themselves in troubling relationships with their teachers and the school administration, Ms. C acted as an ally and an advocate in helping them to navigate other adult interactions.

This also applied to one aspect of the sister code, which reinforced the importance of the confidentiality of the space. In positioning herself with her students, confidentiality for her, also meant refraining from sharing information about her students with the administration. This necessarily affected her approach to discipline where she refused to send any student to interact with any member of the administration for any reason. In short, while she facilitated the space, she also reinforced to her students that what they were creating was something special. What happened in Black space, stayed in Black space.

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[12] Kinda = Kind of

Later in this chapter, I discuss in depth, the ways that Ms. C's philosophy of reciprocity unfolded in her pedagogy. Still, I want to signal that Ms. C extended this reciprocal relationship in all aspects of the way she approached her class. She actively participated in every class activity including check-ins and check-outs, emotional sharing, journaling, giving and receiving what she called "critical feedback," and so forth.

**Struggling.** Still, Ms. C's commitment to creating and maintaining a reciprocal space came with its challenges. "Stepping down" from that teacher role necessitated relinquishing some of the authority that accompanied her previous role as a traditional teacher. Hence, insofar as I have explored Ms. C's political clarity around the kinds of challenges her students face, and examined a small sampling of the ways the space is significant in the process of reimagining, I refuse to romanticize this work. While I discuss many of the challenges of the space in the next chapter, I wish to signal here, Ms. C's acceptance of struggle and her insistence that her students struggle with her, with each other, with the school, and with society more broadly.

On numerous occasions, during periodic check-ins and also throughout our final interview, Ms. C lamented how emotionally exhausting engaging in this work was. During our final interview, I asked Ms. C what she thought the most difficult moment of the course was. She began, "Umm [pause] the most difficult moment was first, all the conflicts. I'm not completely conflict avoiding. Like I can handle my own, and even if I'm not feeling great, I can be like 'ok, this is how I feel, this is how you feel, let's talk about it', but it was all at once. There were times when I didn't even want to come up here, like who's fighting today?" While the work of facilitating students' reimagining of Black girl identity can be beautiful, a preliminary step in this space became navigating the initial feelings Black girls had toward one another – both within the space and in general. Ms. C noted there were times she felt like, "I can't do this, I can't fix this. Part of it is patience, part of it is knowing that it'll blow over in time, as they realize sitting next to a black girl is not the end to the world." While Ms. C sometimes felt completely overwhelmed by the space and the work itself, she was also willing to work through it and be patient in the process of working through whatever conflict arose. Implicit in her patience, was the idea that if you recognized the egregiousness of antiblackness, you understand that the path toward resisting anti-Black narratives is paved with the blood, sweat, and tears of those who walk it.

Hence, with struggle, also came a fierce determination to always resolve conflicts. An important aspect of Ms. C's philosophy of struggle then, was the idea that everyone in the space would work together to resolve any conflicts that arose.

> If there's a conflict, we come back to it. We don't just move on. I felt like that was a really significant thing that became engrained where girls would be like 'No we need to talk. We need to have a mediation.' You know, because I realized how is this going to work out? Because I'm stepping out of the teacher role, so there's going to be shit that needs to be addressed. Like things they need to be accountable for, but my role is different, how do I navigate this. Like ok, there's going to be mistakes, it shouldn't be like you can't make a mistake, but what happens when you

do? What's a loving way to hold that and how do we all do it? Not just me, and trying to teach them that or some concept of that. Because there's so much of just 'Fuck her' and what not going on. And then maybe a few months or weeks later you two end up talking but you never talk about what happened. So it's just lying under the surface going dormant. So it's a lot of really toxic emotional energies and toxic ways of dealing with conflict. So that was an intentional thing and what I brought in was facing conflict head on, like within the second week of school, we talked about conflict.

Ms. C recognizes that stepping outside of her teacher role means that the dynamics of the space will be different from a traditional classroom. While the need to hold everyone accountable remains, the way in which that happens must be different. Approaching the course with the philosophy that conflict must always be addressed, became a way to ensure the socio-emotional health of the space. She notes there must be room to make mistakes, but there also has to be a loving way to struggle through those mistakes and emerge from conflict better than you were before. As opposed to just her "trying to teach them" these concepts, Ms. C highlights the significance of the class' participation in mediating any conflicts that arise. If the students themselves (as they did) begin to insist on resolution to any issues that crop up, they necessarily move beyond a "fuck her" paradigm. This became a critical component of the shifting relational aspects of the way the space developed and of Black girls' ability to see one another in increasingly humanizing ways.

**Pedagogy**

While examining Ms. C's frames, philosophies, and theories are particularly significant in understanding the ways she perceives the space and her work within it, I now turn to an exploration of her pedagogy and the pedagogical tools she utilized within the classroom. However, before I analyze Ms. C's pedagogy, I present a vignette (excerpted from an audio recorded and transcribed class period) to capture how five of the six aspects of Ms. C's pedagogy "show up" in actual classroom interactions, and to better understand how her teaching philosophies informed her pedagogy. Again, the six aspects of Ms. C's pedagogy I discuss in this section are: 1. *Alternative disciplinary methods, 2. Playfulness, 3. No put downs & active put ups, 4. Reciprocity & diminished hierarchy, 5. Love and expression, and 6. In-house conflict resolution.* Similarly to the frames and philosophies Ms. C drew on in the co-creation of the space, the pedagogical tools Ms. C employs reinforce her belief in the significance of the sovereignty of the space. Her resolve to utilize alternative disciplinary methods, reciprocity and diminished hierarchy, and in-house conflict resolution, all signal the ways Ms. C demanded a necessary separation between this Black girl space and the larger school and society more broadly. Further, her attention to playfulness, her rejection of Black girl put downs (and insistence on Black girl put ups), and her attention to love and expression, were a critical

component of working with Black girls to develop a politics of refusal, and engage in the arduous process of reimagining and in the political act of Black dreaming.

The vignette I begin with is part of a class mediation to address a theft in the class. Ms. C's cell phone was stolen by LaShanda, one of the girls in the class. Although the students were unaware of this, prior to this mediation, Ms. C had engaged in a conversation with LaShanda and her mother about what LaShanda had done and what her consequences would be. Ms. C recalls the events that preempted the larger mediation.

> The school reacted, hella[13] abusive, they had her in handcuffs. I thought I was going to have to defend her myself. Like you stole my fucking phone but I have to defend you from security. It was a hot ass mess[14]. It was so traumatic kihana. Her mom came up to the school and was spilling out all of her guts and I'm like this is your baby's story. This happened to her and you're hurt and overwhelmed and you don't know what to do, but don't tell the whole school she got raped. That's going to make things worse. It was like, I'm holding the mom, the mom's crying on my shoulder. It was crazy...totally and completely crazy

Here Ms. C finds herself navigating a situation where one of her students has stolen from her and she is necessarily upset. Still, because the administration learns of what has happened, Ms. C has to reposition herself in defense of LaShanda. Further, as LaShanda's mother shares some traumatic details of LaShanda's personal life, Ms. C also occupies the role of confidant and emotional support person for LaShanda's mother. Without knowing any of this, the other girls in the class want LaShanda kicked out. Ms. C has scheduled a mediation, where everyone in the space (including LaShanda), can speak her piece. Ms. C has also invited Sista Latifah, a Black woman counselor in the larger school, to participate. I share this excerpt at length as it highlights to complex and nuanced ways in which Ms. C and the Black girls in her class, negotiate what Black girl space means for them, the collectively constructed sovereign rules of the space, and what it means to break them.

| 1 | Laquita: | My thing is, why go into class that's like that - we all just - |
| 2 | | we share we talk about every and anything so why go in a |
| 3 | | class that we gon – |
| 4 | Tanesha: | It took me time to share to everybody in this class |
| 5 | Laquita: | Exactly! |
| 6 | Tanesha | It take anybody time to share |
| 7 | Laquita: | I didn't know anybody in here like that but I opened up to |
| 8 | | y'all so it's showing respect is I love y'all and I didn't even |
| 9 | | know y'all. I knew Ms. C over the summer I didn't really |
| 10 | | know her I told her stuff I ain't told nobody else before. So |

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[13] Hella = A lot of
[14] Hot ass mess = A really big or serious mess

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 11 | | it's showing that I love her and I respect her so it's just like |
| 12 | | why go in a class if you not gon[15] say nothin'? You not gon |
| 13 | | speak - it's a door right there you can walk out and leave. |
| 14 | Tanesha: | This class is optional - you said that day one |
| 15 | Laquita: | It is! Thank you. It is. You can change it. You gotta free sixth |
| 16 | | period. |
| 17 | Nakia: | You got the option to leave. |
| 28 | Ms. C: | I would like to umm – can I say umm – so I hear what you |
| 29 | | guys are saying. I mean it's true right. It's real. It's not – |
| 30 | Laquita: | She don't gotta[16] be here. |
| 31 | Ms. C: | It's just that there's also like another side to the story. And I |
| 32 | | feel like umm, I feel like it doesn't make it right - us being in |
| 33 | | circle - none of this is saying that what she did was okay. It's |
| 34 | | about having a conversation cuz[17] if we never get to the deeper |
| 35 | | issues right nothing every changes. And I don't know about |
| 36 | | you, but I've done things that were dumb. I've done things I've |
| 37 | | regretted. I've done things in a fit of emotion that – and this is |
| 38 | | what I wanted to tell you guys. And you too LaShanda. I don't |
| 39 | | believe that you did that to hurt me. I don't believe that it was |
| 40 | | malicious. It doesn't make it right but I don't – What I've |
| 41 | | learned from my family was that sometimes we hurt the |
| 42 | | people we love the most. |
| 43 | Sis. Latifah: | Misplaced aggression |
| 44 | Ms. C: | And so I want you to feel comfortable to speak on those and |
| 45 | | things and I'm not telling you guys that this means it's okay |
| 46 | | you should just let people walk on you that's not what this is |
| 47 | | about. But how do we heal those things? |
| 48 | Sis. Latifah: | How do we help LaShanda to grow? To not have the negative |
| 49 | | behavior? I had little cleptos in the family. Little nephew. We |
| 50 | | used to call him - |
| 51 | Shaunté: | You can't make nobody listen. Or force nobody to do nothing |
| 52 | | if they don't wanna[18] do it I mean this not her first time she |
| 53 | | stole and then like who knows who else she gon steal from? |
| 54 | | Like my stuff come up missin, it's gon be a problem. |
| 55 | Ms. C: | I'm not gonna just drop something like this. That's important. |
| 56 | | The thing is if we don't do it here, where do we do it? Where |
| 57 | | is that place that we actually learn how to make mistakes and |

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[15] Gon = going to (in this instance, "if you're not going to say nothin'"

[16] Gotta = have to (in this instance, "she don't have to be here"; can also mean "have" as in "I gotta job"

[17] Cuz = because

[18] Wanna = want to

| 58 | | then turn around and come back. I didn't have that when I was |
| 59 | | a young person [crying]. [Note: Ms. C tells a very personal |
| 60 | | and difficult story about her family. Here I invoke |
| 61 | | ethnographic refusal (Simpson, 2007). I do this because her |
| 62 | | story was for that space. She cries profusely – sometimes |
| 63 | | wailing – throughout the lengthy and painful story she shares] |
| 64 | | As she nears the end of her story, she explains, "Sorry but I |
| 65 | | have to I have to let you know how real this is. This is not |
| 66 | | something – it still haunts me everyday…when you get out in |
| 67 | | that world you make mistakes you do things. It ain't no love. |
| 68 | | It's nothing. And I told LaShanda, I said 'I'M GLAD IT WAS |
| 69 | | ME!' Shit. At the end of the day you know you know I'm not |
| 70 | | gon throw you away. You know that. Your choices from here |
| 71 | | on out are up to you. But now you know that. Right? And so |
| 72 | | I'm willing for the sake of that because of – when we had a |
| 73 | | meeting I spoke to you right? And I said you continue this |
| 74 | | behavior you can steal from the wrong person. Right? |
| 75 | Laquita: | Forreal |
| 76 | Ms. C: | You could end up in jail off of these actions. Ain't no type of |
| 77 | | love out there. You - your family is crying over you. Your |
| 78 | | family can get to the point where they don't know what else to |
| 79 | | do [pause] so this is a safe space. You shouldn't of did it. You |
| 80 | | know that. But at the end of the day this just a piece of - what |
| 81 | | is this [miming phone] This just a stupid little electronic piece |
| 82 | | garbage. I care about you. What's going on with you. You |
| 83 | | know you betta[19] not eva[20] even think about doing something |
| 84 | | like that again - you know you already know right? That'd |
| 85 | | be a different conversation. But right now I think it matters |
| 86 | | enough to not do the same thing that the system does and |
| 87 | | everybody do and just throw somebody away. Because when |
| 88 | | you – eventually you keep doing these behaviors - you guys |
| 89 | | this for anybody - you gon run out of cushions. You're gonna |
| 90 | | run outta pillows you're gonna run outta[21] forgiveness. But |
| 91 | | when we still have an opportunity I'm gonna take that and I'm |
| 92 | | gonna offer it to you. RIGHT? Like we talked about. To try |
| 93 | | and make it right. because you guys – I hear everything you're |
| 94 | | saying. How old are you LaShanda? |
| 95 | LaShanda: | 16 |
| 96 | Ms. C: | You're 16. |
| 97 | Shaunté: | Can I say something? |

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[19] Betta = better (in this instance, "you better not")

[20] Eva = ever

[21] Outta = out of (you're going to run out of forgiveness)

| 98 | Ms. C: | [Long pause] I'm finished |
| 99 | Shaunté: | That's why you should always think of yo consequences befo' |
| 100 | | you do somethin. Cuz jail is – you lost all yo freedom! People |
| 101 | | gon be in there worser than it is out here. |
| 102 | Ms. C: | And I think that's just - you know I appreciate you guys know |
| 103 | | listening to what I had to share. I think that we should – I |
| 104 | | appreciate y'all hearing me out and I just wanted you guys to |
| 105 | | as to why I think the way that I do. It's not saying that it's |
| 106 | | right. Did you get that? Like it's just saying that okay we have |
| 107 | | this small window of time. If it happened again that's a |
| 108 | | different situation, AND, and LaShanda knows this I think we |
| 109 | | gettin this right? You keep doing stuff like that yo karma it's |
| 110 | | gonna it's gonna come back either way. So given this right |
| 111 | | now this moment right how do we use this opportunity? How |
| 112 | | do we do something different? Umm so thank you guys for |
| 113 | | listening. I wanted you to hear that with me. |
| 114 | Sis. Latifah: | And we're thanking you guys for the feedback cuz that was |
| 115 | | good feedback from you when you said think about the |
| 116 | | consequences…so I appreciate – |
| 117 | Tanesha: | I'm telling you cuz I know how it feel. I mean I ain't never you |
| 118 | | know bit the hand that fed me, but I know what yo, yo |
| 119 | | emotionals[22] you going through with yo family like I do know |
| 120 | | you or whatever. I know what you goin through or whatever |
| 121 | | but still, you can't do that. It's not cool. Especially cuz you |
| 122 | | gon steal from the wrong person one day. And you gon be |
| 123 | | oh I don't know why I did that I didn't mean – they not gon |
| 124 | | care. It's not too many people out here like Ms. C that uh sit |
| 125 | | here in yo face and be like okay I'm accepting you and still |
| 126 | | you know but yeah. |
| 127 | Shaunté: | Ummm so - I feel that – no I don't FEEL. You broke the sister |
| 128 | | code and it's like we posed[23] to trust everybody in here and |
| 129 | | you're not welcome. I feel that you shouldn't be in this class |
| 130 | | no more because you disrespected not only Ms. C but all of us |
| 131 | | and you broke the sister code and – |
| 132 | Tanesha: | And knowin on top of that people done broke the sister code |
| 133 | | and our trust and us starting over all over again. |
| 134 | Shaunté: | Even if you wasn't in here the first day of school, I know Ms. |
| 135 | | C gave you the sister code and she went over it - we always |
| 136 | | went over it and always said it and like – even doing  little |
| 137 | | skit on it though cuz I don't – when somebody – if I hear |
| 138 | | somebody steal somethin Imma feel like - Imma have my |

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[22] Emotionals = emotions
[23] Posed = Supposed ("we're supposed to trust you?")

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 139 | | guard up cuz my stuff come up missin, Imma go CRAZY! |
| 140 | Nakia: | Was you in here when Tanya stole money? But did you hear |
| 141 | | about it? |
| 142 | Tanesha: | She broke our trust. That was us starting over again. |
| 143 | Laquita: | You broke the rules! |
| 144 | Nakia: | That was us giving somebody a CHANCE and when we give |
| 145 | | somebody a chance and they still – you broke the rules so we |
| 146 | | not about to do it again. We not about to do it again – we not |
| 147 | | about to trust somebody again. We done gave too many |
| 148 | | people chances. We gave EACH OTHER chances once that |
| 149 | | shit happened – |
| 150 | | It wasn't like just Tanya - she stole from everybody in this |
| 151 | | room - she stole from Latrice so therefore we had to build |
| 152 | | trust wit her again we still didn't build our trust wit her but we |
| 153 | | still allowed her to be in here and our trust got broken because |
| 154 | | she walked up out uh here tellin hella shit what we be talkin |
| 155 | | about in this room is confidential so no. I don't trust you. I feel |
| 156 | | like you shouldn't be in this class. You're not welcome in this |
| 157 | | class from me. So yeah, that's how I feel. |
| 158 | Sis. Latifah: | So LaShanda, I know you've heard a lot and we want to give |
| 159 | | you a chance to say what you wanna say to regroup from what |
| 160 | | you have experienced and maybe what you have learned from |
| 161 | | this situation. |
| 162 | LaShanda: | Well I accept y'all feelings. Umm I know that I am not |
| 163 | | trusted in this class or any other class matter fact but umm |
| 164 | | I don't know. |
| 165 | Laquita: | [Frustrated she's not saying much] Yeah that shit... |
| 166 | Sis. Latifah: | When you steal, what's the thought that comes to your mind? |
| 167 | | What's the thought that comes to your mind? The reason I'm |
| 168 | | asking you this is because sometimes we have behaviors that |
| 169 | | we can't control. But whenever something happens to us, |
| 170 | | there's a thought. We see something first. You got them five |
| 171 | | senses. |
| 172 | Nakia: | [Angrily interjecting] Why you steal the phone? |
| 173 | | [To Sis Latifah] I'm sorry |
| 174 | Nakia: | She just wanted a new phone. |
| 175 | Ms. C: | Let her speak |
| 176 | Sis. Latifah: | If that be it, there is still something that needs to be done to |
| 177 | | because like you said here's an advocate. Now how do I learn |
| 178 | | to advocate for myself to get that phone instead of doing the |
| 179 | | wrong behavior that I already know |
| 180 | Shaunté: | You get you a job… |
| 181 | Laquita: | Can I say something? |
| 182 | Ms. C: | You guys, I really wanna give LaShanda a chance to actually - |

| 183 | | we've shared – we've shared our group I think it's clear that |
| 184 | | like we're angry we're hurt we're still at the table though right? |
| 185 | | And LaShanda I think it's been clear to you that we need to |
| 186 | | hear something from you. We need to hear something from |
| 187 | | you. And then it's also like we need to actually give her the |
| 188 | | time to actually speak cuz if you cut in and jump in when she |
| 189 | | trying to speak she won't have a chance. |
| 190 | Laquita: | I just wanna say one thang. Okay from everybody speaking |
| 191 | | and talking and saying they opinions, from lookin at you, and |
| 192 | | way you sit and the way you look like you don't give a fuck. |
| 193 | | To me it look like you don't care you stole Ms. C phone. You |
| 194 | | don't care what she gotta say, you don't care what Ms. C gotta |
| 195 | | say you don't care what Shaunté or Nakia gotta say or anyone |
| 196 | | gotta say. That's what it look like you don't care. You look |
| 197 | | like Imma do it again whether y'all say nothin or not I'm gon |
| 198 | | do it. That's how I look at it. Yo body language show how you |
| 199 | | act - that's how I look at it like you don't care [other students |
| 200 | | verbally supporting her statement about body language with |
| 201 | | 'mmm hmm's. Like you gone do it again - maybe not from |
| 202 | | Ms. C - could be from anybody in here or anybody out there. |
| 203 | | It look like you just don't care. That's how I look at it. And the |
| 204 | | way you lookin at me right now, I don't like how you lookin |
| 205 | | at me so change yo look. |
| 206 | Ms. C: | Let's give her a chance. We need to give her a chance. We |
| 207 | | hear you okay. So now if we keep cutting in she never have a |
| 208 | | chance to actually speak. |
| 209 | Nakia: | Aight[24] - go head go head go head go head go head |
| 210 | Ms. C: | And just listen you guys don't cut in. |
| 211 | LaShanda: | Okay well I do care about y'all opinions and what y'all have to |
| 212 | | say - it might look like I don't care but I do. I am taking in |
| 213 | | y'all opinions into consideration to change my act and how I |
| 214 | | do stuff and when I do it. Umm I understand y'all feelins. I |
| 215 | | understand how y'all feel about what I did and I accept it. |
| 216 | | Umm I am sorry for what I did. And I apologize to Ms. C. |
| 217 | | and I apologize to the classroom. Nakia, I'm sorry. Shaunté |
| 218 | | I'm sorry. Tanesha, I'm sorry. Laquita, I am sorry. So yeah, |
| 219 | Laquita: | You forgot Sista kihana and Janine. |
| 220 | LaShanda: | Sista kihana, I'm sorry. Janine I'm sorry. |
| 221 | Ms. C: | LaShanda did you have something for us? |
| 222 | LaShanda: | Oh yes I did. [getting out letter]. "Dear class, I know what I |
| 223 | | did on Friday has caused everybody to get upset with me. But |
| 224 | | I know now that I am very sorry to the class and to Ms. C. I |

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[24] Aight (pronounced like ahhh-ight) = Alright

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 225 | | won't be coming back to class until Friday but I will let you |
| 226 | | know this: when I come back I will try to fix the class because |
| 227 | | know it's broken. So now, so now [makes noise like she keeps |
| 228 | | messing up reading]. So now that we're not sisters anymore |
| 229 | | because of what I did but I still love you guys as sisters and I |
| 230 | | hope we can go back to that. But as for now we can't because |
| 231 | | I fucked up and now I gotta fix it. And to fix this I'm going to |
| 232 | | come to class today and do the sharing circle and then I'm |
| 233 | | going to get a therapist. After that, I'm going to take off |
| 234 | | Wednesday Thursday and Friday. So y'all and myself can cool |
| 235 | | down so we can deal with whatever else we need to deal with |
| 236 | | on Monday. I hope no bridges were burned but now that the |
| 237 | | class will never be the same… |
| 238 | Ms. C: | …And to me it's about supporting the class cuz at the end of |
| 239 | | the day it may not today it may have been yesterday - we've |
| 240 | | all done something that's like 'what the fuck?' And somebody |
| 241 | | had to give you a chance. Somebody had to extend a hand to |
| 242 | | you or you wouldn't be sitting here. And so, like I said, there's |
| 243 | | that one. How they say? How does it go? You fool me once, |
| 244 | | shame on you, second time, shame on me. You understand? |
| 245 | | That's how I see it. |
| 246 | Sis. Latifah: | Ain't no third time. |
| 247 | Shaunté: | Ain't no second time. |
| 248 | Nakia: | Well I'm feelin like I did that already. I feel like I did shame |
| 249 | | on you. I did shame on me. I'm not bout to do a shame on you |
| 250 | | again. |
| 251 | Ms. C: | To whom? |
| 252 | Nakia: | Tanya! |
| 253 | Ms. C: | But see this is a different person |
| 254 | Nakia: | But I already did that. And you see already what happened? |
| 255 | Shaunté: | Its well we not gone - well me myself, I'm not gone feel |
| 256 | | comfortable in this class no more. |
| 257 | Laquita: | I'm not either |
| 258 | Shaunté: | If my stuff come up missing - |
| 259 | Nakia: | I respect you Ms. C. I understand if you want her back, she |
| 260 | | can be back. But I'm not gon respect her. I'm not gon say |
| 261 | | nothin else to this lil girl. I'm not gon do that. I will respect |
| 262 | | your class. I will allow you to let her in this class. She could |
| 263 | | be in this space. But Nakia Jamila Jones will not say shit to |
| 264 | | this lil girl. She will not. I could promise you that. So you |
| 265 | | could have her in this class. I could act like she ain't even |
| 266 | | here. I could act like she ain't even here. But I will not say |
| 267 | | nothin to that lil girl. And I'm just being honest with you. |
| 268 | Ms. C: | I always appreciate your honesty Nakia. |

| 269 | Nakia: | So if that's what you wanna do, that's what you could do. But |
| 270 | | there's no what Nakia's gonna do. |
| 271 | Ms. C: | LaShanda, when I saw that you had started writing you that on |
| 272 | | your own without me asking you or seeing you, I knew that |
| 273 | | you were kind of doing it on your own. I know that we all |
| 274 | | have a ways to go but I appreciate you too and you know that. |
| 275 | | and even just  -you didn't wanna come in today you wanted to |
| 276 | | wait and so the fact that you trusted me enough and you |
| 277 | | trusted this space enough to come now and listen to the anger |
| 278 | | and the difficulty that's here like a lot of people couldn't do |
| 279 | | that. So I appreciate it. And I also wanna appreciate y'all for |
| 280 | | just keeping it 100[25] umm - especially you know like y'all said |
| 281 | | you're here because you'll give me that - you'll give me that |
| 282 | | much right - because you know I'll give you that much. [All |
| 283 | | students agreeing with mmm hmms] |
| 284 | | And so ummm just thank you and we gotta think you know |
| 285 | | about next steps. You know I gotta sit with it. I gotta sit with |
| 286 | | things umm but I appreciate y'all  appreciate you Sista |
| 287 | | Latifah - it's not easy you guys - but lemme tell you. Just |
| 288 | | dropping her out the class no conversation - that's the easy |
| 289 | | thing to do. I don't go for the easy thing. A lot of teachers |
| 290 | | won't show you their emotion  they won't tell you their life |
| 291 | | story. That's the easy thing to do. You think I was always like |
| 292 | | this? Hell no. Right? [Bell rings] so thank you guys. |
| 293 | | [Girls saying bye] |
| 294 | Nakia: | Bye Ms. C |

In the opening lines 1-12, students clearly demonstrate that they have developed trust with one another and have become comfortable talking "about every and anything" even though they did not initially know one another. In fact, one student articulates how in this class, critical participation becomes a way of demonstrating respect and love to Ms. C and to one another. Ms. C, by the very construction of this mediation, is reifying this aspect of her pedagogy, and encouraging Black girls to emote expansively. Further, in lines 15-22, students repeatedly remind LaShanda that this class is optional; in the students' minds, LaShanda should not be in the course if she is not going to adhere to the class norms. Instead of focusing on the fact that she stole Ms. C's phone, here the students remind LaShanda of the importance of engaging the space in a dialogue about it. In lines 12-13, Laquita effectively tells LaShanda that if she's not going to speak, she should leave.

In lines 31-47, Ms. C both reinforces and supports the students' assertion that talking is significant in the space when she reminds students about the significance of having conversations and the role those conversations play in getting to the deeper issues

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[25] Keeping it 100  = Keeping it real or being honest and straightforward

and allowing for change. At the same time, Ms. C also models for the students an alternative way of understanding what LaShanda has done while also pushing students to remember that they are "in a circle". While Laquita talked early on about loving other girls in the group, Ms. C implies here that LaShanda still loves the group (perhaps even the most) and uses herself as an example to encourage students to consider the instances in which they themselves have made mistakes or done "dumb" things they "regretted." Finally, in line 47, Ms. C calls on students to consider, "how do we heal those things?" Here we see Ms. C attempt to gear the class toward resolving the current conflict; hence this mediation becomes a pedagogical tool that both reinforces the sanctity of the space the group has created, and reminds the class that in this space, conflicts get resolved.

In lines 55-74, Ms. C models expansive possibilities for emoting through sharing a particularly personal story. As she concludes her story, she reminds LaShanda that the world (outside of this space) is cold ("there ain't no love") and she questions where else LaShanda will be able to learn from her mistakes without being "thrown away" if not in this space. In other words, in this purposefully constructed homeplace, a child's mistakes will be recognized as such. Further, once again we see Ms. C reinforce the idea that the girls are sisters and conflicts must be resolved; as she repeatedly tells LaShanda she will not throw her away and insists LaShanda acknowledges she knows that, the implication becomes that the problem will be dealt with in the space and of the space.

We also see Ms. C also reinforce the significance of the space in opposition to the antiblackness one faces in the outside world when she acknowledges that the space is special –the only place this kind of love and care is demanded. As a stark reminder of the distinctive nature of the space, Ms. C engages in explicit racial socialization; as a parent would, Ms. C reinforces the stark reality of what it means to be a Black girl in the outside world. Here then, Black space *in here*, is formulated in opposition to everything that is "out there." Moreover, in navigating the difficult situation of her own student stealing her phone, at every turn, Ms. C positions herself both against the administration and also against the system. When the school has LaShanda in handcuffs, Ms. C comes to her rescue, literally removing her chains, and ushering her into safe space. Here we see Ms. C articulate that kicking LaShanda out of the class would be equivalent to doing "what the system does" (line 86) and that is in stark contradiction to the explicit goals of this space. Finally, in line 107, in reference to her time with the girls (I.e. the course only being offered that year) Ms. C notes, "We have this small window of time." For Ms. C, the significance of the space is clear and yet, this may be the only opportunity they all have to engage in it and be a part of it. There is an explicit urgency in everything because of what awaits these girls in the world and the short-lived nature of this intervention. In short, when resisting antiblackness, there is no time to waste. Bell hooks reminds us of the ways dominant forces will attempt to render homeplaces impossible, and the added significance of continually fighting to ensure we maintain them; knowing they will not have the space next year, Ms. C is even more vigilant in utilizing every moment they have with one another.

In lines 127-57, the girls discuss explicitly what it means to them that LaShanda broke the sister code, and betrayed the trust the group collectively built. They are fierce in their defense of the space and their belief that LaShanda should be permanently exiled.

More than a dislike of what LaShanda has done, the girls are fearful that the Black girl space they have developed collectively, will be negatively impacted if she is allowed to stay. In other words, within their sovereign space, they have created their own laws; if there are no consequences for not following them, the inhabitants may not respect them and the space may fall apart. Ms. C's allowance of various girls' lengthy objections to LaShanda remaining in the space, demonstrates how a part of building that trust pedagogically, is talking about it when it's broken. Again, where dissolution is not an option, for Ms. C, the only answer is collective and internal conflict resolution. The girls and Ms. C must work together to hold the space.

Even as Ms. C encourages the girls to express emotionally, she also demands space for LaShanda to be able to do so as well. Throughout the mediation, Ms. C continually requests the girls give LaShanda to speak. In lines 182-89, Ms. C acknowledges the anger within the space but also reminds the girls that their continued presence at the table (in the circle) indicates their willingness to work towards resolution. As a part of that, they must give LaShanda space to speak because if they "keep jumping in…she won't have a chance." She then turns her attention to LaShanda and signals to her the norms of the space, "LaShanda, I think it's been clear to you that we need to hear something from you." When LaShanda does speak, her words signal both her understanding of what her actions mean in the space, and also, her hope that they can somehow come to resolution. She continuously toggles between the ways her actions have negatively impacted the space and broken the sisterhood, but also, she shares specific action items that indicate in this space, there is always a resolution.

Still, the girls seem unmoved by LaShanda's words. In lines 259-67, Nakia in particular agrees to respect Ms. C if she wants to let LaShanda remain the class, but outright refuses to respect or ever engage with LaShanda again. In line 268, as opposed to pushing back against Nakia's unwillingness to resolve, Ms. C simply says, "Nakia, I always respect your honesty." In lines 269-70, Nakia reasserts herself noting that she will not be told how to handle this situation. Here we see Ms. C's relationship with Nakia completely devoid of hierarchy; instead, she enacts a pedagogy of reciprocity and respects Nakia's position as she asks the class to respect hers. This particular section of the mediation signals the way power is negotiated within the space, and the ways Black girls are allowed to refuse, to demonstrate authority and ownership, and to carve their own boundaries.

Ms. C concludes the mediation by thanking LaShanda for trusting her enough to sit through such a hostile session and for being willing to hear the anger and hurt of the other Black girls in the space. Likewise, although they adamantly disagreed with her position, she also thanked the other girls in the class for "keeping it 100" and the level of emotional sharing they engaged in. Hence, although the mediation ends without "feel good" resolution, at every step, Black girls indicate what it means to them to have this space, the sacredness of their ability to exist there together, and their fierce determination to ensure it remains what they've made it.

Overall, this excerpt of this mediation from the women's studies class illustrates the kinds of conversations, struggles, and relationships that developed in this space and the ways both Ms. C and the girls were clear about the significance of the homeplace they

created in the middle of their larger school. This excerpt also exemplifies significant aspects of Ms. C's pedagogical approach and some of the critical ways her philosophies show up in her pedagogy. First, as opposed to opting for the easy solution and removing LaShanda from the class, Ms. C is determined to struggle through this difficult situation with her students. The act of constructing the mediation session, in and of itself speaks to her alternative approach to discipline, and the ways she insists on conflicts being resolved within the space. Further, by refusing to take a traditional disciplinary approach (and physically removing handcuffs from LaShanda's wrists), Ms. C also reinforces her positionality with her students and against the administration. Throughout the mediation, students and Ms. C demonstrate expansive expression, and emote in ways that signal the love and trust that become an integral part of Black girl space. Ms. C is also consistently modeling throughout the mediation, and gently shifting the conversation when necessary to hold the focus of conflict resolution. At the same time, Ms. C remains steadfast in her commitment to a diminished hierarchy and reinforces the reciprocal relationship she and the girls have developed with one another. Finally, even as there is clearly an extreme amount of anger within the space, LaShanda is never called out of her name, or otherwise disrespected by the girls in the space; Ms. C's commitment to Black girls not putting each other down is clear, and Ms. C finds ways to highlight positive aspects of LaShanda's character and what it means for her to be willing to take part in that class. Ms. C reminds LaShanda that while the larger anti-Black society is primed to eat you, this space is here to feed you[26].

While this vignette illuminates various aspects of Ms. C's pedagogy and the ways her educational philosophies emerge in her pedagogy, I turn now to an in-depth look at six aspects of Ms. C's pedagogy: 1. *Alternative disciplinary methods, 2. Playfulness, 3. No put downs & active put ups, 4. Reciprocity & diminished hierarchy, 5. Love and expression, and 6. In-house conflict resolution*.

**Alternative approaches to discipline.** Ms. C's approach to discipline is intimately connected to her philosophy of reciprocity, in which she positions herself with her students and against the administration. Her resolve to disassociate from the administration necessarily meant that her discipline practices did not follow a traditional trajectory. In fact, her approach to discipline began from her disapproval of the ways adults in the school interact with children and the ways those interactions inform students' understanding of what it means to be disciplined. She notes,

> Adults here [sighs] often like play into negative dynamics so they gossip about children to other children. So there's really, there's no, it's just a bunch of bullshit. So it's just like, so when they're [students] disciplined, they don't take it as discipline. They take it personally because you've personalized everything so they take it personally. They take it as, you're

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[26] Note: When LaShanda came back to class, she was welcomed by the girls. Nakia even revoked her promise and began interacting with her like before. If I had entered the classroom for the first time when she returned, I would not have been able to tell anything had occurred between them.

picking on me, or you're...that was hard for me…you know, but that was the climate I was inside of. So for me, it was like, I took time to really build those relationships. And most of my disciplining, I did outside of the class not even in the class. I was like, 'you need to talk to me after class,' or on their way coming in, and I'll catch them and be like 'Hey! This is what happened and this is what you need to work on.' You know, or I'll visit them at the other classes…now it's a little bit more where I feel like I can say stuff in front of anybody, it doesn't matter, but I was sensitive at first because everything is so personalized and they're so unsafe all of the time, they're likely to get triggered off of the slightest thing, and if me trying to discipline you triggers you doesn't help anybody, you don't get disciplined and it messes up our relationship because you see me as unsafe so I had to really be super sensitive.

More than disassociating from the school administration, Ms. C had to wrestle with the collateral damage of the adults in the school creating an unsafe disciplinary environment. Already, the way the space was constructed ensured that student behavior that would be disciplined in other spaces within the school were either not considered a discipline issue, or rather, were praised within this Black girl's space. Even more though, in the beginning, Ms. C decided to enact discipline outside of the classroom space in the beginning as to minimize the chances of triggering students accustomed to unfair and inappropriate interactions with the larger school staff. Still, there were moments where Ms. C determined it was impossible to avoid direct confrontation within the space. I asked her about her policy on sending students out of the classroom:

> Ms. C: To me, that's a last resort, last last last last LAST resort.
> Interviewer: Did you ever do it?
> Ms. C: Timone
> Interviewer: She got a referral?
> Ms. C: No I didn't write no referral. I never wrote a referral because again I felt like, if I'm sending you to someone then that defeats my purpose and this is bad, but I tell other teachers, like that's just me, but use your mind. Other teachers will be like, 'The principal didn't help me; he made it worse!' and I'm like 'well why did you send them to him? If you see that it doesn't work, why do you keep doing it?' So I'm like, I don't send them to him because I know it's just going to make it worse and counterproductive to my values and rules. So if I felt like the office was a place where discipline and restorative justice happened, I would've sent them, possibly...

For Ms. C, sending students to the principal would make the situation "worse" and be "counterproductive to [her] values and rules." This is a critical distinction. In other words, more than the necessity of positioning herself as an ally and advocate of students, in opposition to the administration, Ms. C firmly believes that sending students to the

office would actually make whatever situation deemed potentially discipline worthy, worse. In fact, she does not believe "discipline" happens in the office. When she indicates that if she believed this were the case she would likely send students there, she implies that if she understood the administration as partners in resisting antiblackness, she would also partner with them in healthy and effective disciplining of Black girls. Still, when she indicates, "possibly," at the end of her sentence, she signals the impossibility of the reality of such a partnership being possible.

Beyond her refusal to send students to the formal disciplinary body within the school, as a general rule, Ms. C refused to send students out of the classroom. Centering the students' well-being she questions,

> This is my thing, where am I sending them to? I'm sending them to go hang out on that corner. I'm sending them to go buy chips. I'm sending them in front. That's terrible. What? No? So that's why again, I was always like I'll talk to them in class, before class, after, really try to bring the point home, give them opportunities to really show up differently…in this climate, keeping them in is more powerful

Sending students out of this space is also counterproductive to Ms. C's values and rules, and ultimately, philosophies. As she imagines what she may be sending students to if she asks them to leave, she recognizes the senselessness in sending students to the very things she aims to protect them from. Further, given the various forms of #blackgirlmagic happening within the classroom, keeping students inside is always "more powerful."

As the class progressed, Ms. C began to discipline students during the class and students responded positively. For example, during one class session, students and Ms. C were engaged in a discussion about a recent film they watched together. In particular, they were discussing which characters they liked the most (or least).

> Ms. C: My least favorite was Laura's mom. The way she stood at the door and didn't say one word to her child - how do you do that? And she closed the door on her child. I don't see how you turn your back on blood.
> Ms. C: Can you guys stop playing with these? I'm getting frustrated.
> Nakia: I apologize.
> Ms. C: Thank you Nakia. Okay. Let's check out. Thank you Laquita for doing the questions. [Everyone clapping]. Okay check out. Your number and what are you doing this weekend? [One student says, "ayyye"] that sound just like the song!
> Tanesha: it is a song – 'she gotta donk.' [Saying the words while creating a beat on the table].
> Ms. C: Who wants to go first?
> Laquita: My number is a 10 and this weekend I'm going to a friend's house and I'm going to practice.
> LaShanda: I'm a 9 and – [Some girls engaging in side conversations].
> Ms. C: One mic ladies we're checking out.

Clearly some of the students are playing with something while Ms. C is talking. She asks them to stop and Nakia apologizes. Ms. C thanks Nakia for her apology and moves the class into the check out. When one student makes a sound ("ayyye") that reminds other students of a song, Tanesha begins to mimic the actual song while making a beat with her hands on the table. In this instance, Ms. C simply continues with check-out and asks which student wants to go first. Laquita falls right in line and shares her response to the check out question. As LaShanda begins to check out, some girls are engaged in side conversations. Ms. C simply reminds the girls that we give our full attention to each other when we're speaking, and LaShanda continues her check out uninterrupted. Here we see Ms. C more comfortable setting boundaries for students while also negotiating what represents a discipline worthy moment. In other words, even as she grows more comfortable requesting students alter their behavior, she refrains from interjecting when a particular act doesn't interrupt anyone's ability to participate or feel completely heard. Always aware of the potential "triggers" for Black girls as a result of the racialized discipline they experience outside of this space, Ms. C carefully considers how and when to interject in any given situation.

      **Play.** While the space was often emotionally intense, Ms. C also employed play or playfulness as a pedagogical tool to facilitate the co-creation of Black girl joy in the space. Laughter was a critical component of the class and Ms. C both initiated and encouraged playful interactions. At times, Ms. C described herself as "goofy," and would model for students that it was okay to project happiness. Particularly for Black girls who described having to "be hard" to discourage potentially unsafe encounters, learning to be playful in the space was especially powerful. Further, as Black girls are often adultified in schools, and portrayed by society as "hypermasculine," "aggressive" etc., play was also signaled that this space was one where they could be children. The practice of Black girl joy, of creating space for Black girls to be children, to be silly, to be soft, to smile and laugh and comfortably show signs of happiness, was a critical component of reimagining expansive Black girl identities, and a way to exhale some of the more emotionally taxing work happening within the space. This also became a way that I participated in the space. For example, one day the question for check out was "what is your number and what are you going to do this weekend?" Below, I share my response and the class' reaction:

> kihana: "[voice elevates as sentence progresses] I AM A 10, I'M DROPPING MY KIDS AT THEY GRANNY HOUSE AND ME AND MY GIRL BOUT TO TURN UP![27] [Everyone screaming and laughing] - nah I'm just kidding.
> Shaunté: She said [speaking very fast and loud as to imitate the way I said it], 'I'm dropping my kids at they granny house and we bout to turn up!' [Group laughter].

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[27] Turn up = party heavily; can also be used as a noun to mean a big party

While I could have simply said I was looking forward to a weekend without the kids, I utilized a particular body and verbal language pattern that I knew would create an opportunity for laughter.

In this next instance, the check in question students were asked to respond to was, "please share your number and if you fast forward your life past college, what do you see yourself doing?" The interaction follows,

> Nakia: I'm a ten and ummm
> Ms. C: you're a ten
> Nakia: Hi my name is Nakia.
> Ms. C: Hello Nakia. Nice to meet you.
> Nakia: I'm gonna be doing AA because - nah I'm playing. I'm a 10 and if I
> fast forward my life past college I see myself like working in a shop or in
> a shop career cuz I wanna do hair and working on my umm beginning my
> career and opening my own business.

While Nakia begins as she normally would by stating her number, she then decides to introduce herself to the class when clearly everyone knows who she is. However, instead of shutting down her play, or insisting that she answer the question seriously, Ms. C doesn't skip a beat and plays right along. Nakia, with the approval of Ms. C, then continues her joke but quickly ends it on her own and moves on to answer the question in a serious matter.

In another instance, one student questions Janine, the mentor in her early 20s who often participates in the space, about also attending the 6th period class. The implication here is that Janine is being disloyal to 5th period:

> Timone: So I heard you be going to 6th period.
> Janine: Is you mad?[28] [Laughter from all].

As the girls often demonstrate a playful possessiveness about whether the adults in the room are "allowed" to also participate in the other period, here Timone exemplifies this by insinuating that Janine regularly attends 6th period as well. [29] Janine's response does two things: First, she employs a phrase that has become a running joke within the class and in doing so, she reifies the cohesiveness of the space as a thing in and of itself. Second, she allows this playful questioning and responds in tune – she plays back and creates space for the class to laugh together.

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[28] This phrase came from a popular vine at the time and was used to playfully question whether someone was upset about a particular situation.

[29] In Black English, when the verb "to be" is used in this context, it signals a perpetual or ongoing action. For example, if the student had said, "I heard you going to sixth period" it would have indicated Janine was going once. Adding the "be" in this instance signals an ongoing action.

In another instance, Daronda has been talking about her mother being plump as opposed to fat when Ms. C relates her honesty to a previous interaction they had with one another:

> Daronda: yeah she's plump. I swear to God she think she's fat. She's plump. She not fat. And she be like how do I look - I mean she insecure. I'm like what the fuck is you insecure for? If you was ugly I'd just be like mama nuh uh...no. Nope. I ain't got no problem with telling her nope. No girl no
> Ms. C: And you would be honest cuz you sho[30] told me about my lipstick [laughter].
> Daronda: She had one some orange lipstick
> kihana: Orange though? [Laughter from all]
> Ms. C: That's the style I was trying something new
> kihana: Oh okay. You was stylin [laughter from all].
> Ms. C: [Laughing] It didn't work. I acknowledge that. But I tried [laughter from all].
> Daronda: Next time you should try light pink

In this instance, Ms. C uses this opportunity to acknowledge that Daronda is honest and also make space for a playful moment by recounting a time when Daronda told her she didn't like her lipstick choice. Daronda defends her honesty with Ms. C and extends the opportunity for laughter by informing the class that Ms. C had worn orange lipstick. I also extend this moment by joking with Ms. C about her stylistic choice. Here, while Ms. C invited the initial play, Daronda and I extend the moment as an opportunity for the class to gently tease Ms. C. This segment also demonstrates the way Ms. C looks for moments where she can reinforce the diminished hierarchy within the space. It becomes okay for students to question her or make stylistic suggestions as they might to a friend.

Finally, I want to draw our attention to instances in which humor was utilized both as an opportunity for collective laughter, but also, as a way to raise a very serious issue for girls their age.

> Ms. C: Okay you guys wanna hear something funny I heard on the news? So have you ever been like let's say you going to the bus stop of whatever and it just be like dudes hanging around and they'll like walk up to you and try to like harass you or touch on you or something? That happened to you before?
> Nakia: Ain't nobody tried to touch me but I understand the other part. Oooh! Lemme tell y'all about this A-rab after you done.
> Ms. C: Okay. So this lady I seen her on the news did you hear about this? So ummm I guess she was like a cartoon actor you know people that make voices. So she specialized in monster voices like scary like 'rarrrrrr'

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[30] Sho = sure ("your sure told me...")

[making the sound of a monster roaring]. So she's walking to like the subway or whatever and this dude was like 'hi how you doing?' and she was like 'oh I'm fine hi' and she keep walking right? So he run up beside her and put his arm around her and he grabbed her titty like just grabbed it and she was like 'rrrrrrrrr' [imitating scary monster voice] like 'don't you ever touch me' like real crazy. She said he got so scared he shit his pants.

kihana:  [Everyone laughing] Oh my God like literally?

Ms. C: Yeah he shit his pants.

Laquita: I never been that scared to where I'll shit myself

Nakia: I was. My daddy scared me – I shitted on myself. No forreal.

Here Ms. C utilizes an example of a woman responding amazingly to a sexual assault, to create a space for Black girls and women to laugh together about a woman terrifying her attacker. This story leads to other conversations – some that are solely humorous like the one Nakia is about to tell, and others that become more serious stories about instances in which girls were scared for different reasons in relation to boys and/or men. In this instance, Ms. C utilizes humor as a tool to allow students to engage more difficult conversations about previous sexual harassment and/or assault.

**No put downs/put ups/positive reinforcement.** As noted earlier, Ms. C was keenly aware of the ways society produced and reproduced harmful racialized notions of Black girl identity. Hence, Ms. C was very deliberate about ensuring she was consistently providing the girls with positive reinforcement and that the degradation of Black girls and women was not allowed in the space. For example, at the beginning of the year, most of the girls referred to each other and other Black girls outside of the class, as "bitch." While not employing a zero tolerance policy for the word, Ms. C worked with the girls to think about what it meant to define themselves in that way. By the end of the course, she noted a marked difference in the way girls were employing the word:

And so even though terms like that still show up in my classroom, I feel like I noticed a shift with it, I definitely noticed a shift with it, um, where they're more apt too, it's not the only word they use. They might use that word, but they also might use brotha or they might use different things like woman or girl or they're already expanding what that means, or even just how they relate to it. I felt like at the beginning of the year they were using that word more as and identity descriptor and now I felt like they were using it as more of what it really is, as an insult. You know what I mean, so what does it mean to have an insult be how you define your identity?

Thus while the term was still used to levy an insult during a story or in the context of talking about a teacher or administrator someone felt wronged by, they were no longer hailing each other as "bitches."

Ms. C also made it clear that put downs were not an acceptable way of engaging in the class. In the vignette below, Tanesha is playfully contesting a student, Ebony from 5th period, presenting a poem with Tanesha at the Black family dinner.

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Shaunté: Who ugly ass handwriting wrote on our board?
Tanesha: Is that yo handwriting? Oh my fault. [Sees Ebony's name on board] NAHHH  - Ebony not doing no poem wit me!
Ms. C: Not with you - separately. Separate poems.
Tanesha: Nah, it's my time to shine. She gotta go. She gotta go. Nooooo! [Ms. C is trying to explain and Tanesha keeps saying "no!" The interaction is playful]
kihana: Why y'all hate[31] on 5th period so bad?
Tanesha: I don't hate on em I just don't fuck wit em.
kihana: Why?
Tanesha: Cuz  - why Ebony do it wit me though?
Ms. C: One from each period that makes sense.
Tanesha: She not even gon come to be honest
Ms. C: I feel like anybody should be able to volunteer for what they want and we should not hate on people doing what they wanna do. Ebony was here last time.

While Tanesha is initially playfully protesting Ebony doing the poem with her, when I ask the class why they "hate" on 5th period, a student replies in a way that has moved beyond playful. Picking up on this shift in energy, Ms. C intervenes and explains why choosing one girl from each period makes sense. When a student doubts that Ebony will show up, Ms. C defends Ebony and in doing so, reminds the class that they should not hate on other Black girls.

More than just not allowing students to put each other down, Ms. C also gave the girls regular positive reinforcement. She regularly praised the girls for the work they did in the class and frequently commented on things she liked about their clothing or physical appearance (I.e. "that's a beautiful shirt" or "I love your hair like that."). For example, one student suggested that she read a story she wrote for the class. While another student said it was too long for her to read, Ms. C commented, "It's long but it's worth it" and the student proceeded to read her story.  When she finishes reading her story, Ms. C praised her for the detail she used and noted, "Everybody can't do that." The student then comments that she wants to show her mama. After another 15 minutes of class has passed, and the class has moved on to various other topics, the student comments again, "Imma have to show my mama this." Hence, more than Ms. C's utilization of positive reinforcement, what also becomes clear, is the ways Black girls began to internalize it and become more confident. The fact that this student restates her comment after so much time has passed, demonstrates the pride she feels about her story has remained with her.

In another instance, the check in question for the day asks students to think about what they want to be after they finish college. Ms. C comments, "Anything. Anything you want. Imagine you're out of college. You finish. We assume you did that good."

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[31] To hate on = to attribute negative feelings towards someone or something in particular – usually because you're jealous or envious in some way.

Here, before students even begin to respond, Ms. C is both reinforcing her belief that the girls will do well academically, and helping them to reimagine a future that includes finishing college and embarking on a career. A majority of the girls indicate that they want to have a career related to fashion, makeup, or cosmetology. Ms. C responds to each girl with positive comments about their choices. For example, when one girl says she wants to open her own make up line, Ms. C comments, "That's tight! What makes you wanna start your own make up line? That's unique. I never heard anybody say that before." When other girls share their desire to fashion and/or cosmetology, Ms. C responds,

> Ms. C: Hey if y'all team up you'll have a whole thing right there. All of y'all actually. You could provide hair, make up and fashion. You'd have a whole corporation.
> Tanesha: Fashion don't go wit make up and hair.
> Laquita: Actually it really do.
> Ms. C: Yes it does! You guys could work runways right? Bringing the whole team! Right? Yeah that's awesome. Go to New York. I hear a whole business right here.

Another student then comments, "to own my own business of a hair salon and be a nurse." When I ask her which she wants to do more, she responds, "Imma do both. Nurse and cosmetology." Ms. C replies, "I'm always about back up plans. I love it." My asking this student which profession she wanted to do more was rooted in my thinking it was unrealistic for her to do both. In some way, I was signaling to her that she should choose one. She pushed back and reiterated that she was in fact, going to do both; Ms. C supports her decision and praises it as smart (having more than one idea).

While we may critique Ms. C for praising *everything*, or not engaging the girls in a conversation about how unlikely it was that they would develop their own fashion line or make up line etc., it was important for her to support students in the process of Black girl dreaming. Where one of Ms. C's philosophies is rooted in reimagining, acknowledging and supporting students' dreams is a useful tool in exploring the possibility of a larger reimagining.

Finally, in addition to not allowing put downs, explicitly encouraging students, complimenting their appearance and work, and supporting their dreams, Ms. C also built in time for students to lift each other up. Ms. C employed "appreciations" as a pedagogical tool to encourage students to share their feelings about one another. During appreciations, each person in the space takes a turn saying what they appreciate about the other people in the space. In the following excerpt, Nakia begins her appreciations to various people in the class.

> Nakia: I never knew her last year like that but then when I met her in here, it was hecka cool. And the other thing I appreciate her is just, I don't know. She bring me good energy. I love her. I can't go a day without saying, 'hi JB!' Laquita, I appreciate you. I appreciate Laquita because

okay not to bring this up because when she did want to talk to Dante[32], she considered me

Ms. C: Yeahhhhhhh!

Nakia: So that was nice and I appreciated that cuz some people would have been like forget it Imma talk to him oh well whatever it is but I appreciate that for thinking about my feelins.

Ms. C: Yeah.

Nakia: And another thing I appreciate is for her like I don't know. She just being Laquita, that's Laquita and can't nobody do Laquita but Laquita. Jayzee E [referring to Janine]. Hey Jayzee E! That's my Jayzee E! I appreciate her because even though when I first met her and I was like she look like she gone be annoying [laughter from all], [elevated voice] I really appreciate her because she really took her time to like look for me like okay I'm really gonna become your mentor like I really wanna help you so I appreciated that! And I appreciate another thing is like you know she was there to talk to about hecka[33] stuff she was there to help me with hecka stuff even now she helping me with hecka stuff and I appreciate that cuz shit I don't know where I would be without her.

Janine: Awwwww

Nakia: Jayzee E boop! (Laughter)

Nakia: [Talking to Ms. C] You. I appreciate you for welcoming me into your life period. Like without you - like you positive to me. When I think of you I think about like okay I could go talk to her about any and everything. So I appreciate that cuz I don't talk to any and everybody about any and everything. Any and everything ain't they business [collective laughter]. Nah[34], but I appreciate you because like you have a warm spirit and a warm soul so it's like when you talk to me or when you like give me advice or just talk to me period about life, it's like I take it in. Normally when adults talk I be like okay. I try to get out they face like okay. But like when you talk I hear you. And I appreciate that. Cuz I need that.

Ms. C: [Sighing like heart melting). Lovely Ms. kihana

Nakia: [Exaggerating and slowing her speech] Hi Sista kihana. I appreciate yo smile. I don't know why but her smile is like it's like a light to the room cuz it's like it's nice. It's like a nice smile because we smile up in here we do but you know it's like one of them smiles where you be like [elevates voice] ahhhh, Sista kihana [collective laughter] so yeah [clapping

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[32] Dante was Nakia's ex-boyfriend

[33] Hecka = cleaner version of "hella" – meaning, "a lot" or "very"

[34] Nah or Naw = "No" or indicates a change of direction (in this instance, "let's switch gears – I was joking but now let me get back to appreciating you).

hands to words][35] it's like nice. It make me feel hecka nice. Cuz you got a beautiful smile cuz it's like it make me feel hecka nice on the inside. And another thing I appreciate you for being a strong black woman. Like you being a strong black woman and showing me and telling me like how you know how you raise yo childrens and stuff like that like that's nice cuz normally I just be you know seeing it but I like hearing experiences and stuff like that. Hearing the things. And it's like a good experience. And I appreciate you. And I appreciate you coming in my life. I appreciate all y'all!  And I love all y'all! [Repeats with elevated voice as if she was waiting for a response] I love ALL Y'ALL!

Everyone: [Extended collective laughter] we love you too!

Ms. C, in carving out space for students and adults in the space to appreciate one another, created an environment in which Black girls and women were encouraged to think about each other in positive ways, and verbally express the specific ways they enjoyed one another. While this process generally took an entire class period, for Black girls who are consistently degraded in their larger school and in society more broadly, these moments of shared Black girl love, were a critical component of the ways Black girls were able to carry the space with them when they left. Further, this process facilitated Black girls *expecting* reciprocal love and appreciation from the space; in the end, when Nakia tells the group, "I love all y'all," she is visibly confused when she doesn't receive a response. She repeats herself in an exaggerated fashion, waiting for the class to respond in kind. After a bout of laughter, everyone returns Nakia's love and the appreciations continue.

Although positive reinforcement isn't a novel idea, it becomes particularly significant for Black girls navigating antiblackness in their school and in the larger society. When your complexion, your hair, your features etc. are all in stark opposition to a hegemonic beauty standard, it becomes exceedingly difficult to imagine yourself in ways that resist dominant racial ideology. Further, where your experiences in school (in classrooms, with security guards, with administration etc.) reinforce your academic inferiority, or the ways your language and dress represent "the outer limits in a field of comparison in which the desired norm is a docile bodily presence and the intonation and homogenous syntax of Standard English" (Ferguson, 2001, p. 72), coming "home" and being hailed in a way that is (anti) anti-Black, is particularly significant.

**Reciprocity/Diminished Hierarchy.** While reciprocity was one of the guiding philosophies Ms. C employed, it also showed up in her pedagogical choices in the classroom. A part of enacting a reciprocal relationship was Ms. C's insistence on reshaping her role in the classroom and "stepping down from that teacher role." As a part of that, anything that Ms. C held students accountable for, she also held herself accountable for. For example, Ms. C began each class with a question on the board. Students were asked to write a response to the question in their journals. As students were writing their responses, Ms. C was also writing in her journal, pausing to think or bite her

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[35] As a part of Black English, sometimes people clap their hands in rhythm with the words to accent them.

pen while she read what she wrote. Following, the class would check in. Check-ins required each girl to say what number they were (I.e. I'm a 7 or I'm a 10), why they were that number, and discuss how they responded to their question in their journal. Ms. C participated in check in as an equal in the space. She would explain her number and discuss what she wrote in her journal and then pass the (invisible) mic to whatever girl was sitting next to her.

In addition to participating in the space on equal terms, Ms. C also actively engaged the class in what she called "critical feedback," a session where each person in the space would take a turn receiving feedback from the class. The feedback reflected positive things about how someone was "being" in the class, and also, various ideas folks had for ways that person could improve. More than offering her students critical feedback, Ms. C explicitly requested feedback for herself and actively listened when students shared their opinions. The following excerpt from field notes, explores this kind of interaction.

*Today is the final day of the marking period and everyone is engaging in what Ms. C calls "critical feedback." Ms. C starts with herself. She says one thing she wants to work on is doing a better job of organizing field trips for the girls. She mentions how being in grad school doesn't always leave her with the kind of time she wants to spend creating opportunities for them outside of class. Students begin saying the things they think Ms. C is doing really well such as being passionate, thinking hard about assignments and what students will like, and putting in effort. One student says that Ms. C could do a better job of being clear about what she wants. Another student says Ms. C should calm down sometimes but that she is like a mother figure and the best teacher ever. Another student commends Ms. C for never giving up. Ms. C thanks the students for their feedback and asks if there are any other things students think she should work on. No one says anything and Ms. C asks Charisse if she would like to go next. Charisse begins by saying one thing she wants to work on is doing a better job of writing more in her journals and attending her other classes. She says she thinks this is her best class though and that she participates more and is more into this class than her other classes. One student comments that she loves Charisse's "happy" and that they are glad she comes for this class but they want her to start attending her other classes as well. Another student comments on her positive attitude and willingness to help out. Charisse looks to Ebony sitting to her left and Ebony begins to give herself critical feedback.*

In beginning with herself, Ms. C signals to the class that she is willing (and wanting) to give and receive feedback in the same way she will ask other class members to give and receive feedback. In other words, she models for students how to issue self-criticism and also, how to accept critique from others meant to help one become the best she can be. This becomes particularly significant when Black girls and women are may be defensive as a result of being consistently diminished in other corners of their school and in society more broadly. Still, through participating in the process with her students, Ms. C signals to Black girls the importance of growth and self-improvement, and provides a space where students can engage in the process safely.

Students also begin to model the ways Ms. C demonstrates interest in what happens in their lives outside of school, and begin to reciprocate the ways Ms. C holds them responsible for achieving academically.

> Dalesha: So, how was everybody weekend? [Collective laughter at Dalesha's impression of Ms. C]
> Ebony: Just say good great wonderful - don't explain everything [collective laughter; students imply Ms. C will be lengthy in her response]
> Ms. C: It was good, productive. I had to do my homework.
> Dalesha: [Excitedly] You finished it?
> Ms. C: Yeah
> Dalesha: [Excitedly] That's good! Forreal? You finished all of it? Everything?
> Ms. C: Most of it.
> Dalesha: Is you gon do it tonight?
> Ms. C: Yes tonight.
> Dalesha: Okay

In this instance, Dalesha takes on the role of Ms. C in the beginning, asking Ms. C about her weekend in the way Ms. C would normally do with the girls. When Ms. C mentions her homework assignment, Dalesha is relentless in ensuring Ms. C will finish all of her homework. Ms. C responds to Dalesha in a way that demonstrates it is okay for Dalesha to question her this way; Ms. C expects the class to hold her accountable academically in the same way she does with them. Where the space has become one of collective Black girl (and woman) growth, Dalesha is ensuring that Ms. C is "handling her business" and progressing in a way that facilitates her broader life progress. Hence, Ms. C's decision to step down from her teacher role, creates a space where other Black girls in the class understand the important role they each play in ensuring the success of the larger group.

**Love and Expression.** Although Ms. C had already developed a curriculum she recognized students' need to express would necessarily entail her being flexible with her lesson plans and organizing her work around where the students were at. She notes,

> I initially had topics per day, I changed it to topics per week [laughs]. Because you never really know what's going to happen. Sometimes they can't digest it all on the first day or maybe somebody came in and there's some big trauma that needs to be dealt with and you get thrown off. I had so much curriculum and I was only able to get through....literally we got through...I had 6 modules, we got through 3

Ms. C's relinquishing of her initial plan signals one of the ways that the needs of students, and the students themselves, co-construct the space. The need, in Ms. C's mind, precluded any set curriculum or plan in place prior to the beginning of class:

At first it took me some time to just adjust how they would just bust in and be like 'And this happened, and that happened!' And I would be like [pause in speech to indicate how she would take a moment to process] sit down, take a breath. That's not my orientation, but I grew in being able to accept that and understand that when they saw that door, they said [exhales heavily] I can unload, and how special that is cuz at first it's all this craziness coming at you

Often times, students utilized the space to discuss numerous anti-Black experiences they had endured earlier in the day with teachers, administrators, or security guards. While I detail the various ways students experience antiblackness within the school in a later chapter, it is important to understand that the ability to express in this space served as a "revolutionary antidote" (hooks, 1990) to the antiblackness Black girls experienced within the larger school. A part of creating homeplaces, is the ability for these girls to freely articulate how they're feeling about and navigating their larger world. In the following vignette, Nakia expresses her dissatisfaction with one of the security guards, Tammy, who has allegedly been gossiping and talking badly about her to other students in the school.

Nakia: This is what I don't understand - we're students right? We're students and we're kids - well we not kids but we're students. So therefore we do things that students and kids or whatever you wanna be labeled as – we do that. It's your – you're a grown woman. I don't see them. I don't see these grown women talkin about kids as in why she got that on or why she do this or – I don't see no grown woman do that so for her to put herself in a kid's shoes or in a kid's place, you're gonna get treated like a kid. If I wanna talk shit to yo ass, and you gon sit there, Imma talk shit to yo ass cuz you talkin shit about me to kids. To kids. Not to grown women. To kids. So therefore I don't have no respect for her. I'm not gonna treat her with respect – I'm not about to show this woman no respect. You wanna talk about me like you're a kid so Imma talk to you like you're a kid. You're a kid to me. In my mind you're a kid. You're not a grown woman cuz grown women won't do that.
Ms. C: I love when you get like that cuz you're so clear. So clear and you're so brilliant like whooo!
Janine: I see so many people all the time have turned things – just as eloquently as you presented yo case have turned things and manipulated situations so that it seems like it's the other way around
Ms. C: Well that's what you're saying is that Tammy's gonna - if you go up there she's gonna manipulate it and make it seem like it's you
Nakia: Let her! Let her! Then that's when - then at that moment, that's when you have that petition or whatever everybody done signed, that's when you show them to let them know I'm not the only one that feels this fucking way about yo ass!

First, Nakia is allowed to express her feelings in the way she wants to. Regardless of the fact that she is talking about an adult in the school, or that she is using profanity, or that she is implying a verbal assault on an adult in the school, she is allowed to speak uninterrupted. As she finishes what she has to say, Ms. C refers to her as "clear" and "brilliant." Janine refers to her having presented her case "eloquently." More than simply not focusing on the kind of language she employs, both adults within the space actually praise her mode of expression. Nakia is clearly pushing back against the adultification of Black children and insisting on being understood as a "kid" or a "student," two identities Black children are often precluded from. As children or students, they may do things considered inappropriate by adults; here Nakia insists not only on being able to be a child, but also, for the adults in her immediate world to maintain a clear boundary between the two worlds. As she grows angrier, her insistence that she will interact with the security guard like a kid becomes her primary focus. However, following Ms. C and Janine's insistence that her words are "clear" "brilliant" and "eloquent," and Janine's warning that the security guard will manipulate Nakia's confronting her directly, Nakia pushes herself to develop a new form of resistance that may actually generate substantive results. In the end, what began as an individual problem between the security guard and herself, becomes a structural critique of the ways an adult is interacting with *children* more broadly, and a larger issue that must be addressed institutionally.

While I discussed earlier the ways Ms. C participating in journaling with her students became one of the ways she facilitated a reciprocal relationship with her students, here I signal the significance of journaling itself as a mode through which Black girls were allowed and encouraged to emote in whatever way they desired. Given the limited ways Black girls are generally allowed to identify (what Ms. C refers to as "that little sliver"), having access to unlimited forms of expression became a significant part of the space. Ms. C discusses her decision to utilize journaling as an integral part of her curriculum and pedagogy.

> So not all of the girls really connect with writing all that much sometimes, but I still bring it in as a tradition. And I tell them this too like 'This is your space, you know, do what you want to do.' So if they want to write in marker, I don't trip; I don't try to relegate how they express themselves as you would maybe in another class, because that's yours and it should be yours. So I love when they draw and they do all this stuff, and I find stuff in their journals that are gems. Like I'll find poems and drawings or, you know, Ebony will write these long letters to whatever...to herself.

Hence, expression – both with the group and also with oneself, became a fundamental part of making the space their own, and also, understanding the kinds of spaces they could develop within themselves. Ms. C described journaling as "creating internal safety," as a way to "find a safe space within yourself," and as "these moments where they got so honest, so raw, so vulnerable." At times, the process of journaling also paved the way for more rich conversation. Ms. C notes,

You know they come in and it's like 'BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAAAAAH,' like vomit...which is cool that they feel comfortable, but sometimes it's like, ok well what's really going on, so that's like a collective minute to say Ok, let's just slow down. And I feel like what comes out after is just a little more thoughtful.

The act of taking some time in the beginning of class to be in internal space, often facilitated a level of discussion that may not have been possible before. While I will discuss the kinds of things Black girls talked about in the space they created in the next chapter, I wish to signal here the significance of expression and the ways language and expression became a central component of Ms. C's pedagogy.

A critical component of expression in the space was the ways that Ms. C modeled demonstrating love for her students and encouraged them to express love for one another. Ms. C notes how her expressions of love were initially met with resistance:

Some people, like Nakia, were like Ugh you're bugging me, you're you know, like yeaahhh, but they appreciate it now. I mean yeah I am bugging you because I love you. Do you understand that? Like that's what people do when they love you. They were gonna melt, like the Wicked Witch, if you put water on them they would melt. That's how they acted when I showed them love [laughter]. And I think that it's because the girls here really have to be guarded. It's been kind of hard, but I always have to remind myself, take nothing personally, and I really have to remind myself of the context of where they're coming from, and the trauma that they hold, and the way the environment is so unsafe.

Here Ms. C acknowledges the initial difficulties the girls had when she "showed them love." Ms. C contextualizes the girls' difficulty with her demonstrated adoration as a result of the "unsafe" environment they are forced to navigate outside of this space – the ways in which they are forced to be "guarded." Still, Ms. C was relentless in her demonstration of love for her students; during check-ins, it was not uncommon for Ms. C to say things like, "I'm a 10. I really love you all." As the year progressed, students became increasingly comfortable with Ms. C's "showing love," and even began to declare their love Ms. C and for one another as well.

Ms. C also discussed refusing school rules about being affectionate with her students while also ensuring she maintains boundaries that are comfortable for the girls in her class.

So I feel like my relationships are very familial, and the reason for that is that I feel like that's what we respond to, it's natural. I mean to be honest, that's what's natural. I mean that's what I believe, and I mean it's cultural. Like in our culture, you have a village, and everyone's Aunty, everyone's

mama, everyone's daddy, everyone's cousin, everyone's brother. And that still happens and that's how they operate, you know a few steps removed [laughs]. So that's my natural orientation, it's their natural orientation, so I feel like why fight it. And they try to make it so strict, like you can't show affection, etc. but those rules don't make sense in here. I mean, I'm aware of boundaries and I don't cross those boundaries, but my boundaries are just different from other teachers. Like we hug and stuff, but I feel them out. A lot of girls have sexual trauma and if they're having a moment, I'm not going to break that. I don't force hugs or anything like that because in that moment, they're negotiating everything as well. But I feel really good when I have those natural connections: like they'll feel comfortable putting their heads on my shoulder or they'll come and they get all in my locks, but I know it's love [laughs].

Ms. C is clear that in this Black girl space they have co-constructed, the rules of the outside world do not, and should not apply. In other words, Ms. C maintains the sovereignty of the space and articulates a politics of refusal around allowing the larger school to dictate what happens within. For her, their shared racial and gender identities lay the groundwork for a more familial way of interacting. Rather than implying that all Black people have an affinity for one another, Ms. C's words signal the way she may leverage her identity as a Black woman to create different boundaries with her students than other teachers. At the same time, Ms. C is aware of the traumas girls carry and she is careful to ensure that boundaries are co-created, always negotiable, and comfortable for everyone involved.

**Conflict.** While earlier, I discussed Ms. C's philosophy of resolving conflict, here I want to point to the ways this philosophy often showed up in her pedagogy and was intimately connected to enacting love with one another within the space. In discussing how resolving conflict was one of the few rules in the space, Ms. C comments,

I think a rule was about coming back to things, not just letting things get brushed under the rug. And then like how we talked to each other. I mean they like to play with it, but kindness. I know you love her, so even if you're playing, don't cross that line. Because you really don't know when you'll have an opportunity to take that back or how that's gonna hit her or if that's your sister, then, you know, treat her like that.

Hence the boundaries Ms. C referenced earlier with respect to demonstrating affection, also become significant in the context of playfulness; recognizing that boundaries are easily blurred when it comes to language, Ms. C facilitated an ongoing conversation within the classroom that served to consistently check in with where students were at in their interactions with one another. What one student may say in jest, may affect another student in an unforeseen way depending on the particular life experiences that student was currently navigating.

Importantly, it was not just Ms. C engaging students in conflict resolution. Students also took up this "rule" and ensured any issues unfolding within the space were promptly dealt with. Ms. C comments how students insisted on struggling through conflict as well and became the voice that said, "Work it out. Don't be like that." She also described students as becoming "sub-maternal" in their continual insistence on resolution. In the beginning of the course, she insisted to students, "you can be mad, but you can't just sit there and denigrate her or yell at her or shut her down because she's a person too." While Ms. C was relentless in her desire for Black girls to humanize each other in way discouraged by the larger school (and society), the ways students began to take up and employ these practices themselves, signals one of the ways they co-create the dialogic practices of the classroom.

Although I discussed Ms. C's discipline practices earlier, I want to signal that her discipline practices were another way she enacted conflict resolution as a pedagogical tool within the classroom. When asked about the ways Ms. C disciplined them, all students indicated that Ms. C was committed to working through problems in a way that was different from other teachers. In comparing other teachers to Ms. C, one student commented, "they be so quick to just you know kick you outta class and don't really care about you know you stayin or tryin to make it – like try to fix it and stuff like that. So yeah." Another student noted, "She discipline us by gettin on our level you know and tryin to make stuff work and tryin to fix it rather to other teachers they don't care they just write a referral and just send us to the principal or somewhere else so they could fix it when that's really not the problem you know." Another student noted that Ms. C fixes things before "they get out of hand, she like tries to stop it. She be like 'what's going on?' 'Is it something you want to talk about?' 'Are you going through something?' Like she don't just like, 'Get out of my class' like most teachers do. Perhaps put most simply, Timone articulates, "yeah she discipline you by talkin to you and other teachers just kick you out like whatever. You don't give a fuck, I don't give a fuck. You can get out for all I care. I'm still gettin paid." Hence, Ms. C's mode of disciplining was inseparable from her commitment to resolve any and all conflicts in the space, whether they were between students or between a student and herself. In contrast to the ways students experienced other teachers as uncaring or unwilling to care enough to resolve an issue, they appreciated Ms. C's dedication to reinforcing Black girl humanity, and maintaining a healthy space.

**Summary of Chapter**

*kihana: If you were teaching the class is there anything you woulda done different?*
*Tanesha: No. I would definitely follow Ms. C steps and her process. Cuz we went through a long process to get to where we at now. From the beginning of the class [laughter] and so what she did worked cuz we got a class thas workin out and all of that.*

Overall, the frames, philosophies, and theories that guided Ms. C's practice were reimagining, becoming, reciprocity, and struggle. She worked with the Black girls in the space to develop a politics of refusal and reject hegemonic views of Black girls and

women within the school and in society more broadly. Ms. C modeled expansive ways of being that facilitated Black girls' reimagining the possibilities for a Black girl identity, and encouraged them to "try on" previously untenable positionalities. In addition to reimagining, Ms. C was staunch in her belief that in order for Black girls to reimagine toward something, there must be space for them to become. She insisted that Black girl space – exclusively Black girl space – was necessary in order for the work of reimagining to have the necessary space to transition toward becoming. As a part of this work, Ms. C also held reciprocity as a necessary philosophy in her classroom. To accomplish this, she "stepped down from her teacher role" and positioned herself with her students, often times in opposition to the administration and larger school. Relinquishing much of her previous teacher "authority", however, also reinforced her commitment to struggle within the classroom. The work of rejecting, of reimagining, of becoming, was often arduous and painful; still, Ms. C was determined to toil the land and struggle with her students through the numerous conflicts and growing pains that she understood as part and parcel of such a difficult process.

These frames and philosophies also showed up in Ms. C's pedagogy, and became critical components of the pedagogical tools she utilized within the space. Ms. C understood that the kind of work she and her students were engaging in, required a kind of sovereignty; in refusing to allow her students to interact with the disciplinary body within the school, Ms. C worked with the girls to develop their own rules, and utilized disciplinary methods she deemed more effective and productive for the larger purposes of the space. Through refusing to send students to the office for example, Ms. C reinforced both the sovereignty of the space, and also, her alignment with her students in opposition to structures they deemed harmful.

Ms. C also employed play and playfulness as a pedagogical tool within the classroom and heavily encouraged laughter and playful interactions. This approach acted as a refusal of the adultification of Black girls by allowing them to be children in the space, reinforced the diminished hierarchy through fluid play between adults and children in the classroom, and served to offset the emotional intensity that often permeated the space. In doing so, this pedagogical tool encouraged the production of Black girl joy, and aided students in their ability to let down their guards, and be comfortable smiling, laughing, and publically demonstrating happiness. In addition to encouraging playful interactions, Ms. C also ensured students didn't put each other down, and made space for everyone to give each other positive reinforcement and various forms of encouragement. These "put ups" also served the purpose of reinforcing the space's rejection of dominant (and disparaging) notions a Black girl identity; for girls who are consistently disparaged in their larger school and in society more broadly, these moments of shared Black girl love, were a critical component of normalizing positive Black girl interactions.

While reciprocity was one of the guiding philosophies Ms. C employed, she also employed it as a pedagogical tool in the classroom. In every aspect of the class, Ms. C participated with students on equal terms and encouraged the girls to give her critical feedback so that she could model how to accept and utilize productive critique for the purpose of positive growth and self-improvement. As a part of encouraging this kind of identity development, Ms. C also ensured she demonstrated explicit love toward her

students; she reinforced the sovereignty of the space through an outright rejection of the school's policy around demonstrated affection between teachers and students, and leveraged her shared gender and racial identity to co-create their own (always negotiable) boundaries. Ms. C also encouraged and modeled emotional expression within the classroom, helping students emote within a homeplace where they could unpack the antiblackness they experience in the larger school, and in society more broadly. Finally, when conflicts arose, Ms. C was relentless in her determination for everyone in the space to work towards resolution. While Ms. C acknowledged that struggle was a necessary component of the larger process of reimagining, she worked with students to develop a culture in which conflicts were never left unresolved – were never allowed to linger and disturb the sanctity of the space.

Overall, the frames, philosophies, theories, and pedagogies Ms. C drew on in the co-creation of the space, necessitated the sovereignty of the space and the ability to develop spatial norms that were oftentimes in opposition to the larger school policies and demanded a necessary separation between this Black girl space and everything "out there." Ms. C worked with students to make the margin their own and to carve out a homeplace in the middle of an otherwise hostile environment. In the next chapter, I focus more explicitly on how Black girls themselves perceived the space, and the ways the space began, and shifted throughout the course of the year.

# Black Girl Space

*This work is not just feel good work. It's not happy all of us are together kind of work. This is not middle class Afrocentric kind of work. This is the belly. And it hurts – voice recording taken directly after class, (10/8/2013).*

In the last chapter, I focused primarily on Ms. C's educational philosophies and the ways those philosophies informed her pedagogical practices. In doing so, I centered her voice, and used her own words to explore the ways she conceptualized her role in the space. While student voice and experiences were a part of that process, this chapter centers the voices of the students in the space in addressing research question #2: What norms, values, and cultural practices guide this space? How do Black girl students in this space perceive them? How are they beneficial or detrimental to Black girls? While this chapter highlights student voice, at times I utilize Ms. C's voice as necessary.

In this chapter, I begin with a description of what the space was like in the beginning of the year and some of the kinds of struggles students were navigating with one another. As a part of that process, I explore the ways Black girls initially perceived one another, and also, their initial discomfort with the idea of an all-Black girl space. I continue with an examination of what actually happened within the class, and the ways that Black girls produced Black girl space with one another. As a part of that conversation, I explore the centrality of trust and the ways that trust allowed Black girls to explore difficult topics with one another such as love and relationships, navigating sexual harassment, issues of complexion, hair, and sexuality. I continue with exploring the ways girls came to defend the space, and their insistence that any future classes remain all-Black.

## In the Beginning of Things

In the previous chapter, I began a discussion about Ms. C's commitment to struggling with her students and the significance of refusing to romanticize what this space was and the work that went into creating the space it became. Here I want to begin with an excerpt from field notes that signals what the classroom often felt like in the first few weeks.

*The bell rings and the hallway outside the classroom erupts with loud voices and a stream of students running in one direction. A fight. Ms. C remains near the door trying to pull her students into the classroom one by one as she sees them. She is met with some resistance from students who want to see the fight or see what's going on. As all the students enter the class, she abruptly shuts the door and stands next to it as to signal to students she will not let anyone out. A few students are talking about who is fighting and discussing the back-story behind the altercation. Two other girls come in crying although it is unclear whether it is related to the fight or not. Another girl, Timone, is in the corner of the room talking to her P.O. (parole officer), inquiring about why her ankle monitor is vibrating. The vibration signals to her that she will have to come in to her P.O.'s office and she is worried about being detained if she goes. Ms. C is trying to talk to the girls*

*who are crying to ensure they are okay and to understand why they are upset. Ms. C finally calls everyone's attention to the question on the board for which they should begin their journal writing. She acknowledges that "things are a little crazy" right now, but that we should direct our energy toward our journals. About five minutes after students begin to write, Tanya walks into the classroom smelling like marijuana. She says she is late because she got delayed in the office [but it appears she is late because she was smoking]. Tanya goes to the board and adds a name to the RIP list. Students stop writing and everyone enters into a conversation about the boy Tanya has listed, whether they knew him and if so, how, where he was from, and other people they know who knew him. Tanya does not sit at the table. She stands near the window and starts to talk about how her life is over. Apparently she was also concerned about being called in by her P.O. and she was contemplating skipping the appointment. She continues to remark how she can't go back to jail, but she hasn't been coming to school regularly and her pee would be dirty. The other girl, Timone, who was talking to her P.O. earlier, enters a conversation with Tanya about ways she can avoid being detained. They commiserate with one another about the judge they are assigned to and other girls chime in intermittently. Ms. C facilitates the conversation, helping Tanya explore concrete things she can do to mitigate her situation and manage her grief. We do not get to the question on the board. The remainder of the class is spent discussing other people who have recently died, lack of safety in the school, security guards, police, and the school principal (excerpt from field notes, 9/26/13).*

While this was an example of some of the difficulties girls often brought into the class, there were also ample struggles *between* girls in the beginning. Ms. C notes,

> In the first two months of school, every week had two or three major conflicts between people that were just like I refuse to be in the same room as her or Imma rip her head off, and all of this really violent...almost like they were just raging at each other, and coming into this room together. It was like you know when you try to put magnets together and they're the opposite side, it was like that. Like that's how absolutely vicious the self hate was, and I felt overwhelmed every single day because of the things I said before about not having the support and those other, you know, and the way this space is so different that other spaces. And if I had kind of just had a, you know, hard line, I run the risk of losing all of them, but at the same time, that can't happen. So I had times, I did a lot of mediating, and I was like vent to me and get it all out so that you don't go and fight homegirl[36] because it's not worth it. Like tell me what's really going on. So I had to take a lot of that and listen to a lot of...you know in the cartoons like when the hair's flowing back [laughs]. Really just strengthening myself, so then having the mediations, and that was before Sista Latifah

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[36] Homegirl = A way to refer to another girl, sometimes one's friend (as in, "that's my homegirl")

was here. And my little ass, I'm trying to sit people down, and talk to them, and make sure like you ain't gonna jump on her and [it was] RIDICULOUS!

I share Ms. C's words here to illustrate the significance of what it means to create, develop, and produce Black space together. That is, you cannot simply put Black people together and wait for the Black magic to happen. Rather, Black space in this context, is purposefully constructed (and often contested) by all actors within the space. In the beginning of the year, the same kinds of interactions Black girls were having with one another outside of this class, were explicitly present within it. Further, Ms. C suspects that the fact that the space was all Black may have actually increased the tension. She notes,

> I actually feel like if it was mixed race, I actually think there would've been less conflict, which is ironic because people think about racial beef amongst students, but I actually feel like they're really comfortable being in mixed classes because they're in that all the time. So when you make it all black or all something, the self-hate, it comes up real BIG. Like the internalized stuff, it really comes up because your sister sitting next to you is your reflection and everything you're uncomfortable in yourself, it's in your face for a whole hour. So some really intense dynamics came up

According to Ms. C, being in a classroom with all Black girls forced the students to confront their own self-hatred in the context of an anti-Black world. While in other work, my colleagues and I have discussed the comfort Black students feel in all Black spaces (Givens et al, 2016; Nasir et al, 2013; ross et al, 2016), Ms. C asserts that in this context, the opposite was initially true. This analysis is supported by the ways Black girls themselves discuss initially feeling about being in an exclusively Black girl class and the ways they felt about Black girls overall.

When asked how they felt about having a class with all Black girls, all respondents reported being concerned that the class would be a negative experience as a result of bringing Black girls together. Shaunté explains,

> Shaunté: "To be honest at first I thought like oh my gosh like this gonna be hecka messy. Like there's gonna be hecka drama and hecka stuff like that but it turned out to actually be a very good moment
> Interviewer: Why did you think it was gonna be messy at first?
> Shaunté: Cuz it was just like I don't know like just a class full of black girls so I'm just like oh my gosh like

Other students commented, "at first, I'm thinkin like its gone be a riot in dis class" or "all these girls gone be ratchet and stuff" or "all I know is Imma end up slappin somebody. I don't care you look at me the wrong way Imma slap you" or "all black females is not gon work." Additionally, it was not uncommon for students to make comments that

denigrated Black girls more generally. Statements such as "bum bitches do bum things" or "bitches with raggedy purses don't care about shit," for example, were a painful reminder of the ways Black girls were perceiving and rearticulating negative societal images of themselves. Although students reported feeling markedly different as the year progressed, in order to understand how Black girls reimagine blackness, it becomes critical to consider where Black girls *begin* with each other; this starting point, while often overlooked, renders the kinds of transformative positioning occurring in these spaces, all the more meaningful.

Still, changes did not happen immediately. During a check in with Ms. C a couple months into the semester, I asked her how she felt about the ways the girls were relating to one another. She responded,

> I don't know - it connects to the beauty image but it's also this insecurity - how harsh they are on each other. Just their judgment it's almost in everything. They'll just see a girl and like 'oh she like this' and they create whole narratives that's in their head you know whether it's true or not. You know or they just see something and make a snap judgment and it's usually negative and it causes a lot of their conflicts and their fights and their unhappiness. So I'm not sure how to couch that. The best way obviously is connected to larger issues, you know, but a lot of that - a lot of like, you know, I mean, there's positivity between them but how much like actual positive talk do they have and just the kind of - you know a lot of the put downs and stuff like that - I mean it's somewhat controlled in here as opposed to out there but I mean still I don't consider it to be positive you know. So, kind of working with that a bit

Ms. C acknowledges that while it may be less negative within the space than within the larger school, she still doesn't consider the girls' interactions with one another to be positive. Referencing "put downs," she speaks to the notion that girls are still interacting with one another in a way that indicates their negative feelings toward each other and toward Black girls more broadly.

**Shifting perspectives.** Although the Jefferson High girls in this study spoke to the initial negative feelings they had about being in a space with Black girls, at the conclusion of the course, they had developed a fierce critique of the way Black girls are stereotyped. Shaunté explains,

> kihana: What do you feel like it's like to be a Black girl at Jefferson?
> Shaunté: [Pause] Ratchet[37], dirty, a ho - being at Jefferson that's what Jefferson girls is known for. If you Black - oh yeah I'm runnin all up in her

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[37] Ratchet is used in the same derogatory way "ghetto" is. It normally refers to a (Black) girl who behaves in ways people associate with ghetto behavior

shit bruh[38]. Damn bruh you ain't even know me. Feel me? [Smacks lips]. Please!

More than being perceived as promiscuous, Shaunté's words speak to the ways Black girls' bodies become 'up for grabs' or a site of embodied property (Mckittrick, 2014). Still, her pointing out that this hypothetical boy doesn't even know her, and ending her sentence with "please!" illuminates the ways Black girls came to employ a politics of refusal to refute discourses that attempted to brand them as Jezebels.

This politics of refusal is also visible in the ways Black girls levied structural critiques against themselves for their viewpoints held prior to the class. Kenosha explains,

> I was always just judging them about like how they talk and how they held themselves.  I was thinking they were like stuck up and ratchet and like now I see why I thought – like I stereotyped them the way that they – that I did and it was because like – it was basically like institutional racism I guess because that's just how like black girls are categorized and I just like took that upon myself to basically copy what other people were saying. And which I shouldn't.

Within Kenosha's thoughtful articulation of her shift in understanding of how "they" are, is a powerful implication for what her repositioning means for herself as well. Her statements also condemn society for its role in the kinds of perceptions they develop of other Black girls. Another student noted, "The most valuable thing that I would take away from the class is that not all black girls are ratchet and that they are actually nice and they seem – sometimes they act a certain way because of the way that other people perceive them. So if you call a black girl – if you call her ugly, she's going to act ugly." Recognizing the significance of the ways society positions Black girls in their behavior, this student's statements reinforce the severity of the girls' shifts in their perceptions of other Black girls and what that means for their own identities as Black girls as well.

Another student, Ebony notes, "I didn't know that I was really caring like I didn't know I was caring til that class cuz I didn't really care about nobody. I didn't know I could love females like that or I could talk to females or be friends with females like that. I never knew that." Tanesha also expresses how her views have changed as a result of participating in the space, "well personally I learned how to like touch my inner womanhood like and how to actually get along with females cuz at first I didn't and then I learned like you know to talk to - you know you get to talk. Like if you talk to other females it's different besides like judging em off that so yep." Both Ebony and Tanesha come to see themselves differently, but also recognize their ability to be in community with, and care for other Black girls – something they hadn't previously considered possible.

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[38] Refers to boys assuming they will be able to have sexual intercourse with Black girls

Laquita also discusses a new sense of self but she contextualizes her statements in how this shift affects her overall desires,

> I've changed a lot. I know who I am now, cuz now, I hear everybody's stories, and I hear my moms stories, just like we got stuff in common, and we could all do the same thing. And accomplish the same thing if we wanted to. Like a new me, I'm so happy. At first I was depressed. I was just like I don't wanna do this I don't wanna go nowhere. But now I'm open to do more things and be out. Not like out in the streets, but doin more involvement and stuff helpin other kids, help them to accomplish something that I didn't get to do. And it's just like I'm more happy and bubbly.

Students, in their own words, articulated that a space existed that allow them to reimagine themselves as "beautiful souls" and to treat other Black girls "like [their] blood sisters." In fact, a few students who identify as bisexual, also explored how the space necessarily shifted their interactions with Black women they were in relationship with. Timone notes,

> Before I came to this class, I'm tellin you I used to fuck wit hella bitches[39]. Hella people. Feel me? Like wit my girlfriend. I used to fuck wit hella bitches feel me? I didn't care. I came to this class and we wanna be talkin about relationship shit got a nigga feelin some type of way[40] like - You shouldn't do like you know you shouldn't do that person like that cuz like - had me thinkin like oooh. Like I don't know. This class just made you think about stuff different. This class made you think about stuff

Timone' statements speak to the ways this class shifted her relationship with Black girls overall. While she used to have multiple girlfriends or interact with other Black girls in a way that may not have been "righteous", she has come to a place where she's struggling with what it means to treat other Black girls that way. This point is particularly significant as an example of the ways Timone's new way of thinking extended to Black girls beyond the ones in her class.

In stark contrast to their initial negative feelings associated with the course being all Black, in the end, students were staunchly protective of preserving the exclusivity of the space noting "we need our own space so more African American girls could come together and like and be a team." or "I like this class just focus on us and give us a chance to stand up and speak and all that." While I explore the girls' feelings about the space remaining all-Black later in this chapter, I want to transition into exploring the process through which such a dramatic shift became possible.

**Trust.** Detailing how Black girls in the course initially felt about one another, and also, exploring the myriad of conflicts during the beginning of the year becomes

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[39] I.e. "I used to be in some form of relationship with multiple girls"

[40] Feeling some type of way generally indicates strong feelings toward something – often negative feelings although in this instance, she's indicating strong feelings

particularly significant in understanding the critical role of trust in facilitating the development of Black girl space. Early in the year, girls would often make comments specifically about how they didn't "trust no one" or how girls shouldn't trust each other. For example, during a class conversation in which the class was discussing what it's like at Jefferson, Ebony offered advice to any girl starting school there:

> At the end of the day, you cannot trust anybody at Jefferson. You really can't. They will call you yo friend, but go back and talk shit about you, they will, they will tell, they will like be in yo, the will smile in yo face one day, but go back and just stab you in yo back, take you friend, take yo boyfriend, this and that

While this is just one example of a student warning other girls about the danger of trusting other Black girls, it signals the level of fear girls have about developing close relationships with other students in their school. Further, in the numerous times that girls stressed the importance not trusting anyone, their warnings often extended to girls outside of school as well. Yet, trust became a central component of the women's studies class at Jefferson and girls openly discussed how central it was in the development of the space. During our final interview, I asked Timone to talk about how she would describe this class to a friend who hadn't taken it.

> Timone: I would tell em like umm – it's snacks in the class. You get to know like you know different stories about people. Like stuff that you wouldn't think somebody that you know would go through that they'll tell you or whatever and you could just open up. It's like a trust class. It's like you could trust the people in there.
> kihana: Hmmm. Okay. What do you feel like you learned in the class?
> Timone: Umm - I learned a lot. I learned a lot about trustworthiness.

Timone describes the class as a "trust class" and notes how important it is that girls can share details about their lives within the space. That sharing, in turn, allows for her to "open up" and has resulted in her learning a lot about "trustworthiness." This point is particularly significant because it represents a shift in the ways Black girls were able to relate to one another. In other words, not only did their opinions of each other shift, but also, their actual interactions with one another shifted as well. Trust became a critical component of allowing for the kind of reimagining made possible in the space.

We see the significance of trust as well in the mediation session referenced in the previous chapter. As students were expressing why they felt like LaShanda should be expelled from the class, the majority of their comments centered on trust and the sister code they agreed to follow together. I excerpt a short portion of the mediation session below where the girls repeatedly signal the significance of trust in the space.

> Shaunté: ummm so - I feel that - no I don't FEEL - you broke the sister code and it's like we posed to trust everybody in here and you're not

welcome. I feel that you shouldn't be in this class no more because you disrespected not only Ms. C but all of us and you broke the sister code and

Tanesha: and knowin on top of that people done broke the sister code and our trust and us starting over all over again.

Shaunté: even if you wasn't in here the first day of school, I know Ms. C gave you the sister code and she went over it - we always went over it and always said it and like  - even doing little skit on it though cuz I don't - when somebody - if I hear somebody steal somethin Imma feel like - Imma have my guard up cuz my stuff come up missin, Imma go crazy

Nakia: was you in here when Tanya stole money? But did you hear about it?

Tanesha: She broke our trust. That was us starting over again.

Laquita: You broke the rules!

Nakia: That was us giving somebody a chance and when we give somebody a chance and they still - you broke the rules so we not about to do it again. we not about to do it again - we not about to trust somebody again. We done gave too many people a chance - we gave each other chances once that shit happened - it wasn't like just Tanya - she stole from everybody in this room - she stole from Latrice so therefore we had to build trust wit her again we still didn't build our trust wit her but we still allowed her to be in here and our trust got broken because she walked up out uh here tellin hella shit what we be talkin about in this room is confidential so no. I don't trust you. I feel like you shouldn't be in this class. You're not welcome in this class from me. So yeah, that's how I feel.

In the vignette above, students begin by explaining to LaShanda how she broke the sister code and in the process, disrespected everyone in the space. Students also express the difficulty they have had in other girls breaking the sister code and forcing them to "start all over again." In other words, trust has become so central to the space, and the work to get to that point so intensive, that the idea of having to start the process all over is exhausting and infuriating. If LaShanda remains in the space, students fear regressing into the kind of environment present prior to building trust with one another ("Imma have my guard up"). The final student to speak is perhaps most clear about what trust means in the space. What she has learned from experience with Tanya, a student who is no longer in the class as a result of repeatedly stealing from students, is that when someone breaks the trust and you give them another chance, it will not work out. They will repeat the same behavior you forgave. Although this was the only instance of something like this happening, Nakia goes on to say, "We done gave too many people a chance – we gave each other chances once that shit happened." In other words, even though it was only one girl who broke the space's trust, that fracture resulted in everyone having to build trust with one another again – regardless of the fact that no one else had broken the sister code. Allowing Tanya to remain in the space after the transgression only led to another transgression: Tanya breaking the code of confidentiality and discussing information shared in the space with people outside of the class.

LaShanda too, recognizes that breaking the trust is her biggest transgression when she responds, "Well I accept y'all feelins ummm I know that I am not trusted in this class or to any other class matter fact but umm I don't know." LaShanda is not grappling with stealing Ms. C's phone; rather, she is struggling with understanding that she is no longer trusted in the space. Significantly, she adds that she also understands she's not trusted in "any other class matter fact"; here we see LaShanda reflecting on the understanding that this was the only space where she was trusted – where there was trust. This becomes particularly significant for understanding what this space meant to Black girls navigating antiblackness within the larger school. Together, the girls and Ms. C have collectively constructed a homeplace in the margin – a space where among other things, there is trust. Hence both LaShanda and the girls struggle with the weight of what it means if the sanctity of this space is demolished; LaShanda struggles with what it means to once again be trusted nowhere.

While there are numerous other examples of the way the importance of trust is signaled within that mediation session, I want to draw our attention to the ways Ms. C also signals the importance of LaShanda's trust for the space even after what she's done.

> I appreciate you too and you know that. And even just – you didn't wanna come in today you wanted to wait and so the fact that you trusted me enough and you trusted this space enough to come now and listen to the anger and the difficulty that's here, like a lot of people couldn't do that. So I appreciate it. And I also wanna appreciate y'all. For just keeping it 100 umm - especially you know like y'all said you're here because you'll give me that - you'll give me that much right - because you know I'll give you that much. [All students agreeing with mmm hmmms]

Ms. C acknowledges the difficulty in what LaShanda has done. The space was hostile, angry, and hurt, and yet, she was willing to sit in it and hear what the other girls had to say. She trusted Ms. C and trusted the space enough to be there. Likewise, the other girls in the space trusted Ms. C and the space enough to sit at the table with LaShanda and be honest about how they were feeling and why what happened was so tragic for them. As noted in the previous chapter, the students eventually welcomed LaShanda back into the space. Although they did not have all of the information Ms. C had about LaShanda's abuses outside of school, they trusted Ms. C enough to realize she was making the best decision for the group and they trusted the space to handle LaShanda's return.

**Black Girl Space**

While trust allowed for particularly intimate conversations to unfold in the space, likewise, students' ability to be vulnerable and discuss what were often painful and private experiences in the space, allowed for trust to be built. Hence, trust and politicized emoting co-constructed one another and maintained a dialectic relationship in the production of Black space. While there were numerous kinds of conversations that

unfolded in the space, I focus here on six; *Relationships and love, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, complexion and hair, sex and sexuality, and Black women's history*.

**Relationships and love.** On numerous different occasions, conversations in the space centered on relationships and love; while these conversations were often about "romantic" love, they also spanned relationships with parents, other family members, and friends. At times, these conversations were initiated by Ms. C and at other times, they were spontaneous discussions initiated by students but allowed and encouraged by Ms. C. Either way, Ms. C always participated equally in the conversations and was willing to share stories from her own life that supported her responses.

For example, during one class, the journal question for the day was, "Is it important for parents to stay together for their kids?" At one point, Ms. C responded,

> I definitely would say no about my parents. Main reason being is that my father was abusive to my mom. He was abusive to my sisters and he would be out all type of hours of the night and bringing home cases and cases of beer and just being drunk acting crazy like she - before she got sick she did have times where she coulda I feel like set an example for us and been like okay - maybe she didn't know he was like that before they got married but he showed himself once they got married and you have to - I believe a mother's responsibility is to protect her children. And so my mother couldn't do that. And so she didn't really set - she did the best she could but that's not the kinda mother I would wanna be. So it's not that you know I can't blame her for who he was, but I think that once you see a person is a kinda way you gotta make a decision about if you're gonna stay with them and if you're gonna let your children go through certain things. That's fine if you wanna go through certain things but you shouldn't put your children through that as well. If you can - that's what I have to say. I would say no.

Hence, not only does Ms. C share her opinion, but in the process, she reveals an intimate story that allowed the class to understand why she felt the way she felt. In other words, she could have easily stated an opinion without sharing such a private story. Still, in this instance, the sharing is more significant than the actual message. Once Ms. C shares her story, the students begin to couch their opinions in stories of their own parent's relationships, how it affects them, and whether they think they should do things differently. In other words, whereas in the beginning, students' responses are more general (I.e. "nah because if you could be co-parents and work together and be happy and cool"), following Ms. C's sharing, students' responses are intimately connected to their own experiences and even the way children may interact with adults when the relationship is not healthy (I.e. "that take me back to my sister because she does that. Like if she mad at my daddy, she talk about my daddy to my mama. And then when she mad at my mama, she talk bad about my mama to my daddy"). Later in the conversation, Ms. C asks the class if there is anything they would want out of a relationship that they never received. The class responds in a collective "hmmmmm" and then encourages Ms.

C to go first. Ms. C discusses how she's beginning to get it in her current relationship but that she wants someone to completely accept her for who she is. The following vignette represents the dialogue following Ms. C's statement.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Tanesha: | You and your boyfriend live together right? |
| 2 | Ms. C: | Yeah. But like 100%. Like he accepts me. But you know it's |
| 3 | | always those things about you or the other person that gets on |
| 4 | | your nerves right? And so, I wanna know what it feels - to |
| 5 | | really be accepted even the things that get on their nerves |
| 6 | | right? Like what's something I do that is annoying |
| 7 | Tanesha: | Do you fart around your boyfriend? |
| 8 | Ms. C: | Why was I just thinking about that? [Laughing] |
| 9 | kihana: | No! Never! I mean I have lived with somebody for 10 years |
| 10 | | and never once has he ever heard me pass gas |
| 11 | Nakia: | Fart? |
| 12 | kihana: | To the point where I convinced him that I actually don't do it |
| 13 | | and he believes me |
| 14 | Ms. C: | Are you serious? Are you serious? [Laughter] |
| 15 | kihana: | I'm dead ass serious[41] |
| 16 | Ms. C: | [Laughing] She said I'm dead ass serious |
| 17 | kihana: | No ma'am. But I was just gon say, I know you got a different |
| 18 | | answer [laughter] |
| 19 | Ms. C: | I do fart. I'm not gone fart on him [collective laughter] but I |
| 20 | | will get up and go to the bathroom and have manners but I'm |
| 21 | | not gon pretend like I don't do it. Like I'm a human. Humans |
| 22 | | pass gas. |
| 23 | Laquita: | What's wrong with farting? |
| 24 | kihana: | But if you get up and go to the bathroom, how doe she hear it? |
| 25 | Ms. C: | He - because, our house is small - or like okay. If you sleep in |
| 26 | | the same bed, you're going to hear the other person fart. Cuz |
| 27 | | you fart in your sleep. |
| 28 | Laquita: | No you don't |
| 29 | kihana: | Not me |
| 30 | Ms. C: | Everyone farts in their sleep. If you wake up in the middle of |
| 31 | | the night you gone hear bbbbbaaaam [making farting noise] |
| 32 | | [Collective laughter] it comes out. |
| 33 | kihana: | No ma'am! I'm not buying it [laughter]. |
| 34 | Laquita: | I don't fart in my sleep. |
| 35 | Ms. C: | Well you guys know - obviously you see me. I'm real silly and |
| 36 | | goofy right? You see that. This is me holding back. So I'm even |
| 37 | | that much more goofy. And that's something that it's hard for |
| 38 | | people to obviously accept. And that's never gonna change. |

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[41] Dead ass serious = Very serious – as serious as one can be

| 39 | Tanesha: | What do yo boyfriend do when you here and he at home? |
| 40 | Ms. C: | He's at work right now. He workin too. Yeah |
| 41 | kihana: | Why y'all ask that? [Laughing] |
| 42 | Tanesha: | What do y'all do when y'all first wake up like how do you wake up? |
| 43 | | You don't get tired of him? |
| 44 | Ms. C: | I do get tired of him [laughing] |
| 45 | Nakia: | Like just like seeing him? I'd be like - |
| 46 | Ms. C: | Yeah I do I gotta work on that though cuz I'm saying I want |
| 47 | | somebody to accept me I gotta accept them too. And the thing |
| 48 | | when we live with somebody you were raised different - you |
| 49 | | have different - |
| 50 | Tanesha: | Y'all share a closet? |
| 51 | Ms. C: | Yeah but it's big so he has half and I have half. |
| 52 | kihana: | I'm all no. |
| 53 | Ms. C: | You're so cute and funny. When I wake up you know he still sleep |
| 54 | | cuz I'm a early riser and he's not. So I'll get up and I'll try not to wake |
| 55 | | him up and that's it. |
| 56 | Daronda: | Have you ever woke up and just stared at him? |
| 57 | Ms. C: | I'm not that kind - but one time I woke up and he was staring at me |
| 58 | | and I was like ooooh get back |
| 59 | kihana: | I think that's sweet |
| 60 | Ms. C: | Yeah? It scared me. [Laughter]. Yeah and so I pass to Daronda. How |
| 61 | | would you answer? |

Although Ms. C was discussing what she wants from a relationship that she hasn't received, in line 1, Tanesha asks her whether she lives with her boyfriend. In lines 2-6, Ms. C answers, but also tries to bring it back to the spirit of her response. In line 7, Tanesha student asks Ms. C if she flatulates in front of her boyfriend. This question could be construed as both off topic and particularly personal in nature; still, Ms. C doesn't flinch. Before Ms. C can respond, in lines 9-18, I offer my own opinion about whether or not this is an appropriate part of an intimate relationship. Through the difference in Ms. C's and my opinions, students are able to engage a question they are considering in their own current or prospective relationships. It becomes clear that the students are simply curious about what it is like to live with a partner when in lines 39-51, the questioning shifts to wondering what Ms. C's boyfriend does when he's at home, what they do when they first wake up, whether or not she gets tired of him, whether they share a closet and so forth. In other words, students recognize that this space is also one where they can ask questions about Black womanhood and about aspects of life they envision in their future. Without skipping a beat, Ms. C has engaged this entire line of questioning and then passes her turn to Daronda so that students can continue thinking about what they want from a relationship that they have yet to receive. This conversation is indicative of the openness of the space and the kinds of conversations students feel comfortable to have, and Ms. C's role in facilitating students' construction of Afro-futurisms, and a collective imagining of the shift from Black girlhood to Black womanhood.

**Domestic abuse/love.** These kinds of conversations also created a space for students to discuss domestic abuse. For example, one day the check in question was: "How do you know if you want to be in a romantic relationship with someone? How do you know if you should stay in the relationship? How do you know if you should leave?" Many students cited domestic abuse as a reason to leave a relationship, while some students felt like this may be an acceptable part of a relationship at times. Students shared various stories about their experiences with being hit by their partners, and also recounted times they saw other women in their families hit or otherwise physically abused by someone. At the end of the conversation, one student commented, "we don't really like talk about it, but it affect us though."

The following excerpt from fieldnotes is one example of the ways conversations about domestic abuse were often times spontaneous:

*Ebony came into class crying today. Everyone began asking her what's wrong and she immediately began talking about her frustration with her life. Her mother is very ill and it is hard for Ebony to come to school because there is no one else to take care of her mother. Even though she wants to come to school regularly, she feels bad when she leaves her mother alone and is afraid she will die or something bad will happen when she's not there and she will feel guilty. This also means that she has to navigate other adult responsibilities such as paying the rent, PG&E, buying groceries etc. She is upset because the landlord is accusing her of not paying the rent and she's arguing that she did. It appears she did not get a receipt [of course she didn't get a receipt! She's a child!]. She then moves into a discussion about her boyfriend and how they did not have a good weekend. He got mad at her for something and he pushed her down the stairs and choked her [I am struck by how casually she shares this and moves on]. She left his house and went home only to find two girls smoking weed in her room that she did not know. She got into a verbal altercation with them but she was able to get them to leave [I am still unclear about who the girls were or why they were there. This makes me wonder about whether her house is a neighborhood "kick it spot"]. The following day she saw her father who she does not see often. She got a whooping from her dad that caused a bruise because he thought she was lying about something (excerpt from field notes, 12/10/2013).*

In the process of explaining her frustration with various difficult aspects of her life, Ebony reveals that she has been physically abused by her boyfriend as well as her dad over the course of one weekend. The remainder of the class is spent talking with Ebony about how to navigate all of these different things, and Ms. C and I offering to help her navigate the adult responsibilities she struggles with. The girls in the class take up the part of the story with her boyfriend and probe whether she is still with him. When she says she is, most of the girls are encouraging her to break up with him, noting that he would likely assault her again, that next time it would be worse etc. This also prompted girls to share stories they heard about women being hospitalized or killed by abusive men. During our interview, when I asked Ebony what she thinks of when she hears the word discipline, she returned to whoopings she's received throughout her childhood:

So it was a bruise but I couldn't blame him because, it's not his fault, it's the belt fault. I was like okay the belt fault, I'm not trippin[42], but the bruises to me, it didn't hurt, I did not cry over whoopins cuz of the fact that, I was, I had got raised to not cry. I got raised like that. I didn't get raised on, 'oh you can cry its okay to let it out.' I didn't get raised like that. Whenever I used to get hit, suck it up, whatever, I'm like okay so I really wasn't raised like that. So I think I been, I think of like caskets and stuff like that its cuz of the fact that like it goes to whoopins, to hitting each other to fighting, to guns, to killing, to caskets.

Ebony does not blame her father for beating her; rather, she blames his belt – the thing that is actually causing her skin to be bruised. In the end though, Ebony moves from whoopings to domestic abuse, to death. Clearly Ebony is working through her own experiences with domestic abuse and perhaps other instances of violence; this Black girl space becomes a place for Ebony to "let it out" and engage other Black girls about what it means to navigate multiple forms of domestic abuse.

Issues of domestic violence also surfaced in writing activities students completed. In the previous chapter, I mentioned a story Nakia wrote that Ms. C praised her for and that she was excited to show her mother. The story was about two friends, Tanesha and Latoya, their relationship with one another, and with the men in their lives. Tragically, toward the end of the story, Latoya is beaten to death by her boyfriend. Nakia writes,

> For months she and Tanesha hadn't spoken to each other but as those months go on, Latoya had a secret of her own. She was getting beat constantly to where she was in and out of the hospital. But one night Latoya and James were at it again but more serious this time to where she was left in the middle of the living room floor in a puddle of blood beaten half to death

Latoya dies and Tanesha wrestles with the loss of her best friend and how she could have missed the fact that Latoya was in such an abusive relationship. A part of the moral of the story then, is the ways Black women must protect one another from abusive relationships; as a result of their "falling out," Latoya and Tanesha aren't in communication. That critical lapse results in Latoya's death. In other words, the companionship between Black girls and women is a critical part of our health and survival. Finally, these kinds of ideas were clearly prevalent enough in Nakia's life that they became a central component of her story – whether her story reflects her own experiences or those of Black girls and women more broadly.

**Sexual harassment.** Class conversations also spanned what it meant to be a Black girl at Jefferson and the various ways girls felt sexually harassed at the school.

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[42] I'm not trippin = "I'm not bothered by it" or "I'm good" or "Whatever"

Particularly during extremely hot spells, girls struggled with wearing something that kept them cool but also didn't create a space where they would receive unwanted attention from boys. While these conversations were mostly around things boys would say to them (I.e. "look at all that ass" or "ratchet" or "can I touch it?"), there were also instances where both male and female administrators made comments to girls that made the girls uncomfortable. For example, one day Daronda came to class upset at the way a female administrator indicated her shirt was too revealing. Daronda noted the administrator said, "You're blessed in a way that I'm not so I'm gonna need you to cover those." During our interview, Laquita discussed a time a male administrator indicated her shirt was too revealing,

> I was- actually it was a principal actually. It was Mr. James. I was in the cafeteria sitting there eating my food and he came and sat with us and then I had my shirt my shirt was down but I didn't know it was down nobody was saying nun so I didn't know. And he came up to me and was like 'why yo chest all out like that you need to put them thangs up' and I was like why are you looking at me that kind of way and I was uncomfortable. And I didn't have no jacket so I couldn't just like cover up, I was like stuck so I'm just like, wow. And everybody was just like did he really just say dat to you? He had said somethin else I forgot what he had said and I was just like you are our principal you are a grown man who has kids our age probably, and you sayin stuff like this. That's not coo.

Beyond the regular sexual harassment girls reported hearing from boys in their school, both Daronda and Laquita are also forced to navigate inappropriate language from school administrators. While they both felt uncomfortable in the situations, neither girl felt like there was any possible resolution. Rather, these kinds of situations are simply another aspect of schooling Black girls must endure.

More than verbal assaults, girls also discussed instances in which they were touched inappropriately. The following excerpt from field notes represents one such example.

*I notice that Dalesha is not here today. I asked Ms. C why Dalesha was absent and she indicated that apparently Dalesha had on very short shorts because it was extremely hot today. Dalesha left early because she was upset because boys kept slapping and grabbing her bottom. Ms. C said she told her she is never wearing shorts to school again and commented on how the boys at her school are disrespectful. Ms. C begins to discuss how this is a rampant issue for girls and how the administration does nothing about it and/or may even shame the girls for wearing something that "invites" that kind of behavior – (excerpt from field notes, 4/3/13).*

In this instance, Dalesha decided to leave school because she felt she had no other recourse to prevent the sexual harassment she was experiencing. Further, as opposed to

boys having to change their behavior, it is Dalesha who decides she will alter her dress for the foreseeable future.

Ebony also discusses the ways she sees the differences between what boys and girls have to navigate at Jefferson:

> Yeah, cuz it's like - the boys…it's like it don't really be too much going on with them but it's like, the girls, it's like, hecka drama, hecka mess, hecka stuff like that and then it's like when it comes to the boys and going at towards the girls, it's like the boys disrespect the girls, tell them stuff, and it's like, you always hear like a boy calling a girl the b word, or a ho, or hecka stuff like that

Here Ebony notes that girls are faced with more "drama" with one another, and also, the regular harassment they face from boys in their school. In other words, Black girls in her school must navigate both the "mess" they have with other Black girls and the ways they are consistently disrespected by Black boys on campus. This precarious positionality illuminates the necessity of Black girls building Black girl solidarity; outside of the space they have created together, Black girls remain in tension with each other, and with their male counterparts.

**Complexion, hair, and our bodies.** I want to say at the outset that I invoke ethnographic refusal (Simpson, 2007) in this section of my work. That is, I will not share the personal stories, questions, acknowledgements, tensions etc. that were a part of our conversations about our hair, about our complexions, about our features. While it may seem as if issues such as domestic abuse or sex/sexuality are even more personal than hair and complexion, in a society where Black girls and women represent the antithesis of a hegemonic beauty ideal, these conversations are particularly painful and incredibly personal. Further, for Black girls and women already navigating the intersections of patriarchy and antiblackness, our internal struggles with one another – often rooted in the varying degrees to which we are positioned closer or farther from that beauty ideal (lighter or darker complexions for example), are safer "in house." I invoke refusal here because these stories are not for the academy – they were, they are, for us. Suffice it to say that as a group of Black women and girls, we engaged in multiple conversations about what it meant to "be" in stark contrast to the female archetype. We talked about ourselves as girls and women of different complexions, with different hair types, with different features, and the ways those differences lent themselves to different experiences. We talked about what parts of those experiences we could understand and the parts we could not. We talked about weaves, perms, presses, and natural hair. We talked about skin bleach and plastic surgery. We talked about our mothers and the kinds of things we were taught by women about ourselves as girls and women. We talked about our fathers, or other male family members in our lives, and the kinds of things we learned from those men about what was attractive, what was desirable. We talked. We cried. We laughed. We listened to music. Still, the actual conversations – the actual sharing, will remain in Black girl space – in that homeplace, and in the ways we continue to carry that space with us. I refuse to render us naked with strangers.

**Sex and Sexuality.** On a number of occasions, the conversations in the space centered on sex and sexuality. Again, at times Ms. C initiated these conversations and at other times, they were more spontaneous and student led. In the following vignette, Nakia and Daronda weave together a story about their fictitious relationship with one another.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Daronda: | NO! She cheated on me |
| 2 | Ms. C: | But y'all each have different - other people right? |
| 3 | Daronda: | Let me tell the real story |
| 4 | Ms. C: | When - when Laquita's done tell the story. |
| 5 | Nakia: | And don't lie. |
| 6 | Ms. C: | Yeah cuz we need to still – it's Laquita's – |
| 7 | Nakia: | And don't lie. And don't lie. |
| 8 | Laquita: | I'm a 10 - I'm good [she throws talking stone. We all start laughing |
| 9 | | b/c it's clear she wants to hurry up so we can hear the story]. |
| 10 | Tanesha: | I'm a 8, I'm good. |
| 11 | Ms. C: | Oh my god! [Reacting to everyone moving quick] lemme[43] hear this. |
| 12 | | Nakia side next [everyone has been waiting to hear the story about |
| 13 | | what's going on with Nakia and Daronda] |
| 14 | Daronda: | I'm 1000 cuz I got rid of this crazy girl. |
| 15 | Nakia: | You got rid of me? |
| 16 | Ms. C: | Don't talk about Nakia like that. Go ahead tell your story? |
| 17 | Daronda: | This morning, we was walkin to school, and she just was all on my best |
| 18 | | friend. So I told her like it's over. And then after I said it was over. And |
| 19 | | after I said it was over, she kept on telling me like no baby, I want you, |
| 20 | | that's all I want [makes crying sound and everyone is laughing]. So |
| 21 | | then in the lunch room we finally we finally was just like okay - we |
| 22 | | really done. But she beat me up and told me I couldn't go nowhere – |
| 23 | Nakia: | Don't believe that. I would never put my hands on that woman, I loved |
| 24 | | her. |
| 25 | Ms. C: | Loved, past tense? |
| 26 | Nakia: | Yeah, past tense. |
| 27 | Tanesha: | Nakia, what's yo side of the story? |
| 28 | Nakia: | I told y'all. I broke up wit her cuz she was cheatin on me. |
| 29 | Daronda: | Who was I cheatin on you wit? |
| 30 | Nakia: | [Smacks lips] Don't even go there. |
| 31 | Ms. C: | But Daronda you said she was on your friend? |
| 32 | Daronda: | She was. My best friend. And last night when we was all kickin it. |
| 33 | | She gave her her kik and everything and was tellin her like wussup |
| 34 | | Anisha and all that so |
| 35 | Nakia: | Oooh - I said ASL - Anisha. Y'all know what that mean? |
| 36 | Group: | Mm mm |
| 37 | Nakia: | Oh. [Laughter] |

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[43] Lemme = Let me

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 38 | Ms. C: | What does it mean? What is ASL? |
| 39 | Nakia: | Y'all didn't have AIMs? You know what that mean? |
| 40 | Ms. C: | Oh my god. |
| 41 | kihana: | What does it mean? |
| 42 | Nakia: | Y'all didn't have AIMs? Age, sex, and location. |
| 43 | Group: | Oooooohhhh |
| 44 | Nakia: | How old are you? What's yo age? |
| 45 | Daronda: | I don't care. And then this morning she was lookin at other girls and |
| 46 | | stuff too. So we done. |
| 47 | Nakia: | Why lie? [Clapping hands to rhythm of her words] |
| 48 | Ms. C: | Didn't y'all both have other people? Wasn't that part of the agreement? |
| 49 | Daronda: | No. I was faithful. |
| 50 | Nakia: | I was faithful too |
| 51 | Daronda: | I was faithful. I was hella faithful |
| 52 | Nakia: | I was hella faithful. I still wanted to be wit her but she left - well I left |
| 53 | | her because she was just too much. |
| 54 | Laquita: | Dang - that quick? |
| 55 | Ms. C: | Right! I thought love was a little stronger than that! |
| 56 | Laquita: | Right! |
| 57 | Shaunté: | What kinda love y'all got? |
| 58 | Nakia: | I'm not even gonna explain to y'all why she loved me. |
| 59 | Daronda: | Cuz you got that good good[44] [collective laughter] |
| 60 | Ms. C: | That's lust - that's lust - that's why it was gone so quick! |
| 61 | kihana: | Wow… [Bunch of laughter. It's hard to hear but someone says |
| 62 | | something about a "strap on"] |
| 63 | Nakia: | You ain't catch that? |
| 64 | Ms. C: | No |
| 65 | Nakia: | Ahhhhh - throw it back![45] That's a throw back! Mmmmm - |
| 66 | kihana: | She said she was strapped up good |
| 67 | Nakia: | Ahhhhhhh |
| 68 | Ms. C: | Oh my god I gotta clean my ears! |
| 69 | Daronda: | I'm just playin though |
| 70 | Ms. C: | Y'all so silly. |
| 71 | Daronda: | Nakia know I love her. |
| 72 | Nakia: | Nah I don't mm mm |
| 73 | Ms. C: | Fa sho fa sho[46]. |
| 74 | Nakia: | I don't want her back. [Repeats continuously] |
| 75 | Daronda: | She could act like that but – |

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[44] You got that good good = You are particularly good in bed

[45] Throw it back = Repeat what you said

[46] Fa sho = For sure or definitely. When it's used twice like this, it means most definitely for sure

In the beginning, Daronda asserts that Nakia cheated on her. As opposed to ignoring her statement or shutting down the conversation, Ms. C plays right along insinuating that she thought the two girls had an open relationship. Daronda insists that she wants to tell the story while Ms. C wants the other girls to have an opportunity to check in. Still, the other girls also want to hear the story and so they deliberately check in with only their number so that they can quickly finish check in and hear Daronda's side of what happened. In lines 17-22, Daronda begins by explaining how Nakia was flirting with her best friend and so Daronda ended their relationship. She then insists that Nakia beat her up and refuses to let her go. Nakia interjects, saying, "Don't believe that. I would never put my hands on that woman, I love her" (23-4). Here we see students exploring issues of domestic abuse in their recounting a fictitious story about an imaginary relationship they have with one another. In this instance, Nakia takes on the role of the man, being abused by his woman of beating her. In a masculine voice, Nakia responds that she couldn't have hit Daronda because she loves her. In lines 28-34, the students debate who actually cheated on who with Ms. C again, playing along and reinforcing the idea that the two may have had an open relationship. In line 35, Nakia acknowledges that she was trying to talk to the other girl, Anisha and asked her her ASL. Daronda remarks that she doesn't care and that Nakia was looking at other girls again this morning so she ended the relationship. In lines 49-53, both girls allege they were faithful even after Nakia has already acknowledged that she was attempting to get the ASL of another girl. Finally, Nakia says, "I still wanted to be with her but she left – well I left her because she was just too much" (52-3). Here we see Nakia initially acknowledge that Daronda left her but then attempt to reclaim the idea that she left Daronda. Where boys often claim they dumped girls to retain the power even in the break up, or to diminish the idea that they had any real feelings, here we see Nakia refusing to acknowledge Daronda broke up with her, even when it's clear that is what happened. Shaunté then interjects, "what kinda love y'all got?", essentially questioning how their love could be real if it was over that quickly. Following, Nakia remarks that she won't say why Daronda loved her and Daronda quickly responds indicating that Nakia is good in bed ("you got that good good"). Ms. C reminds the girls that this is lust and should be distinguished from love, and signals that the reason their relationship ended so early was because they were in lust and not love. Daronda then continues this line of conversation by remarking that Nakia was strapped up good. As if to assuage her discussing Nakia like a sexual object, Daronda remarks, "Nakia know I love her." Nakia refuses this remark by saying she doesn't know that and she doesn't want Daronda back. Daronda concludes the story by saying that while Nakia can act this way, everyone knows she does in fact want her back.

This conversation is particularly interesting on a multitude of levels. First, the fact that Ms. C allows and even participates in this conversation indicates the ways she allowed discussions to manifest and unfold in the space. Further, she uses this performance as a teaching tool – as an opportunity to reinforce the difference between love and lust and the idea that being with someone for their sexual prowess will ultimately lead to a short-lived (painful) relationship. Likewise, the girls play out various ideas within this spontaneous improvised skit. First, the scenario they act out is between two girls who have a relationship with one another; as the story unfolds, the girls push

back against a heteronormative paradigm and normalize a sexual relationship between two girls. Significantly, outside of this skit, Nakia identifies as straight and Daronda identifies as bisexual. Still, although the story is told through a relationship between two girls, in utilizing a masculine voice when she denies beating Daronda, they begin to play out the way a man may respond to accusations of domestic abuse against a woman, citing love as the reason for its impossibility. Finally, we see the roles shift in the end, where Daronda insists she only loved Nakia because she was "strapped up good" while insisting she still loves Nakia. Nakia's refusal of Daronda in the end and Daronda's insistence that Nakia isn't being honest about her feelings, speak to the ways girls struggle with how being sexually active with someone affects their feelings and their ability or inability to move past a relationship.

While this "skit" unfolded spontaneously, at other times, Ms. C initiated conversations about sex and sexuality. On one occasion, Ms. C put a number of questions in a box and asked one student to select one and pose it to the class. The question was whether students feel like Jefferson is a safe place for LGBTQ youth. All students responded negatively. When Ms. C asked why, one student commented that if two girls are together, "it be people talkin about them when they walkin by or then maybe in the classroom." Another student begins to discuss her male friend who people in the school identify as gay and the way a student responded to him during a talent show:

> Nakia: he musta said, 'get yo faggot ass off the stage. Get yo gay ass off the stage.' And I turned around like my best friend is not gay. He not a faggot neither.
> Laquita: Who? Who was singing?
> Nakia: Danny
> Tanesha: Danny is gay.
> Nakia: Okay but he ain't gotta say it like that like
> Ms. C: Right. That language is not safe. That 's the point.
> Nakia: Don't call him that. I mean like I tried to talk to him about it he's not comfortable with that so therefore –

Here Nakia discusses an instance in which her gay male friend was called homophobic names by another student during a school talent show. Although she knows he is gay, in order to defend him, she tells the assaulter that her friend is not gay. When another student indicates that he is gay, Nakia argues that regardless of whether Danny is gay or not, he should not be called names as a result. Particularly since Danny is not comfortable talking about it yet, Nakia does not think it's appropriate to even call him gay when he has not identified as such yet. As I have not heard the girls discuss any instance where a girl has been called these kind of names, I attempt to understand the difference (if any) of how they think students at their school view homosexuality of boys vs. girls.

> kihana: So you don't think it's safe for boys or girls?
> Nakia: For girls, niggas find that cool.
> Shaunté: No they don't. Not all of em

Nakia: Some. Some find it hella

Ms. C: some do.

Shaunté: It depends. If you a girly girl and you like girls or if you a like a girl that's tryna[47] be a boy or whatever - a girl that dress like a boy

Ms. C: That's a good point. That's real. Because they see it as that's for their pleasure when they see pretty girls.

Nakia: I feel like dudes got it worser than females.

Here, while one student thinks being gay is safe for girls because boys find it attractive, another student argues that it depends on whether you are a "girly" lesbian or a more masculine one. Her point, furthered by Ms. C, is that boys may be more pleased and hence more likely to respond positively to girls' homosexuality when it may be visually pleasing to them. If however, it is not to their benefit, it may become unsafe again. Importantly, twice during this conversation, adults posed the question of what we should do as a result of Jefferson being unsafe for queer youth. One of those times, a student responded, "I thought Jefferson was finna[48] get shut down anyway." The other time, a student responds by asking for more hummus and the conversation is diverted to discussing a security guard who walked by.

Ms. C made space for girls to discuss sexuality on numerous occasions, particularly as at least one quarter of the girls actively identified as bisexual, lesbian, or questioning. For example, over the course of two class sessions, Ms. C showed a film, *Pariah*, where the main character, Bina, was a girl who identified as lesbian but was afraid to tell her very Christian parents. Among other things, Bina struggles with whether it will be worse to come out and face her parents' wrath, or to remain in hiding and live a lie. In showing this film, and engaging the students in a discussion of it, Ms. C made space for students to share their own perspectives on sexuality, what it means to be "out" or not, what it means to be a stud vs. a femme etc. Further, for those students identifying as LGBTQ, having the space to share the ways in which they felt supported (or not) helped straight identifying girls in the space consider some of their own behaviors that may be unintentionally harmful or hurtful. Overall, the myriad of ways Ms. C made space for intimate conversations about sex and sexuality, served to normalize Black girls engaging these kinds of conversations with one another. Further, the ways members of the space with varying sexual orientations engaged one another on these particularly sensitive topics, enhanced notions of a larger Black girl solidarity.

**History.** A part of that solidarity in Black educational sovereign spaces became intimately connected with Black women who came before us. Ms. C made a point to engage Black woman history throughout the course including trivia games, shared readings, film, song etc. During the final interview, I asked students, "what do you feel like you will remember most from the class?" All students noted learning Black history – and Black women's history specifically, was a particularly powerful experience for them. Daronda discussed how learning about her history answered lingering questions for her:

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[47] Tryna = trying to

[48] Finna = about to (as in "I thought Jefferson was about to get shut down)

Yeah, about my history cuz it's like don't nobody really talk to you about it so it's like Ms. C teaching it is nice and stuff like that and I feel like that was extra help…Cuz I didn't know a lot about it…because like a lot of stuff, it was still like questions, question marks there and stuff, so it's like when she walked us through a lot of stuff it was like okay like I see

Here Daronda shares both that her own history is something she doesn't get to learn, and also that learning about it filled gaps she had in understanding the past. Other students discussed the ways that regular classes don't teach them anything about Black history and that what they do learn is limited to two-three figures they learn and re-learn about every year. Students were particularly excited to learn about a variety of Black women outside of Rosa Parks (and for some) Harriet Tubman. For example, one student interested in acting discusses her excitement around learning about Dorothy Dandridge: "I would like to learn about more famous uh black actresses from the old days because Dorothy Dandridge that's ummm my instagram name now and my wallpaper and she just hecka bad to me."

Another student discussed what it meant to learn something that she would take with her forever:

Laquita: Cuz like when it comes to college, or my future kids I can tell them somethin that I knew and they pass it on and just continue on and when they pass to their friends- so it's like everybody is gettin an understanding of they black history.
kihana: Why you think it's important to know your history?
Laquita: So you know where you came from like, you just know about slavery, and about the great depression, but it's just more to it. It's more to just we picked the cotton. We been through - we got raped by the master and it's just like everybody know that simple stuff but it's just like it's really more detail to it.

Here Laquita expresses what it means to have knowledge she sees as something she can share inter-generationally. Moving beyond what she's learned, she sees what she's learned as something that has the potential to spread and be shared in a way that "everybody is gettin an understanding of they black history." In other words, absent a public school curriculum that explores the experiences of Black folks and their contributions to the creation of the U.S., Laquita envisions being able to use her own knowledge to develop an interpersonal, living, makeshift textbook. Further, learning more about her history helped her see that the Black experience is about much more than the numerous abuses we have endured – learning about the myriad of ways Black folks resisted every anti-Black onslaught, is particularly empowering.
Another student, Timone, discussed Black women's history as a key element of a future school she wants to design:

kihana: What would you - if you had a school, what would you make it that folks learned about?

Timone: All the ancestors. I don't care if we gotta go back to BC, you gon know about yo sisters. You gon know about the people that did stuff for you. You not about to say – bruh[49] I'm not bout to just teach you about three people. You gon know about everybody. You gon know about everybody. You not just gon know about three people. Then when you hear about somebody new you be like 'oh I ain't never heard about them before.' Why you ain't never heard about em? Cuz I only know about Malcolm X, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. And a little bit about Harriet Tubman. Other than that, I don't know about nobody else. So my school we just gon - you gon know about everybody. If I had my own school.

Timone emphasizes the importance of learning about "yo sisters." Here we see Timone developing a fictive kin relationship with Black women who came before her ("all the ancestors"), and arguing that in an ideal school, learning about these women is a non-negotiable. Timone critiques her own education for only teaching her about "three people" and questions why she's never heard of more historical figures than this. Timone sees knowing about "everybody" as an integral part of what students should be learning in school.

Significantly, both Laquita and Timone signal the importance of sharing what they've learned with other Black folks in their lives. A part of the creation of Black space is the ways it extends to folks who were not necessarily a part of the original space created. In other words, Timone and Laquita's responses both speak to the ways Black space is never static, is not relegated to a particular "place," and becomes embodied by the Black girls who participate in its production. Further, their voices signal the ways it became particularly powerful for Black girls to begin to understand themselves as part of a larger legacy of fierce Black woman, of the historical trajectory of #Blackgirlmagic.

**Homeplaces**

All students agreed that there should be more spaces like this for Black girls. Despite the initial challenges of the space, all students were clear that spaces like these would be a positive force in Black girls' lives. Kenosha notes, "Every school need to have a program like this. Just for us to have a chance. I bet you it'd be so much of a difference like it'd be a difference in every school." For Kenosha, the class was not only something that she herself enjoyed, but rather, she understands it as a necessary structure in every school serving Black girls. In fact, these spaces are wholly necessary for Black girls to "have a chance." Within Kenosha's statement is a recognition of the myriad of

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[49] Bruh = Does not directly translate to "brother" as it is used towards girls as well. It is used as a way to refer to someone else or as a way to accent something you're saying similarly to "you know what I'm saying?"

obstacles Black girls face in their schools and in life more broadly. Her statement that there would be "so much of a difference" is indicative of what she understands as the current educational Black girl reality.

Ironically, despite the trepidation Black girls initially felt about being in an all Black girl space, they were fierce in their insistence that future spaces remain all-Black. Unfortunately, some students had already heard that the course would be mixed next year, with a non-Black teacher; one student discusses potentially teaching the course herself to preserve the space:

> Tanesha: yeah I wish the class was - we could have the class wit Ms. C again next year. But I'm not gone take it cuz another teacher is gone try to do it. It's gone be like a mixed class it's not gonna be you know focused on us. But yeah [pause]. The other day I had a dream that I was actually runnin the class. Yeah but I could see myself doin somethin like that cuz it's just you know for women - African American women you know like we need stuff like this in schools you know.

Here Tanesha notes that she will not take the course next year because "it's not gonna be focused on us." Although I discuss this in more detail in the following chapter, Black girls strongly critiqued their perceived invisibility on campus, and the ways non-Black girls were given more attention and preferential treatment in their school. Hence, in her desire to preserve a space (finally) carved out for Black girls, Tanesha envisions teaching the course herself because Black girls "need stuff like this in schools…" Students appreciated that you "don't have to worry about other races being in there" and the idea that the space would shift drastically the following year was disheartening.

Another student also expressed how she feels like Black girls need this space in a different way than other students on campus. Daronda notes, "like to me, I feel like different races know more about like their backgrounds, like their momma, when they mommas was kids and stuff like that. Like they know more about that then, I feel like black people do. So it's like, having this class is like, is good." Here we see Daronda conflating a lack of knowledge about Black history with her desire to understand her family and her family's history in a way she assumes families of other races can share with their children. For her, this class helped her understand herself as a part of a historical trajectory she was previously unaware of.

Many of the other students also were angry at the idea that the class would not be preserved for Black girls the following year. Laquita notes, "I don't want it to be mixed. Cuz we already got a Latino club, and Tongan club and we need to just have one club for just all black folks." Noting the lack of exclusively Black spaces on campus, in comparison to exclusive spaces for other non-Black students of color, Laquita is upset that they cannot have a space that is designed specifically for them. Other students made comments such as, "you got me fucked up. Nah man" or "if they make it for Mexicans, I'm gonna be so mad I haven't thought about that, oh my God!"

While the anger stemmed from feeling like they were already not afforded the same privileges as other racial groups on campus, there was also a recognition that Black

girls needed a space where they could learn how to be around each other and appreciate each other. One student noted, "I like the space being all black because – black girls like – if they're not like friends, they're enemies. So it was good to be in the space with people that I didn't know who weren't really judging me and it was – I just think like more people should be like that but it was like a good example of what – how black girls should interact with each other." Harkening back to the discussion of the various negative ways Black girls perceived one another and other Black girls in the beginning of the chapter, here Kenosha notes how significant it was for her to have experience positively interacting with other Black girls. Further, moving beyond knowing each other (I.e. the girls in the room), students developed a sense of the connection between Black women more broadly. Whereas in the beginning of the year, students had difficulty being in a space with other Black girls, at the end of the year, students commented "you'll sit back and think like dang like these are really my sistas" or "It's like you know everybody the same you know we all women, we all black, we all connect so."

Finally, I want to signal that a part of creating homeplaces is the defense of them, but also the acknowledgement that regardless of the various purposes they serve, they are, a purpose in and of themselves. For example, one student commented, "a lot of girls, a lot of black girls, that don't have this class or never even knew about the class, they would probably like it, *like just being in it*" (italics added). In the end, it is simply "being" in the space – having the ability to exist there in a different way than one can exist in other places, that becomes the beauty of it.

**Summary of Chapter**

*Tanesha: You wanted a tight-knit group of girls. You wanted your girls that were gonna be stylin, that were going to be together. And we're here. We did that.*

Overall, the norms, values, and cultural practices that guided the space were heavily rooted in the numerous ways Black girls entered into community with one another, with the Black women in the space, and with Black girls and women more broadly. While Black girls entered the class with an understanding that there was an inherent impossibility in Black girls positively co-existing with one another, the space they produced with one another shifted their perspectives on Black girls individually and collectively. In fact, they developed a defense of Black girls and often levied fierce critiques of all things deemed anti-Black girl. They discussed the ways these shifting perspectives also affected their views of themselves, and the kinds of things they deemed possible for their future selves.

A significant part of that transition was the kinds of communication girls entered into with one another in the space. Their ability to engage in extremely personal and painful conversations necessitated a level of trust with one another that was new and often uncomfortable to achieve. At the same time, their willingness to engage those conversations facilitated the development of trust; in this way, politicized emoting and trust co-constructed one another in their ongoing production of Black girl space. These conversations included but were not limited to relationships and love, domestic abuse,

sexual harassment, complexion and hair, sex and sexuality, and Black women's history. These conversations carved space for Black girls to consider with one another, what it means to be a Black girl in a relationship, and what it means to seek love or give love in a world where Black girl love is often undesired or diminished. At the same time, these kinds of conversations facilitated a necessary leap into Afro-futurisms, and required girls to consider their transitions into womanhood and to imagine themselves with relationships and families of their own. As a part of that, engaging in conversations about domestic abuse both allowed girls the space to unpack past or present abusive relationships (or the relationships of other Black women in their lives), and also, forwarded ideas about the potential power in (and necessity of) Black girl solidarity. Similarly, carving the space to engage the ways Black girls experience sexual harassment from their male counterparts, served to transition various girls' individual experiences into a shared sense of the burden of navigating racialized patriarchy. Likewise, engaging in very difficult conversations about our hair, complexion, and bodies, served as a space to unpack the structural forces behind self-hatred, and the ways Black women of varying shades may support each other in the margin. Similarly, engaging issues of sex and sexuality, ensured that the production of Black girl space resisted heteronormativity, and allowed Black girls with varying sexual orientations to better understand how to support one another from different standpoints. Finally, conversations about Black women's history were particularly powerful in facilitating the Black girls' in this space connection to Black girls and women more broadly, and in helping them to understand their connection to a larger trajectory of #blackgirlmagic.

Perhaps that connection was a part of their fierce defense of the space at the conclusion of the year. Black girls were visibly upset that this homeplace they carved out in the margin would no longer be supported by a physical structure the following year. They had come to believe in the space they created with one another; in stark contrast to their initial opinions of one another and of Black girls more generally, they came to cherish this space and were furious that Black girls would be cast aside once again the following year. Hence, the deliberate act of creating homeplaces in the margin, of carving out space for Black girls to "be," becomes critically important in and of itself. This space became makeshift homeland, where the laws were in opposition to the outside anti-Black world and supported the construction of positive Black girl identities. Within this homeland, Black girls became full citizens, and reimagined themselves in ways precluded by the larger society. The space became a makeshift textbook, remembering and celebrating their historical struggles and resistance, counteracting the myriad of ways their experiences are rendered invisible in their school, in the media, in the world.

While I have frequently referenced the "out there" that is in stark contrast to the "in here" of this space, it is important to understand what that "out there" means specifically in the lives of the Black girls in this study. In the next chapter, I turn to understanding the ways Black girls experience antiblackness in their larger school, and the relationship between the presence of this Black educational sovereign space and the broader ways antiblackness and patriarchy play out within their schools and society.

# Antiblackness in Urban Schools

In June of 2015, a cellphone video captured a white male police officer waving his gun at a group of Black girls in bathing suits at a pool party in a suburb near Dallas. He can be seen subduing one Black girl, Dajerria Becton, by shoving her face into the ground and digging his knee into her back (Cole-Frowe & Fausset, 2015). The following month, in July of 2015, social media exploded with an #ifidieinpolicecustody hashtag in light of the death of a Black woman, Sandra Bland, who police allege committed suicide in a Texas jail cell (Rankin, 2016). Although Sandra Bland was a #Blacklivesmatter activist who was reportedly excited about beginning her new job, and had just attempted to post bail, police allege that she choked herself to death with her bed sheets. In light of this, the #ifidieinpolicecustody grew out of an implied necessity for a living will, where users may announce their post-mortem wishes in the event they die in police custody. Still, later that year, in October 2015, a video surfaced showing a white male police officer viciously slamming a Black girl student to the ground and dragging her across her South Carolina classroom (Fausset & Southall, 2015).

Certainly, all of these cases involve Black girls or women and white male police officers. More importantly though, they all exemplify the ways Black girls are precluded from childhood, the dissonance between "Black" and "woman." In each of these cases, many people questioned whether Dajerria Becton was being unruly, whether Sandra Bland was being combative, or whether the South Carolina teen was being non-compliant. In other words, despite the particularly violent ways in which these girls and women were treated, in the minds of many, it was possible (or likely) that they did something to deserve the brutal treatment they received. Still, others questioned whether it was even possible to imagine, for example, a Black police officer slamming a blonde haired white girl (or a dog for that matter) to the ground and dragging her across a classroom. While these are certainly not the only three instances of violent repression against Black girls and women (or even the only three caught on camera), I use these three examples to illustrate the ways Black girls, inside and outside of school, and Black women more broadly, are excluded from the kinds of protections (automatically) extended to white girls and women.

While scholars have begun to discuss antiblackness in schools, we have little understanding of what antiblackness actually looks like in the educational context. Certainly as antiblackness becomes "permissible" to say, and the media has increased its focus on incidences of violence against Black people en masse, we have some specific examples of the ways antiblackness may play out in schools and classrooms. Still, this chapter aims to consider more broadly, what does antiblackness look like in the everyday context? What are students' daily anti-Black experiences in schools and what are the ways antiblackness as a structure plays out in the lives of students each day? This chapter addresses research question #3 and considers the relationship between the presence of this Black educational sovereign space, and the ways race and gender play out in students' school and in society more broadly.

**Antiblackness in Education**

Specifically, this chapter considers school violence and school safety, school discipline, administrative support, security guards, police, and student-teacher relationships. Further, this chapter explores and nuances the often taken for granted notion of a broader people of color solidarity. In doing so, I discuss the significance of antiblackness as a frame (in relation to other possible frames). As a part of this conversation, I explore how students feel in relation to other students of color on campus, their perceptions of unequal treatment by teachers, administrators, and security guards, and the lack of support structures in place for Black students specifically (as compared to other non-Black students on campus).

**School violence. School safety**. Many students discussed not feeling safe at school and/or being scared to come to school. Unlike many instances in which scholars have discussed schools that serve as "safe havens" for students in particularly difficult neighborhoods, the structural violence students fear outside of school permeates the walls of Jefferson and becomes part and parcel of their educational experience. As a researcher as well, there were times when I felt like my safety was in jeopardy – something I hadn't experienced at any other school I've been a part of. The following excerpt from a voice over after class explores one such incident

*I'm sitting here now in my car. So ummm after school, there was an all out brawl basically outside ummm - it was a fight that led into other fights. As I'm saying this now, I'm watching a ton of cop cars driving over there. One girl had a Taser gun and was definitely like threatening to use it. I think she may have pressed it once like threatening because I heard the sound of it. Ummm a boy was walking away maybe – I don't know but he walked right past me with his back scratched up and his nose bloody. I don't know exactly who was fighting who but ummm it's just indicative of the school culture and the climate and just like it's sooo sooo difficult here. Ummm someone else in the heat of the moment – I forgot what I was gonna say. Honestly, I feel hella happy to be in my car. I feel bad for wanting to leave but I helllla want to leave. It was scary like security guards running around – it felt chaotic and out of control and even more than the girl with the Taser, that bloody boy walking by me was just like – like what is going on here? It's really fucked up (voiceover, 2/25/14)*

While the above voice recording represent my thoughts after one particular incident, Ms. C discussed the very real dangers students face at Jefferson more broadly.

> Ms. C: So last week was all the crazy shit I just told you. Yesterday, we had people with guns walking around the campus looking for one of our students to kill him.
> kihana: Like on campus?
> Ms. C: ON CAMPUS! The kids saw the gun - so it's that kinda shit. I don't care about your hot fries. You can't go out there and there needs to be –

people can't just come in and off this campus - like the community that we're in – I mean shit needs to be taken seriously.

Here Ms. C explains to me that yesterday (a day I was not on campus), there were students on campus with a gun looking for another student to kill him. Ms. C notes the significance of the lack of protection of students in a situation where people can just walk onto campus without being questioned, given a visitor's badge etc. In this instance, as a result of a lack of protective measures, students were allowed on campus with a gun. Students also discuss their own feelings of a lack of safety on campus.

> kihana: Do you worry about that, like people shooting or fighting or something?
> Kenosha:  I don't worry about people fighting, but I do worry about people shooting because you never know like when someone's going to start shooting.  And then you could get caught in the crossfire so I do kind of worry about that.  But that's like why I just like leave earlier.

Here Kenosha discusses being afraid of people shooting at her school and indicates that as a result, she leaves school early. Kenosha has elected not to have a 6$^{th}$ period so she can leave school before the commotion of after school begins. While she notes a shooting can happen at any time, she safeguards herself by eliminating her presence during what she perceives as a particularly dangerous time period of school. Another student, Laquita, also discusses the unease of not knowing what will happen on any given school day:

> Laquita: I wake up scared to come to school.
> Interviewer: Why?
> Laquita: Cuz it's like, everyday it's somethin different at Jefferson, something like there is a fight going on, or talkin bout startin a riot. I was at the riot last year when school first started. And it's just like it's somethin different every day at Jefferson and you don't ever know. It's not gon be the same it's not gon be the same, it's always different everyday, it's always different.

Here Laquita discusses how she wakes up scared to come to school because there is no certainty or guarantee of safety. In fact, she is always aware that some form of violence may occur on campus and her experience in past incidents leave her afraid to go to school. Hence, while some students may discuss not liking school or not wanting to be at school for a variety of reasons, Laquita is clear that for her, fear is a primary concern when she wakes up in the morning.

Other girls also share Laquita and Kenosha's concerns. In the following excerpt from fieldnotes, I discuss the class' response to a lockdown that occurred at school a few days after the boys entered campus with a gun.

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*Today there was a lockdown. It felt chaotic with administrators running through the hallways ensuring all students were in a classroom. No one is allowed out of the room. There is one student from our class who was in the bathroom when the lockdown began and the girls are scared for her. No one is clear whether this is a drill or the real thing. Students are talking about what happened recently where the boys came to school with a gun looking for another boy (a Jefferson student). Students are angry the boys were allowed on campus and they talk about how they feel unprotected by the security guards. They can see the police cars through the window and this scares them as well. Ms. C tries to close the blinds but the students want to be able to see what is happening. Timone is in the corner again talking to her P.O. Again, she is afraid she will be detained and trying to negotiate not coming in. Ms. C doesn't try and calm the girls down; she engages their conversation about feeling afraid and unprotected. Dalesha, the girl who was in the bathroom returns to class. She said she was made to run into a room, that she was scared and still feels scared. One girl starts to cry. A boy who was close to her was murdered recently. It sounds like it's connected to the boys who were on campus with a gun [I think she's saying her friend was a friend of the boy they were looking for]. Other girls begin talking about people they have lost recently or people they "knew of" who were killed recently. The mood is somber. Timone gets off the phone and announces she will have to go in and she's scared she will be detained. [I feel like crying. The space feels heavy and hopeless. I feel scared too. I'm waiting for this to be over and for someone to say what happened – to let us know if everything is okay]. Finally the principal comes by. Lockdown is over. Everything is okay. We are still unclear whether something happened or whether this was a drill. I ask Ms. C after class and she does not know either* (Excerpt *from field notes, 4/10/14*).

One of the things most striking about these fieldnotes is the tension between students previous discussions about being unfairly and overly harshly disciplined, and also feeling unprotected and like the administration doesn't do enough to create protective structures and effective consequences for misbehavior. In the next section, I explore the nuances of the school's disciplinary body and the ways the girls feel at once under-protected and over-disciplined.

**Discipline.** While Black girls discuss feeling unfairly and disproportionately disciplined, they also have a fierce critique of the lack of discipline in their school. In the following excerpt, Laquita discusses the way she perceives the principal's approach to discipline in comparison to her 10th grade principal.

> I'on[50] know, my first year here I was a 10th grader I came like in February. The principal here, he was an okay principal he took charge but when it came to like fights and stuff he will take charge of that. You got into a fight you got suspended. With Dr. Jackson he don't do that, you get into a fight we'll talk, bring your parents, you gotta have a communication, he go through this whole process and they still here. But

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[50] I'on = I don't

when Mr. Jones was here, it was just like we gone talk about it and you know what you did you still gotta leave but you can come back when its time when you learned yo lesson. Dr. Jackson he just- he don't really care to me he don't care. Cuz if you really care class wouldn't be like this it'd be different.

While much of the scholarly literature focuses on the racialized disproportionate disciplining of Black students, Laquita is concerned that there is not enough disciplining happening in her school. From her perspective, there is so much process to go through, that students don't see any potential consequences for affronts like fighting in school. She appreciates how her old principal would talk to students, but he would also enforce a discipline policy that signaled to students that certain behaviors were unacceptable and would not be tolerated. Her old principal would still welcome students back but only after they "learned [their] lesson." This point is significant, as disciplinary actions signal something not only to the student involved, but also, to all of the other students on campus. For Laquita, her old principal's way of disciplining created a safer environment for students overall and (in contrast to her current principal) one where she felt like her principal cared about their well-being.

Timone also discusses why she considers going back to her previous school even though her previous school is also an incredibly challenged school in the district.

> Timone: I ain't gon lie. I was just talkin bout this to Drina. I might go back to Highland to graduate you feel me? It's like Jefferson ain't doin nothin for me out here. Not doin nothin for me. I was at Highland gettin 2.0s and stuff so that's not. Up here, they don't have no type of help up here bruh that be pissin me off I had to tell my P.O.[51] that today.
> kihana:  What do you feel like is the difference?
> Timone: Okay. This how I feel like. Like at Highland. Okay. At Highland they was more stricter like say you know how this is a closed campus? Okay when you leave off campus here you don't get in trouble for it you just get a warning like stop leaving off campus.  At Highland, when you left off campus and you didn't have no pass no nothin they didn't know about you leaving off campus, they'll pull you in the office you get a whole lecture like – here they see you and just be like okay you need not to leave campus no more. But at Highland sometimes you'll get suspended or you'll get detention right then and there like you NOT bout to leave off campus no more.

Timone begins her statement with an indictment of the lack of support structures in place at Jefferson, and the lack of support she feels academically. In fact, she reports discussing this with her parole officer to indicate that she connects her poor academic performance to the fact that there is no help available at her school. Timone connects the lack of

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[51] Parole officer

support structures to a troubling lack of concern for students following school policy. Again, while students have discussed being unfairly or disproportionately disciplined, Timone appreciated how her previous school was more strict and that there were actually consequences for leaving campus during school hours. She notes that although Jefferson is supposed to be a closed campus, the school does not take leaving campus very seriously; while a warning may be levied, there are no real consequences for cutting school. At her previous school, the administration took immediate action when students left campus, signaling to students that breaking the rules and leaving campus during school hours was a serious offense and would not be tolerated. Hence, when Timone indicates that Jefferson "ain't doin nothin for [her]," she is explicit about how the school's lack of support structures and inadequate disciplinary policies indicate a lack of care.

Ms. C also discussed her frustration with the ways students "slip through the cracks" at Jefferson. She noted that even when students receive a detention, it may be followed up with or it may be forgotten about. In other words, from Ms. C's perspective, there was no clear policy or protocol in place to effectively handle discipline issues within the school. When I asked Ms. C to discuss her thoughts on the school's disciplinary policies she commented,

> There is no structure. It's all over the place. You could do something and no consequence - that's why they think they should be able to walk off and on school any time they feel like it. Because that's been what has happened. If you're cool with security, then you get to go out. If you're not cool with security, or you might get hella consequences for like nothing. Or just being assumed to be somewhere. We don't even have - we don't even have a discipline matrix. We don't have a like if you do this, this happens. Like that doesn't exist. Which is ridiculous like how can you have a school in that - that's been in the community for this long - so nothing was - you know things have not and so we just have really severe safety issues here as you've seen. And so whatever there's a lot of reasons for that. Obvious reasons – Jackson's not prepared for this job on different levels. This is his first real principalship - why the fuck would you put somebody that fresh in at Jefferson? Right? And then we don't have consistent SSO presence. They don't like ever - they call out - no one wants to come to Jefferson. So that's why we've been stuck with the people we have even though they're highly unprofessional, not trained, no accountability - cuz the principal job to keep them accountable. And he don't know what he doing and he can't handle them. And so they just off the hook doing whatever - you hear the stories. A lot of that is true. Umm and nobody wants to come to Jefferson.  Principals  - all the people they supposedly hire - supposedly nobody wants to come here.

Similar to Timone, Ms. C explains how the lack of structure in the school's disciplinary policy creates a space where students often feel like they can do whatever they want.

Absent any clear and visible disciplinary system, the "severe safety issues" at Jefferson are continually exacerbated. At the same time, Ms. C acknowledges that there may be severe consequences "like for nothing." In other words, while students may be allowed to break school rules when they feel like it, there are also times when students are disciplined unfairly or instances where they haven't done anything to warrant the response. Although Ms. C perceives many of the security guards to be unprofessional, untrained, and not accountable to anyone, she notes that there is no real way forward because no one will come to work at Jefferson. In fact, the school has had four different principals in four years; clearly Ms. C perceives the current principal to be unprepared for the kind of work that leading Jefferson High entails. As opposed to Ms. C focusing on how the principal cannot control the students, she insists that he is unable to control the staff and as a result, the staff is "off the hook doing whatever." The lack of accountability of the staff creates a space where students are left to navigate the often inappropriate and unfair interactions with adults on campus.

**Security Guards.** The security guards at Jefferson were consistently a main point of conversation in the class and the stories Ms. C and students shared about the security guards' inappropriate behavior were abundant and quite frankly, outrageous. Students used words like "messy," "outta pocket[52]," "childish," "a waste" etc. when referencing the security guards in their school. In fact, while students had various stories to tell about different security guards, all students had a negative perception of the security guards overall. I focus here on one security guard, "Tammy," as she was the lead security guard and all students had at least one seriously inappropriate interaction with her.

Many of the students focused on the ways Tammy made students feel powerless and sent negative messages that exacerbated violence within the school. During a class conversation, students recount an incident where Tammy responded to a boy in a wheelchair who indicated he was being chased.

> Daronda: She be talking about people in wheelchairs. Everything.
> Nakia: You talkin bout that stuff that happened? Yeah there was this boy up in a wheelchair like literally his wheelchair was low like I think y'all seen him around here before just that one problem. So like you know I guess he had some problem I guess he was funkin[53] wit somebody he told us like that you feel me I guess somebody was chasin him and what not so we tell him like if you don't feel safe you feel me like let somebody know.
> Tanesha: Oh the one that used to go here?
> Daronda: Yeah! Yeah and he was like he didn't wanna tell nobody because the way Tammy made him feel. Like Tammy just shit on him[54].
> Nakia: She gon say, 'he ain't doin nothin but whinin - why? No he betta get on the bus.'

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[52] Outta pocket = Out of line; this phrase is used to indicate when someone has done something clearly wrong (as in "she outta pocket for stealing from her mama")

[53] Funkin = To have a problem with someone – to be in some form of ongoing feud

[54] Shit on him = Shot him down in some way – made him feel low

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Daronda: And she be tellin us like 'don't believe him that's just a lyin ass muthafucka' and I'm tellin her like you don't know him.

Nakia: No! No! You don't know that nigga - I mean - y'all know, you don't know that man from a can of paint and you gon tell him - and he's TELLING YOU that his life is in danger you feel me like he fears his life somebody just chased him damn near yesterday and yo ass gon tell him -

Daronda: That he lyin

Nakia: No, he lyin? Who the fuck is you? You not in his chair nor is you in his shoes. And I don't appreciate her tellin any - no that grown ass B!

In this instance, the girls allege that although this boy expressed to Tammy that he was being chased and wanted to find a ride home, Tammy insisted that he get on the bus and told him he was lying. She also discussed with other girls the fact that she did not believe him, that he was just whining. Here, as opposed to being protected by the security guards, a student was made to feel like he was being a "punk" for requesting to call for a ride. The fact that he was disabled, reinforces for students that while the security guards may act like children, they may also bully them and exercise their power in ways that are counterproductive to a healthy school environment.

Students also discussed the ways that the security guards, and Tammy in particular, shared information about their private lives in inappropriate ways. Daronda recounts,

I got into it wit Tammy before. I got into it wit Tammy before and she put my whole business out there. Like, when I was like a tenth grader. Uh we was in the gym and I guess we weren't supposed to be in the gym cuz it's, the PE teacher wasn't in there, so she came up in here thinking like she was gonna smash on everybody[55], yelling at everybody and stuff like that. So I took my sweet time to leave the gym or whatever, and so I guess that made her hella mad, and she went out, she went outside and as we got out the gym or whatever, she started yelling about how I got pregnant at a young age...so she just try to do hecka stuff.

Here Daronda recalls an instance in which Tammy shared aspects of Daronda's personal life and sexual history in front of a number of other students, seemingly as revenge for Daronda taking too long to leave the gym. While clearly embarrassing and potentially emotionally harmful, Daronda notes that Tammy deliberately tries to do things to students; as opposed to protecting students and ensuring their safety, Tammy facilitates an environment in which students feel unsafe and uncared for.

While other students also recounted times in which Tammy called them names such as "bitch," "ugly," "thirsty[56]," etc., or shared aspects of their personal lives in

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[55] To smash on someone is to tell them off or let them know something in a very authoritative way

[56] Thirsty = Someone who craves sexual or romantic attention and appears desperate

inappropriate ways, many girls explicitly highlighted the ways in which they don't believe the security guards are there to protect them. When I asked Tanesha how she felt about the security guards in her school, she responded,

> They're a waste of time…they don't do they job how they think they do they job…like…they you know like they sneaky like you know they just here for the money and just here for the drama. They not here to protect us and make sho we safe and to help us you know so…yeah.

Tanesha reveals that the security guards are only at school for their paychecks and to participate in various "drama" with students as opposed to ensuring students' safety and well-being. Hence, more than just being a "waste of time," the security guards actually contribute to creating an unsafe environment for students at Jefferson. Another student made clear that security guards' lack of care and attention explicitly made her feel unsafe:

> Cuz last year Jefferson had got shotten into like where the- that's why they got two bullet holes in the door, all you see is two bullet holes. Cuz somebody was shootin and the security guard sititn there watchin. Just watchin. Cuz one of the boys, it was like two boys who ran out towards the bullets and the security guard sittin there watchin like- just watchin. I'm like, they ain't gon do nothin y'all just sittin there watchin but they could have got shot or somethin. They don't care. It's just like if somebody was fightin, Tammy'll let em fight. She don't care. She feel like if they don't care, she shouldn't even care. But it's the other way around. If they don't care you should be the adult and be responsible and you should care and stop it. But now that you don't care they could get hurt or somethin. But they just don't care.

Here this student explicitly discusses the security guards' lack of care toward students, and their absolute refusal to assist in instances where they could be helpful. In the first instance, where the security guards refuse to stop students from running outside when there has been a shooting, she notes that the boys could have been shot. Moreover, she notes that when people fight, Tammy takes the position that if students are fighting, they must not care about themselves and as a result, she does not care either. Students spoke often about security guards acting like children or refusing to act like adults; here this student expresses how the adult thing to do in this situation is to care (even if it appears that students don't) as opposed to sitting idly by and passing judgment on students. Specifically, this student indicates that Tammy's lack of care could "get students hurt."

At Jefferson, the security guards become yet another structure within the school that facilitates an unsafe and at times violent school atmosphere. The body of adults hired by the school to ensure the school is a safe place for students to get an education, only increases the kinds of danger students face. Whether students fear being humiliated, verbally assaulted, or unprotected in the face of physical danger, the overall sentiment is that the security guards operated against the students, with the support of the

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administration. When I asked Ms. C how come no one reports all of these things to the administration, she replied, "we do but they don't do anything." In other words, while she still encourages students to follow the proper procedure and file a formal complaint (and has filed them herself), everyone is aware that the response will be inadequate if there is a response at all.

**Police & School Security Officers (SSOs).** Likewise, students often discussed what it meant to have police officers in their schools (SSOs) and also to consistently have local city police in front of and at their school. Again, while many would consider a police presence to be a structure that may ameliorate school safety concerns, students often felt quite the opposite. Importantly, I want to reiterate that students' feelings are not rooted in a lack of desire for protection; much to the contrary, students articulate very clearly that they want protection, but they do not believe the SSOs or the police actually serve this purpose.

Ms. C indicated that the SSOs within the school have actually contributed to a decreased sense of school safety

> Ms. C: In terms of the feeling of safety the school's gotten worse. They started doing like random searches on people and the SSO's putting their hands on girls.
> kihana: Who does the searches?
> Ms. C: The SSOs.
> kihana: Really?
> Ms. C: And you're not supposed to have like male with females and they're not observing any of that. They're searching people who had just got out their cars from their moms. It's pretty crazy.

In chapter four, I discussed the ways Ms. C is careful about the boundaries she and her students create with one another around physical affection. Ms. C discussed how as a result of the high number of students she has with histories of sexual abuse and trauma, she is careful to allow students to negotiate if and when they desire physical affection. In a complete disregard for the bodies of Black girls at Jefferson, Ms. C indicates that male SSOs are conducting stop and frisk searches on her female students. Beyond a disregard for the potential discomfort this kind of interaction may cause for students, this practice is simply, against the law. This becomes one more example of the ways the impossibility of Black humanity plays out on the extralegal "frisking" of Black girl's bodies.

More than just this kind of treatment by SSOs in their school, students also discussed the ways they perceive the police to have negative feelings and opinions about Black people more broadly. Laquita notes,

> Me personally, I think... I think black people are more like - what's the word like we attract the police. Like they more caught attention by policemen they look at us like criminals or done somethin bad or robbery and stuff so they're more attracted to us then they would verse like Mexican, cuz I mean usually Mexicans goin around doin stuff but you

don't really see it that often the only thing you see on the news, black person got shot, or they robbed a store or they did this they did that. That somethin you see pretty much every day but you don't really see like Mexicans on TV

Here Laquita asserts that police are socialized to fear Black people or associate them with crime in a society where the media portrays a consistent loop of Black criminality. This conflation of Black and criminal leads police to target Black people in ways that they may not target other racial groups who also commit crimes. In other words, there is something about blackness in particular that lends itself to deviance and criminality – something that draws the repressive state apparatus to our bodies *in particular*.

The notion that police had an *always already* negative opinion about Black students created a space where the Black girls in this study felt like there was no space for positive police interactions. Speaking about how it's difficult for Black folks to see police in a positive light Ebony says, "We're a target. And they see us as a threat so you know we see them as a threat you know." In other words, students feel like as a result of being Black, they are seen as a threat by police. If the police are threatened by blackness more broadly, this signals the impossibility of a protective relationship between the police as a structure, and Black people as human beings. Where police fail to recognize Black humanity, Ebony understands the relationship between Black people and the police as one where Black people become a target, and understand police as a "threat."

Other students also discussed feeling unsafe when they saw police in front of or in their schools. Tanesha notes, "I feel like the environment not safe if every time I walk outside I see a police officer. Or like somethin goin on you know. That's how I feel." Other students discussed the ways their experiences (and the experiences of Black people more broadly) with police outside of the school directly affect their inability to see them as a protective force. When one student discussed how she does not think Black people have a positive relationship with the police, I asked her to elaborate and explain why she thinks that way:

A lot of people feel like that because when someone gets murdered in Jackson[57], many of the cases are unsolved and then if it was like somewhere in Porterville[58], they would know who the killer was. They'd put them in jail for life. And basically it's just – it's unfair and also because there's like police brutality and racial profiling. So that's like – a couple of reasons. There's like different reasons for everybody, but as a whole, those are reasons I see.

This student explains that many people don't believe that the lives of poor Black folks are weighted in the same ways as more affluent white ones. When Black people are killed, it is commonplace and accepted for police not to devote energy to solving the crimes.

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[57] Pseudonym for city where Jefferson high is located
[58] Pseudonym for a neighboring more affluent, predominantly white city

However when white people are murdered, their killers are sought, and punished to the highest extent of the law. Further, more than just being ignored or deemed unimportant, Black people are also actively profiled and brutalized by police. Hence, on the one hand, Black lives do not matter, and on the other, their bodies bear the brunt of police terror. Moving beyond Black negligence, racial profiling, and police brutality more broadly, students also shared numerous stories of their own negative interactions with police. Students discussed being followed, male family members being called the "n word," having guns put to their heads as children during raids of their homes, and being fondled inappropriately during unprovoked searches. Their own experiences, and the experiences of Black people en masse, led students to believe that police were against them and that police would either be unnecessarily brutal, or unhelpful and non-protective, in the event their assistance may have been needed. Daronda notes,

> Cuz it's like, it's like more like when you hear stuff about the police and then it's like, when it comes down to like black people in these situations, it's like, I don't know I feel like police officers like, I don't know how to really explain it [pause]. It's like, they show like different type of feelings towards like black people then there would be like to a normal like white person or something, so it's like, I don't know like I just feel like black people really just don't like the police, like…

A normal white person. Daronda notes that she feels like police have different feelings toward Black people than they would to a "normal white person." While Daronda's words speak for themselves, I want to emphasize the way in which she understands police to be able to see the humanity in white people (look, a normal person), while they look at Black people "differently." The conflation of "normal" and "white" signals the ways Daronda understands that for police, Black people are not quite normal; they may be *something* else entirely.

All of these experiences and feelings leave many students feeling like there is nothing positive that results from a police presence on campus. One student discusses how she does not feel police will be helpful even if they are on campus during a violent incident:

> When I see police outside, I just think it's not going to make a difference. There's still going to be like violence and like people like F the police basically. So like it doesn't—I don't feel safe even when the police is here because like you never know like when someone's going to start shooting or someone's going to start fighting and it seems like they're always—like when something happens, like they don't know what's going on even when they're right in front of the school or they're right in back of school. They don't know what's going on. It's like what are you here for?

For many students, when police are not actively engaging in some form of police brutality, they are negligent towards the safety and well-being of Black people. For this student, the police presence does nothing to curtail a potential shooting and their being there becomes a mockery of the lack of protective structures available for Black students.

Timone expresses her disdain for seeing police at her school and echoes above student's statement that the police will not be helpful in the event there is a safety issue on campus:

> When I see the police I just be like y'all not shit either. Y'all don't try to stop shit up here like. Like y'all don't. They don't - they not worried about us like, like the policeman up here, it's not gone help. The police ain't worried - what? They not worried about us. Y'all do what y'all gone do what y'all gone do. That's why when it's a fight goin on they sit in they cars. And just park there like talkin on the speaker like everybody need to go home. Why you didn't get out the car and go you feel me, direct some stuff. What y'all scared?

Here Timone notes that police are completely unhelpful in the event something occurs on campus. She doesn't believe the police care about the students and hence allow students to fight one another because it makes no difference to them. Perhaps in line with recent news stories of racist text messages exchanged between San Francisco Police officers (Fuller, 2016), these cops are inclined to let the monkeys do as they do. Even still, Timone's final words indicate some level of desire for the police to actually function in a manner that is helpful to Black folks – the way they interact with the "normal" white people Daronda mentioned earlier. Despite her clear disdain for the police, when she questions, "Why didn't you get out the car and go…direct some stuff," this signals the heartbreaking way in which Timone clings to a sliver of hope that the police could be different.

Finally, I want to resist the simplification of this narrative into one between racist white cops and Black kids. Rather than focusing on whether a police officer was Black or non-Black, students took issue with the uniform – with what the police represent as a collective force in opposition to Black students. In the excerpt below, Timone is clear that she feels the same way (if not worse) about Black cops:

> This how I look at it. I'm not gone lie, if you a black cop, I feel you should fuck wit yo black people. Give the black people some passes or something like nigga you black - you - what is you doin? It be black cops just hella cocky like nope you goin to jail like hella bootsy[59]. Like bruh, you're black bruh. We got the same ass story. I prolly know yo damn mama. Like bruh. Be cool like don't try to make it seem like y'all just all bout it bout it and

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[59] "Bootsy" = "whack" or "uncool" or something that makes one look undeserving of respect

classy and shit. Like black cops is just like hella bootsy to me now like [whispering] irritate me.

For Timone, while she can understand Black people's interactions with non-Black police officers as racialized, she struggles with the ways Black cops function in the same ways, despite their blackness. Black cops, Timone notes, should have more understanding for the daily struggles of Black people and "give them some passes." From her perspective, a shared blackness means that "[they] got the same story," and Black cops knowledge of that story – the story of existing while Black – should render Black humanity possible in their interactions. Instead, Black cops become an intricate part of whiteness ("classy and shit") and regardless of their skin, appear only as blue.

In fact, all of the security guards at Jefferson High School were Black. The principal was Black. The vice principal was Black. I reiterate that to highlight that antiblackness is not about non-Black people treating Black people poorly; rather, it is about the antagonistic relationship between blackness and the impossibility of humanity. Just as much as Black people experience antiblackness, Black people can also, as individuals operating in ways that support and maintain anti-Black structures, become servants of antiblackness. Hence, at Jefferson High, the fact that the administration is predominantly Black, does nothing to resist the anti-Black structures they support and reproduce in their interactions with Black students.

**Teachers.** In addition to issues of school violence, school safety, and the structures that are supposed to protect students from these issues but often end up exacerbating them, students are also consistently navigating problematic experiences with teachers in their school. While numerous students complained about teachers being unwilling or perpetually unavailable to help them academically, Black girls also shared more biting stories about instances where teachers blatantly put them down, acted unfairly, and inappropriately. One day when Kenosha came to class particularly sullen, Ms. C asked her what was wrong. After some prodding she discussed how her teacher in her previous period responded to her when she asked her a question about the classwork: "Are you so stupid that you can't figure it out? I already explained it twice!" Another student, Timone, discussed how her teacher was explicit in her disbelief that Timone was a capable student:

> Yeah when my English teacher told me. [Elevating voice] WHEN MY ENGLISH TEACHER - one of my English teachers told me in front of the principal -she was like I have zero faith in her being in my class. So I told her well then there's no point in me bein in your class if you been feelin like that you shoulda been let me know. That's prolly why the fuck you not passin me now. Cuz you just - oh you just got zero faith in me. I ain't never heard no teacher tell no student oh yep, I got zero faith in her. But when my parents in the room, 'oh yeah she's good in class, I like you know she may be on and off sometime but she's always doing her work.' But in front of the principal, you don't have no faith in me so like what you tellin my parents that for like oh yep she's good, I appreciate her being

in my class I like her all that. No. I ain't. Don't don't disrespect me like that. And den when I got out the hall[60], I asked half of my teachers like can I get my work they said you're not gonna catch up so. I felt disrespected like what you mean I ain't gone catch up. Like, I was in jail. How the hell - what you wanted me to do? I couldn't do nothin - I couldn't tell them jail people let me go to regular school and then come back. No so I felt disrespected like I felt like y'all disrespected my parents by tellin them Imma give her her work when she get out and I didn't get it and all of that see nope.

Not only does Timone's teacher publically dismiss Timone's potential in her classroom, but according to Timone, she also shares a different message in front of Timone's parents. Clearly aware that her behavior towards Timone is inappropriate, Timone's teacher develops a different narrative when adults who will support Timone are present. However, when Timone is unprotected with only another member of the administration present, Timone's teacher is frank about her lack of faith in Timone's ability. More than this one teacher, Timone discusses half her teachers refusing to give her "her work" after she has served time in juvenile hall because they do not believe she will catch up. Although they have promised her parents she will receive the work, when she requests it, they refuse, indicating that it is a waste of their time. Timone continually expresses feeling "disrespected" as she has no recourse when her teachers interact with her in ways she clearly understands as inappropriate.

      Many other students also discussed instances in which they felt disrespected by their teachers. For example, students shared stories of teachers (like the security guards) sharing in appropriate and unsolicited comments regarding various aspects of their lives; at the same time, students did not feel like their teachers made any attempts to get to know them as students or as people more generally.  One student notes,

I feel like they don't get – I don't feel like, I feel like they don't know a lot of they students. I can always say Ms. C know me. I can say that all the rest of my teachers, they don't know they students. I feel like they be too busy. I feel like they be too busy worrying about just our work, instead of knowing us, cause at the end of the day, the work, when somebody is not feelin too good, somebody not, somebody goin through stuff, you not gon figure out what it is if you don't know them. So its like 'that's not our problem' but I feel like my teachers should really just, I feel like more teachers should, really um, get to know they students more and then start the education

For this student, if her teachers do not know her, then it becomes impossible for them to "start the education" because they can't be aware of the various things are experiencing. While clearly teachers are rampantly overworked and underpaid, for Black students in

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[60] Shorthand for juvenile hall

particular, teachers having an understanding of the larger context of their lives is a significant part of their ability to educate them. This student indicates that sometimes students may be "going through stuff" that prevents them from performing in the classroom; absent an understanding of that, teachers may perceive students' behavior (at best) as a lack of effort.

Timone is more explicit in her belief that for Black students in particular, there is a strong connection between teachers knowing their students and student success. As a part of discussing the myriad of reasons she does not like school and does not believe that Jefferson meets the needs of Black students, Timone indicated that she wanted to create an all-Black school. Below I ask her about what the teachers in her school would be like.

> kihana: You said what your school would be like. Would you also have all-Black teachers? Do you think it makes any difference?
> Timone: Yeah I think it would make a difference cuz it's gone be like. Like if I had a school, I'd have my homies be my teachers like. My niggas. I have my hood. Like it's gone be like a school where everybody really just know each other like from diapers though like nigga I grew up wit you. Feel me? Like all these teachers that work here they don't know each other from a can of paint they just know each other from being in training and all that other stuff. Like my school all my teachers gone know each other. Some of em might be sisters and cousins some of em might be datin. Y'all gone know each other and the kids I want to go there - the kids that I want to go to the school - I want them to be the kids that be like - like I was molested or something like or I was put in prostitution or something like I been in jail all my life or woomp woomp woomp[61] or I'm in foster care I just need education like my school would be that kinda school like. Dem the kinda kids I would want to go to my school so they can know like since you was a prostitute you don't - you - what's two times two? You don't know that prolly. Come learn it. You was in foster care. You was just prolly white washed. Come learn about yo real people. Like dat. My school gon go[62] though. My school would be like the best school on the chart like all my kids would have A's I would make sure. I would make sure I had people there thas able to talk to my kids like and let them know like we really here. [Pause] We really here for you.

Timone answers my question that yes, the teachers in her school will be exclusively Black. Still, she quickly moves beyond that to indicate that it is not simply about having Black teachers. For Timone, it is particularly important to have Black teachers that have an intimate knowledge of the experiences of their students. In Timone's ideal school, both teachers and students will know each other "from diapers" and may even be dating or related in some way. She contrasts this to the teachers in her school who she doesn't

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[61] "Woomp woomp woomp" = etc. etc. or so on and so forth

[62] "My school gone go" = my school will be great or my school will be a hit

think know each other "from a can of paint" or who only know each other from "being in training." Given that she wants to serve the students most impacted by poverty, antiblackness, patriarchy etc., it becomes especially significant for teachers to know their students and to have a greater understanding of the structural barriers they face that create experiences of sexual abuse, prostitution, incarceration, foster care and so forth. Timone notes that all of her students would have A's because she would ensure that the adults in her school were able to talk to students and let them know "we really here. We really here for you."

Unfortunately, the Black girls in this study did not believe many of their teachers were there for them, knew them, or respected them. While I will engage this idea more in the next section, I want to signal the ways students perceived their teachers to treat them poorly specifically because they were Black. In the excerpt below, I ask Kenosha about whether she thinks her teachers respect her:

> kihana: Do you feel like your teachers respect you?
> Kenosha: Umm, half yes I do, half of them do I feel like they, some of them don't respect me I feel like, I mean most of them don't but I feel like this one that don't respect me I feel like that person is just, I don't, I feel like that person have a – I'm not gone say they racist cause I don't know if it's racism, I don't, I just feel like that person should really work on talking to students differently or focus on or um try – how can I say it, work on, work on her students more like work- like work on how to handle students the same way, instead of differently cuz, its not go get you nowhere
> kihana: She's white?
> Kenosha: Yeah she, I feel like she treats African- American's disrespectful like, I'll say a cuss-- I say 'damn,' 'get out of my classroom!' Latinos, they'll be like 'bitch this and that', 'oh it's okay, do yo work.' No, it don't work for me, I don't, that don't work for me, when I, and when that, when that happens to me, I feel like that why I, that's the, that right there, you tellin me to attack you, oh you tellin me to go like go off on you, cause its like you disrespectin me like, you make me go out but he won't go out, that's disrespectful to me so …

While initially Kenosha is hesitant to attribute this teacher's behavior to racism, she is clear that the teacher should learn how to "handle students the same way." When I ask Kenosha if the teacher is white, she quickly notes that she feels like she treats Black students differently from other students. Where she may say, "damn" and be thrown out of the classroom, Latino students were allowed much more leeway with the kind of language they could use without reprimand. For Kenosha, the racialized treatment is so blatant – the disrespect so clear, that she would be justified in attacking her teacher. Rather than one example of a teacher demonstrating preferential treatment toward non-Black students, Kenosha's story is indicative of what students describe as rampant and overt differential treatment between Black and non-Black students on campus more broadly. In the following section, I problematize hegemonic notions of a people of color

or POC solidarity, and explore why antiblackness exists in tension with the neo-liberal multicultural imagination.

**Antiblackness and Multiculturalism**

When conceptualizing what it means to exist as a person of color in a white supremacist society, we often utilize a paradigm that distinguishes those racialized white from those racialized non-white – or to use a less white-centric framing, people of color and non-people of color. This framing often makes sense; where white supremacy is the hegemonic racial ideology, all peoples racialized as non-white, suffer within a racial hierarchy where they are less than. Still, this framing often presumes a solidarity between people of color (against white supremacy) that does not make room for, or account for, the ways that Black people *specifically* must navigate antiblackness within people of color spaces. In this section, I want to trouble the idea of automatic solidarity and explore the ways Black students felt their experiences were very different from non-Black students in their school. I focus here on Latinos and Tongans specifically, as these were the two other majority non-Black groups on campus, and the two groups students referenced most in their discussions. I consider the ways Black students "feel" different from other non-Black students and the ways Black students perceive they are treated differently in class, and in the larger school. I also explore the ways Black students perceive non-Black students of color to have more structural supports dedicated to non-Black students. (I.e. a Latino club, or a Polynesian club).

**Black as different.** One of the questions I asked in my final interview with the girls in the class was, "what is it like to be a Black girl at Jefferson?" Laquita's response helps us begin to think about the ways in which being Black means something different in an anti-Black context.

> It's real hard. They look at us bein, the opposite or somebody who different. Like they see Mexicans and Whites and Tongans and they just one whole. But it's like, we just a complete separate, you got a big old piece of pie and it's just that one lil piece just sittin out. And it's like they look at us bein ratchet, loud, and all that but in deep down we not like that.

According to Laquita, Black girls are the opposite of all of the other students on campus. Here Laquita groups Mexicans, Tongans, and white students together as "one whole" whereas Black students are the "little piece of pie" sitting apart from the larger whole. The implication of her saying Black girls are seen in these negative stereotypical ways, is that those other groups (whether they sometimes exhibit these behaviors or not), are not viewed in this way. In other words, being a Black girl at Jefferson signals something different (and worse) than being racialized as a non-Black person.

Another student, Timone, noted that she feels like non-Black students of color receive more attention than Black students. When I ask her to elaborate on why she thinks this is, she notes,

Because it's like - they out. They stand out more. They not known for really droppin out or they not known for doin this and doin that. It's like African Americans just known for doin stuff - we're in the papers. We're known - we known - most African Americans killed. Latinos get killed - you not hearing about - you not really hearing about them getting killed on the news - it's more African American man gettin killed. We just in there. Like we just - we just a disruption basically. That's all we known for is fuckin' up.

Although Timone stated previously that non-Black students of color receive more attention, in her elaboration, she frames her answer within the heightened negative attention Black students receive. In other words, non-Black students of color, in comparison to Black students in this context, "stand out" and are recognized for not being like their Black peers. Timone attributes this to the ways the media conflates Blackness and criminality and violence; while Timone doesn't believe that Black people are the only ones committing crimes or being murdered (Latinos get killed), she is clear that Black people are represented in a way that makes them "known." In fact, she argues, Black people are *only* known for the ways they disrupt society ("we a disruption basically"). Hence, the reason BlackCrit, in its exploration of antiblackness in education, proceeds with a wariness about uncritical multiculturalism is precisely because "Black people become—or rather, remain—a problem, as the least assimilable to this multicultural imagination…" (Dumas & ross, 2016, pg.16).

**Antiblackness & teachers.** Similarly with teachers, Black girls extensively discussed their feelings that they are treated differently from non-Black students of color in their classrooms. Tanesha discusses how she believes teachers "go more for the Latino students." When I asked her why she felt this way, she replied,

I feel they go more towards the Latino students because their parents and where their parents came from because many of the Latinos, like their parents are like, no offense, but they're like illegal immigrants and they have to go through all these obstacles. But I feel like that isn't a reason why you should like lean more towards them and stuff. I feel like it should be equal and if you want to bring up like obstacles and stuff, like African Americans face obstacles every day too, like not having both of their parents, having single moms, and going and living in violent communities. Latinos aren't the only people that go through stuff.

Here Tanesha shares her view that teachers favor Latino students because of a belief that they face more obstacles in their lives, while simultaneously diminishing the challenges that African Americans face. For Tanesha, teachers position Latino students as more deserving of their energy and attention to the detriment of Black students. A part of the impossibility of Black humanity is the inability for some teachers to recognize Black students as people who have feelings, who go through things, who "face obstacles every

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day too." Still, the teachers Tanesha references may be more readily able to legitimate the struggles of non-Black students who navigate (real) obstacles.

Similar to the narrative Kenosha shared earlier, students also perceived teachers to enact explicitly racialized disciplinary practices within their classrooms. Timone also discusses how teachers respond differently when Black students are perceived to be being disruptive vs. Mexican students.

> Sometime a Mexican could do something and it'll be like one more warning for dem. Like a African American do something and it be like just get out. I don't even got time to be explaining myself. It's like they feel we don't like - we just a disruption. We don't listen. One warning and you out.

Timone feels like Black students are sent out of the classroom more readily than Mexican students and teachers don't give them the same opportunities to explain themselves, as if what they may have to say is irrelevant. For the second time, we see Timone note that Black students exist as (only) a disruption. Although she doesn't complete her sentence, Timone is clear that the teachers' treatment of Black students is related to something they "feel" about them, as opposed to a specific thing they have done. In that case, giving students a chance to explain themselves is futile; they will still always, already, be who (or what) they are.

Another student as well discussed how even when Black students are the extreme minority in a class, they are still singled out and treated differently than Latino students. She comments, "Its like, how can you do that? And its like, 3 African- American people in your class, and you got a lot of Latinos in your class, so its like how can you do that to us, but not to them? Its – that's not – I can't." Here, this student perceives the disproportionate disciplining of Black students to be even more egregious given the sparse number of Black students within the class. In the end of her comments, although she tells the story retroactively, she still struggles to make sense of what happened and seems to not be able to find the words to articulate her feelings about it.

More than the racialized disciplinary practices students shared, they also discussed the ways teachers had higher expectations for their non-Black students. Black students are effectively over disciplined, and under-encouraged in their classrooms. When talking about the difference between her experience and Mexican students' experience, Tanesha commented, "I think it's different cuz they want them to you know like they force them to do better and they always on em and like always want them to do good grades and like it's just way different like." According to the Black girls in this study, while many teachers pay attention to Black students in the process of sending them out of the classroom, they fail to demonstrate that same level of consideration when it comes to encouraging students to succeed academically.

**Black humanity, Black loss.** Black girls also discussed the ways in which they feel they are treated differently than non-Black students by administrators and other school staff. Earlier in this chapter I discussed students' critiques of their school's disciplinary policies, the ways they felt like they are allowed to "run wild" and what this signals to them as Black students in the school. I also discussed how they felt like when

discipline does happen, it is often arbitrary and doesn't match the alleged offense, and the ways they feel excessively disciplined in their classrooms as compared to non-Black students. Moving beyond the classroom, Timone discusses the ways she understands discipline within her school as explicitly racialized.

> They slick with everything at Jefferson like y'all do not understand I be getting so mad like - I be like the Mexicans can go to the back feel me, smoke they weed, soon as they see a African American go back there, 'what y'all doin back there?' 'Get up here.' And don't even see the Latinos smoking. Like what? What you mean? That's - feel me?

Timone feels like Black students are disciplined for actions that Mexican students are not; when she says, "they don't even *see* the Latinos smoking," she alludes to the ways that as a result of Black people being expected to do certain things, the administration more readily recognizes when they behave in ways the administration expects from them – in ways that are in line with the *always already* understandings they have of Black students.

Students also reported being treated differently when it came to losses they experienced – the times when students from Jefferson or within their community were murdered. I quote Timone here at length as her comments in their entirety are critical in understanding the way she's interpreting the racialized response to Black death vs. non-Black death, and Black grief vs. non-Black grief.

> Like when Amari died. All the security guards was like [whispering] "ohhhh...yeah everybody they at T[63] house"...why is y'all worried about what we doing? Y'all know we wasn't gone come to school c'mon now our nigga just got killed. Y'all know we wasn't coming to school. And with that at the school too - I feel like when he died, they didn't - I'm talkin bout they was tellin us go to class everyday. That's just like if y'all was going to school and one of y'all patnas[64] died in the middle of the school year, you ain't gone want to go to no damn class after you seen this dude EVERY day, you done - he finna[65] graduate too you be with him everyday and all of a sudden he just get killed. And we come to school and y'all just like nope, go to class. But when the Tongans died, oh they can be outta class 'oh y'all need somewhere to go vent?'
>
> kihana: Really?
>
> Timone: Y'all sho didn't offer that shit to us! What? I mean y'all gave us a room in the back but other than that, we could only go to that room if we was crying or something. Like if we was just sittin out, like y'all didn't know we prolly wasn't really ready to cry and shit, we still thinkin about

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[63] T is a nickname Timone uses for Amari

[64] Patna = friend – often a close friend or someone one spends a lot of time with

[65] Finna = About to (in this instance, "he's about to graduate")

this shit like this nigga really gone, this shit is not true…and I sat there and Jackson came out like you need to go home or something because you're not going to class. I said 'bruh [long pause], is you serious?' You should be like lemme let her vent. When the Tongans died I'm talkin bout they had bottles up here, they was leaving the bottles up HERE. They was drinkin and stuff like we was…and then when we come to school it's like y'all - y'all need to go to class. We're still hurt bruh! We're still venting. Ain't no - Imma tell you right now, to this day, ain't nobody still got over Amari death cuz we still go to this school. For us, that shit is still gon hit like we still go to this school like, we seen him around this school he posed to graduate everything so we- c'mon now like - no. That shit still hits… And then they be tryna make it seem like oh woomp woomp woomp another young - another youngster done died so I mean y'all used to this shit - I mean no lie, I'm used to this shit. Now when somebody die I'm just like [pause], who next? Who else gone die? I don't be trippin no more. [Long pause]. But like I seen T around the school every day. It's not like I was not wit him - I was wit him every day - even outside of school. Feel me? It ain't no - it's not just. It's not the same I mean goin here is not the same. Bein at this school not the same. It's not - it's - ain't nothin the same about this school. This school is just not - it's just not it for me no more like. I'm just not meant to be here. Like he not here no more. Like that wasn't my nigga or nuthin but you feel me I like - that was my day one[66]. And you feel me? But they don't see that though. They don't care like. You feel me? The Tongans die, they be havin Poly day and shit. Like all that like y'all don't care what we go through. Y'all don't y'all don't really care. Cuz if y'all cared y'all woulda been tried to help us like - I know you goin through this lemme try to get you these classes. I know these classes prolly gone be too much on you and you gon do this or let me - let me put you on independent study so you can take some time off or and you come back or you know like y'all - they didn't do none of that. It was no support. When the Tongans died, all the principals – 'everything's gonna be okay. Woomp woomp woomp'. Wit us it was just like 'fuck what you goin through, go to class.' Like all that other shit. I didn't care though. I wasn't I wasn't I wasn't listening to my I was not listening I was doin I was doin my thang. I wasn't caring.

In the beginning, it appears that Timone's frustration centers mainly around the security guards' lack of care or understanding surrounding the death of her friend. However, as she concludes her statement, she mentions that when the Tongans experience a death, they are treated in a manner that reflects the weight of the occurrence and they are (at minimum) offered somewhere to grieve. While an unrestricted grieving space wasn't

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[66] My day one = someone one has been close to for a long period of time – someone one grew up with.

offered to the Black students, they were given a room to go to if they were visibly crying. In a fierce critique of this process, Timone questions whether the administration understands that different people grieve differently – that visible tears are not the only markers of needing to take space and time. Further, according to Timone, the Tongan students are not given these same kinds of parameters around how they are allowed to grieve – even where that may include violating school policies such as drinking on campus. As Timone continues to discuss how she felt about her close friend who was murdered, she insists, "but they don't see that though. They don't care." It's as if Timone doesn't believe that the school is capable of understanding the notion that she is grieving – the possibility of this loss meaning something to her. In fact, she implies the normalization of Black death and the ways in which the school administration assumes the students are accustomed to the murders and hence, unmoved by them ("another youngster done died…y'all used to this shit"). Yet, with the Tongan students, the school facilitates Poly Day[67], an opportunity for them to build with one another collectively and publically express their grief and collective healing. Timone continues, "But y'all don't care what we go through." Perhaps taking a page out of Kanye West's book, Timone is essentially saying, "Jefferson High doesn't care about Black people."

While her critique is fierce in and of itself, Timone forwards specific suggestions as a part of her overall narrative. In other words, it's not just that her school doesn't care about Black people, it's that if they did, they would demonstrate that care via their actions. While the administration verbally comforts the Tongan students, according to Timone, they implicitly tell the Black students, "fuck what you goin through, go to class." Timone ends her discussion of this topic by repeatedly claiming she was not listening – that she did not care, and yet, clearly the experience left a lasting impression on her.

**Structural supports.** In addition to being treated differently during individual instances of Black suffering, students also signaled the ways they perceived non-Black students of color to have more structural supports dedicated to non-Black students. When I asked Tanesha why she felt like Mexican students had a different schooling experience than Black students, she responded,

> Tanesha: Because they got more support from the school than we do.
> kihana: hmmm. Why you say that?
> Tanesha: Cuz like you know. They got clubs and like after school programs and like funding and all of this other stuff that like you know African Americans don't like it's just you know, a big difference between us.

Here Tanesha asserts that Mexican students have more structural support than Black students – both in terms of actual clubs and afterschool programs, and also, tangible funding to support those spaces. In other words, more than jus the additional programs

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[67] Poly Day is a colloquial term utilized to signal a day that Polynesian students do collective activities on campus and share their culture with the larger school.

offered to Mexican students, Tanesha articulates that this is just one of the ways Black students receive less support. Another student articulates how the school's support structures leave out Black women in particular:

> kihana: Ummm why you think the school created this class?
> Ebony: To be honest [sighs] because you know Black women don't really have too much of this school cuz Latinos got everything, they got a Poly club and it's like we just stuck you know just not havin nothin. Then they think we the problem solver like - or not - I meant the problem creators and stuff like that

Ebony insists that the class was created to fill a supportive void in the school for Black girls in particular. Interestingly, she connects the ideas of not having such structures with the notion that Black girls are the "problem creators" within the school. Hence, there is something about the existence of these spaces for other students (Latinos and Polynesians) that render their positionality on campus differently. Hence this Black girls' space addresses Black girls being "stuck…not havin nothin" and provides a space that may positively impact their collective being within the school.

This space for Black girls may also address Black girl invisibility. Below, Shaunté discusses why she is a staunch supporter of any future classes remaining all Black.

> I don't feel it should be mixed up because it's like if you - I feel like African American girls don't get the attention that Latinos and Asians get like - a African American student could get like a 4.0 - she noticed for like two weeks, that's good. Boom you got yo lil 4.0, you got yo lil fame. But for Asian and Latino, they on throughout the whole school year. Oh first semester you know umm Angelica she got a 4.0. The African American had 4.0 all through school year and still don't be noticed all like that. So I feel like it was just - this class is just made for African Americans cuz dis not a class that's just made for everybody. Everybody don't go through the same stuff and most African Americans you meet thas the same age or peers - they damn near goin through the same thing at home. Same thing at school. Failin.

Shaunté discusses the invisibility of Black girls on campus; similar to the administration's inability to recognize the possibility of Black grief, here the possibility of Black girl academic success is precluded by the successes of those students *expected* to succeed. Unless there are no Black girls at Jefferson who have achieved a 4.0, in my own observations of the celebratory student pictures on the school walls, I found no Black girls featured for academic success. Further, while the school also featured pictures of past successful graduates, there were no (visibly) Black girls in any of those pictures either. According to Shaunté, this space is exclusive to Black girls (and should remain so) because other girls don't share the same experiences, and this space is one where Black girls can support each other in "going through the same things." Given that students are

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aware that there are Latino and Polynesian students who also struggle with poverty, this student's comments speak to a specifically Black experience that means something different in an anti-Black context.

Even with school staples such as Black History Month celebrations, Black girls felt invisible or unacknowledged in their school. When I asked Ms. C why she thinks the school created this class, her response indicates the way Black girls feel on campus.

> Ms. C: Well the reason the school created it is because last year the administrators felt that a lot of their main behavioral problems that they had with young people were actually with black girls, even though a lot of the focus is on black males, with the suspensions and stuff, they actually felt like they had the hardest time with the girls. And even after, you know, discipline was given and conversations happened. And at one point, a group of black girls actually waged a protest last year, and it was funny and it was silly, but I felt like it was kind of telling.
>
> kihana: About what?
>
> Ms. C: So it was like towards like the end of the year, and they, actually, you know, I don't even know, I think they might have even made signs? It was kind spur of the moment, it just started one day. They just started like running around the whole campus, yelling at the top of their lungs that they wanted Black History Month and that there had not been a Black History Month and that they, it was during 5th period or something, I heard, because I was trying to teach, and they were just, and then they went around the whole school and they stopped in the quad and they were like laughing and yelling, and folks took it as more so of a disruption because they weren't in class and stuff, but um, but it was cool because um some of the black teachers made it a point, well they got disciplined for it, but out of that part of their discipline was that they had to plan the Black History Month celebration for the next year [laughs].

Although Ms. C describes this event as "funny" and "silly" because of the way the girls spontaneously protested, created signs etc., she also notes that their protest was "telling." Clearly there are a number of other things that Black girls could choose to "yell" about if they simply wanted to be disruptive. However, their protest was specifically about their school refusing to highlight Black History Month in a context where there are celebrations and recognition for other non-Black student groups on campus. In the following field notes excerpt, students discuss their feelings around the upcoming Black History Month presentation.

*Ms. C is helping students think about what they will present at the Black History Month presentation and the girls are very hesitant about what they will do or if they want to do anything at all. Two girls are talking about how they're scared to do anything in the presentation because they think the audience will be rude and disrespectful. I ask them why they think that and they start talking about a recent talent show during which students in the audience were so disruptive they cut the talent show short. The discussion*

*is about how it was rude but also about how they don't want to get into it with people around feeling disrespected. Someone says, "If they do that to me I swear we gone have problems!" Another girl says, "See! That's why I don't wanna do nothin." The girls begin talking about how they're upset about the Black History Month presentation – they feel like it's not being organized well and that it's not getting attention. They talk about students having Poly Day and also Latino Day [I think they are referencing the Cesar Chavez celebration] but that the "Black shit – if they do it, it's bootsy." Ms. C is trying to convince them that they should do something for the presentation and that if they do something "strong" then it will be received well. Some students kind of commit to doing something and some remain steadfast in their decisions not to participate (Excerpt from field notes, 2/13/14).*

While it appears that the student protest pushed the school to make space for a Black History celebration, the girls are upset that students may not take the event seriously, and also, afraid that if they participate, it will not be well received by the school, and has the potential to cause conflicts between them and other students. The Black History celebration becomes yet another example of the ways Black girls feel invisible (i.e. not having this structure in place in the beginning) and the ways they feel perpetually disrespected and unsupported on campus (i.e. the presentation not receiving enough attention and/or receiving negative attention from students).

Overall, Black girls felt like their experiences at Jefferson were much different from non-Black students of color, and that the school's expectations of non-Black students were higher. Below, Laquita articulates how she believes people in the school develop negative opinions about Black students and compare them to non-Black students on campus.

> They look at us like, I guess the past few years they see some black kids haven't graduated, so when they see the future kids comin in, they put us in that category as we not gon graduate. So when they see the Tongans and Mexicans and them, all them doing what they gotta do, they look at us it's like why aren't we doin what they doin? They compare us, as to like they can do this but y'all cant do that.

Here Laquita points to the ways the school perceives Tongan and Mexican students to be "doing what they gotta do," whereas Black students are expected to fail (to not graduate). Laquita believes that because "some black kids haven't graduated," all Black students get lumped into that category. While we may assume here, that the category she references is one of academic success, as she continues speaking, her words take on an entirely different (and painful) meaning. I asked Laquita whether she thinks the experiences of Black girls and Black boys are similar or different. She responded,

> I think it's similar. I think it's similar cuz even though, we're different genders we go through the same thing everyday. And it's just like – I don't know how to explain it it's just like if you're a boy and you're black, they

look at it and it's just like, you're a black boy you're gonna always do drugs and go to jail, and do that. And they see black girls as being prostitutes, or showin they body or whatever. And they all will put us like- I see the same category it's like we're no different whether your a boy or a girl you still in that same category.

Hence, regardless of gender, regardless of whether a student is academically successful or not, ultimately, Black students will never be able to escape that category – Black students will never be able to *not be Black* and blackness is equated with crime, incarceration, prostitution, promiscuity and so forth. While students have discussed the different ways Black girls and boys navigate antiblackness, here Laquita reminds us that all Black students must reckon with what it means to be Black in an anti-Black school – to be Black in an anti-Black world.

**Summary of Chapter**

*"Like we just - we just a disruption basically. That's all we known for is fuckin' up" –* *Timone.*

Overall, the presence of this exclusively Black space functions as both a mirror and shield to the endemic anti-Black racism at Jefferson High School. In other words, this space was both an expression of antiblackness and also a form of resistance against it. The kinds of meaning this space takes on then, is intimately connected to the racialized and gendered experiences these Black girls have in their school and in the broader society.

The ways students described feeling unsafe in their school, and the kinds of violence they were forced to navigate within their school, were directly connected to rampant institutional antiblackness, and the ways students felt completely disregarded by administrators, security guards, police, and teachers at Jefferson High School. At the same time, when students did receive attention from school staff, they describe being unfairly targeted, disproportionately disciplined, humiliated, and disrespected. Whether a student is navigating a security guard publically discussing her sexual history, or an administrator normalizing Black death, or a teacher overtly disproportionately disciplining her, overall, these students' experiences in their school serve as an indictment of the lack of support structures in place at Jefferson, and the ways Black girls are metaphorically dragged across their classrooms on a daily basis.

Black girls were also especially clear that their experiences were different from other non-Black students on campus. Without diminishing the significance of a people of color solidarity in a white supremacist society, it is also critical to consider the ways Black students experience antiblackness in relation to other people of color spaces as well. Black girls described feeling like their blackness separated them from non-Black students in their interactions with teachers, with administrators, and security guards within their school. Moreover, in addition to being treated differently during individual instances of Black suffering, students also signaled the ways they perceived non-Black

students of color to have more structural supports, both in terms of actual clubs and afterschool programs, and also, tangible funding to support those exclusive spaces. As Black girls wrestle with what it means to be a Black student in an anti-Black school, or a Black girl in an anti-Black world, they were clear that this all-Black women's studies class was a reprieve from the ways they felt invisible and unacknowledged, or targeted and denigrated, outside of those walls.

## Education for Liberation: Concluding Thoughts

Given the educational trajectory of Black people in the U.S., exclusively Black spaces in education have necessarily always been a component (at times the only component) of a Black educational experience. Beginning with enslaved Africans risking their lives to hold secret meetings to learn to read, and continuing until the landmark *Brown v Board of Education* decision, the educational opportunities for Black students happened almost entirely in all-Black spaces. Although many African Americans fought tirelessly for an end to separate and unequal education, some Black folks were wary of the experiences Black children would have in desegregated schools and despite their material inferiority, were uninterested in relinquishing exclusively Black educational spaces.

Hence, in the immediate aftermath of *Brown*, in the decades following, and in the current context, Black folks have continued to conceptualize a liberatory Black educational experience for African American students, that has oftentimes taken the form of salvaging, creating and/or reconstructing all-Black educational spaces. Whether in the form of Afrocentrism, programs of community control, nationalist schooling endeavors, or scholars who work to understand what was lost for Black children through desegregation initiatives, Black folks have continued to wrestle with what a successful Black educational project looks like. Within each of these projects is a recognition that Black students continue to be systematically denied the educational opportunities of their white counterparts, and these projects fundamentally problematize the idea that there is something inherently wrong, or something intrinsically backward, about separate spaces for Black children in education.

This study theorizes and brings empirical evidence to bear on what I am calling Black educational sovereign spaces. Utilizing data from a year-long ethnography in an exclusively Black girl space at Jefferson High School, this study aimed to better understand the meaning behind the presence of exclusively Black spaces in education, and the dialectic relationship between their origin and what actually happens within them. In this particular all-Black girl space, it was important to understand how the instructor understands the space and the work she does within it, the myriad of ways students perceive and experience the space, and what its presence reveals about the broader ways race and gender play out in society.

Utilizing a theoretical framework that builds upon BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016), Fraser's (1990) subaltern counterpublic, and hooks' (1990) notion of homeplaces and the margin, this study develops three framing ideas for how we might conceptualize Black educational sovereign spaces and what their presence in the current context may signal about the educational experiences of Black students more broadly. The first framing idea, highlights the significance of employing the language of sovereignty, and considers the ways that Black spaces in education exist in the margin, outside of the auspices of the larger school. Acknowledging the endemic nature of antiblackness necessitates understanding the ways the rules, regulations, and disciplinary practices within Black educational sovereign spaces, are often necessarily in opposition to the larger school (and society). Further, as Black educational sovereign spaces are both in

response to, and in resistance to antiblackness within schools and society more broadly, they serve as makeshift land, provide makeshift citizenship, and serve as makeshift living textbooks, to people whose humanity is perpetually precluded on the outside.

The second framing idea considers the ways that Black educational sovereign spaces engage in struggling, reimagining, becoming, and are always inherently political. Here I caution against the assumption that Black people together in one "place" is tantamount to what I am calling Black educational sovereign spaces. To the contrary, Black people can easily participate in the production and maintenance of antiblackness; Black educational sovereign spaces commit to the arduous process of reimagining blackness, and of working collectively to develop radical Black subjectivities. Finally, insomuch as Black space is not simply Black people lumped together, it is also not confined to a particular place. Black space is fluid, embodied, and can travel beyond the places in which participants produce it.

The final framing idea for Black educational sovereign spaces considers the ways Black educational sovereign spaces exist in tension with mainstream school reform efforts. While this frame does not preclude the idea that policy efforts can ameliorate some of the racialized experiences many Black students have in schools, it does recognize the ways schools inherently position Black children as uneducable. As such, Black educational sovereign spaces remain skeptical about the larger utility of notions of school reform, and troubles and problematizes the possibility of conceptualizing educational policies that create liberatory schooling experiences for Black students in an anti-Black world.

Building on these three framing ideas, I first addressed research question one, and considered the ways the Black woman educator in this purposefully constructed all-Black space perceived the space, how she understood the work she does, the frames, philosophies, and theories that guided her pedagogy, and the pedagogical tools she employed in the space. Findings indicate that the frames, philosophies, and theories that guided Ms. C's practice were reimagining, becoming, reciprocity, and struggle. These frames and philosophies also showed up in Ms. C's pedagogy, and became critical components of the pedagogical tools she utilized within the space. The pedagogical tools Ms. C employed were her use of alternative disciplinary methods, play and playfulness, no put downs & active put ups, reciprocity & diminished hierarchy, love and expression, and in-house conflict resolution. Overall, the frames, philosophies, theories, and pedagogies Ms. C drew on in the co-creation of the space, necessitated the sovereignty of the space and the ability to develop spatial norms that were oftentimes in opposition to the larger school policies, and demanded a necessary separation between this Black girl space and everything "out there." Ms. C worked with students to make the margin their own and to carve out a homeplace in the middle of an otherwise hostile environment.

Next, I addressed research question two, and considered the norms, values, and cultural practices that guided the space, the ways the Black girls perceived the space, and the ways in which the space was beneficial or detrimental to Black girls. Findings suggest that the norms, values, and cultural practices that guided the space were heavily rooted in the numerous ways Black girls entered into community with one another, with the Black women in the space, and with Black girls and women more broadly. A significant part of

that political act was the kinds of communication girls entered into with one another in the space. These conversations included but were not limited to relationships and love, domestic abuse, sexual harassment, complexion and hair, sex and sexuality, and Black women's history. The connections they developed with one another and their newfound sense of a larger Black girl collective was a part of their fierce defense of the space at the conclusion of the year. Hence, the deliberate act of creating homeplaces in the margin, of carving out space for Black girls to "be," was critically important in and of itself. This space became makeshift homeland, where the laws were in opposition to the outside anti-Black world, and supported the construction of positive Black girl identities. Within this homeland, Black girls became full citizens, and reimagined themselves in ways precluded by the larger society. The space also became a makeshift textbook, remembering and celebrating their historical struggles and resistance, counteracting the myriad of ways their experiences are rendered invisible in their school, in the media, in the world.

Finally, in addressing research question three, I explored the relationship between the presence of this exclusively Black space in the current context, and the broader ways race and gender play out in society. Findings reveal that this Black educational sovereign space was both an expression of antiblackness and also a form of resistance against it. Students were explicit in their descriptions of the myriad of ways they experience antiblackness in schools including the ways school "support" structures perpetuate school violence and impede school safety, the absence of a disciplinary protocol or (conversely) the presence of racialized school discipline, the lack of administrative support, disrespectful, callous, and incompetent security guards, discriminatory, unhelpful or brutal police, and problematic student-teacher relationships. Further, students' experiences problematized the often taken for granted notion of a broader people of color solidarity. Findings demonstrated how students felt in relation to other non-Black students of color on campus, their perceptions of unequal treatment by teachers, administrators, and security guards, and the lack of support structures in place for Black students specifically (as compared to other non-Black students in their school).

While I have explored in depth, the ways Black girls collectively produced Black girls space, I acknowledge that these findings are not prescriptive; these findings are limited, particularly given my focus on one exclusively Black space, in one school, with one educator, for one year. Further, although I discuss the experiences of Black students in relation to other people in the school (school administrators, security guards, police officers, teachers, and non-Black students), I did not conduct interviews with any of these groups; as such, my research cannot discuss the viewpoints of non-Black students in the school for example, or the ways in which teachers may have had a different perspective on their relationships with Black girls in the school. Additionally, this study does not imply that simply putting Black girls and a Black woman teacher together in a classroom will facilitate the kind of Black dreaming or Black reimagining discussed in this paper. Rather, I want to problematize the notion that shared racial and gender characteristics automatically lends itself to positive teacher-student relationships. This particular teacher's frames, philosophies, and theories, in conjunction with her shared communal history with her students, are what allowed for the kind of liberatory Black educational project explored in this study. Moreover, while this instructor's positionality as a Black

woman who lived in the same community as her students, privileged her within this context, I am not implying that non-Black, or non-female teachers cannot create liberatory educational spaces for Black girls. Indeed, Black teachers cannot be the only ones expected to engage in countering antiblackness and reimagining liberatory possibilities in schools.

Still, as we engage in conceptualizing Black educational sovereign spaces specifically, we must consider the ways in which the liberatory possibilities in these spaces in particular, are necessarily different. Despite the limitations of this study, the three framing ideas for Black educational sovereign spaces advance our thinking about what kinds of philosophies, pedagogies, and values are crucial towards developing educational projects that counter the racialized experiences of Black students in U.S. public schools. I want to signal here, that I am not concerned with the extent to which these spaces increase Black students' ability to better navigate their larger schools. I am not particularly interested in the extent to which these spaces facilitate increased test scores, higher graduation rates, elevated GPAs, or any of the other standard measures for programs that boast success with Black students. Without downplaying the significance of these measures, I only wish to convey that we must also consider the utility of Black educational sovereign spaces in and of themselves. That is, we must consider the ways that developing spaces that help students resist antiblackness, and aid students in the development of a radical Black subjectivity, is important, necessary, and dare I say, *owed* to Black students. If we conceptualize Black educational sovereign spaces as "homeplaces" as "radical sites of possibility," we must consider the ways these spaces are generally disallowed, and what it means when we are able to carve them out, to maintain them in schools and in a society that takes a legal and ideological stance against them.

I should also say that I do not aim to imply with this work that we know everything we need to know about Black educational sovereign spaces, or the ways Black students produce Black space with one another. For example, where these classes have developed as "manhood development" or "women's studies" spaces, we may consider the ways these kinds of titles reify the adultification of Black children. Black boys are not men. Black girls are not women. How can we conceptualize the construction of Black spaces that encourage (in name and in action), the possibility of Black childhood? Further, how do we guard against inadvertently giving credence to a politics of respectability, where these kinds of courses may perpetuate the idea that Black boys and girls need to be taught how to be proper men and women? Finally, where public school integration remains the liberal heartbeat of the United States, referring to these Black boy spaces as "manhood development programs," or this Black girl space as a "women's studies" class, may serve to de-racialize these spaces in an attempt to downplay their racial exclusivity. How might we become more tenacious in our assertions that the presence of these spaces signals the ways in which they are necessary for Black students in schooling environments that more than sixty years post *Brown*, remain severely racialized. Hence, rather than a "how to" for Black space in education, this study is simply an invitation to consider more deeply, what these spaces as they are, and their broader liberatory potential.

Still, even as we consider the utility of these spaces in and of themselves, outside of their potential to increase Black productivity in schools, I also want to signal the ways in which we may consider these spaces as temporary, or perhaps, pit stops on the road to *Brown*. Fraser's (1990) work reminds us that counterpublics, while admittedly purposefully constructed separate spaces, may also serve to increase and enhance participation in the larger public sphere. In other words, in stratified societies, genuine inclusivity may require spaces of exclusivity. The ability to retreat and engage in collective (and elective) separatism, may be understood as a necessary perquisite for more precise and direct action toward larger systemic change. Hence, if we conceptualize integration as a continuum – something that perhaps hasn't failed so much as it has yet to be achieved, we may consider Black educational sovereign spaces as a critical partner in a truly equitable educational project.

Ultimately, this study, then, is an invitation to further explore how we reclaim silenced narratives, is a call for research that explicitly examines how Black youth navigate antiblackness in schools, and represents the potential for transformative resistance in spaces that eschew theories of a colorblind, post-racial society in favor of confronting race and racialization directly. African American students deserve to have education scholars be courageous in our explorations of complex answers to difficult, and oftentimes painful, questions about how we can create learning settings and policies that mitigate their anti-Black experiences in schools. While there is ample research detailing the racialized experiences Black students have in schools, there is a need for research that explicitly examines alternative spaces that may radically impact the Black schooling experience. The presence of exclusive Black educational spaces in the San Francisco Bay Area, signals their on-going relevance, importance, and potential, and is particularly significant in an era of purported post-raciality that often times renders racial discourse verboten. Their presence presents an opportunity to explore what these spaces are, how they function, and their potential role in the creation of a more liberatory Black educational experience. Recognizing the shortsightedness and analytical limitations of colorblind theories, Black educational sovereign spaces confront racialization head on. Further exploration of these spaces is necessary to helps us understand how creating spaces in which Black students can critically interrogate their anti-Black experiences may also increase their consciousness, and develop their will, desire, and capacity to change them.

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