FIGHT THE POWER! PERCEPTIONS OF RESISTANCE AMONGST BLACK FEMALE YOUTH IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM

BY

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DISSERTATION
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ABSTRACT

Educational desire and resistance have been historically intricate and interconnected notions for Black women and girls. Problematizing Black girls instead of structural oppression and institutional opposition has situated Black girls at the margins of American institutions and stereotypes and misconceptions have restrained their voice and narratives of their experiences there. Educational desire and the academic experience for Black girls are perceived to be difficult and challenging for them. And while some Black girls resist by disengagement, some strategically use their agency and autonomy to dismantle oppressive infrastructures and call out systems that protect White privilege (Mirza, 2009).

This study will explore the concept of resistance among Black girls in a middle school classroom. Often in research and literature, the narratives and voice of Black girls can get lost within the existing literature on Black boys and white students. Given the unique positioning of Black girls in schools, this study will explore the lived experiences of low-income Black girls within the school context focusing on resistance and moments of conflict within the classroom as well as teacher and student perception of those moments. This interpretive qualitative study based in an intersectional lens was employed at a middle School mainly using observations and interviews. Data has suggested that Black girls are consciously resisting what they perceive as differential treatment based on race and gender. Class played a more nuanced role in their interpretations. The opposing explanations from teachers indicate their may be some cultural dissonance within the school.
In Memory of Doris Jean Franklin and Richard Miller.
This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Mamie H. Miller, and my parents Alan and Sherri Franklin.
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# Table of Contents

## Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1  
THE PROBLEM .............................................................................................................. 2  
PERCEPTION OF BLACK STUDENT BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOLS .... 2  
PERCEPTION OF BLACK GIRL BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOLS .... 4  
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY .............................................................................................. 8  
RESEARCH QUESTIONS ............................................................................................... 9  
Terminology .................................................................................................................. 9  
significance of the study ............................................................................................... 9  
DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS ................................................................. 10  
ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY ............................................................................. 11  

## Chapter 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL CONCEPTS ............. 12  
BLACK GIRL BEHAVIORS IN THE CLASSROOM .............................................. 12  
THE ROLE OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION .............. 18  
Class and Black Youth .............................................................................................. 23  
THE MYTH OF MERITOCRACY .............................................................................. 23  
EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY AND CLASS ......................................................... 24  
SOCIAL CLASS AND LOW-INCOME BLACK GIRLS ......................................... 26  
resistance in black feminist literature .................................................................. 28  
TRADITIONAL RESISTANCE THEORY ................................................................. 29  
RESISTANCE AND SCHOOL .................................................................................. 31  
DEFINING RESISTANCE ......................................................................................... 32  
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ................................................................................. 34  

## Chapter 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY ...................................................... 39  
RATIONALE FOR USING Basic interpretive qualitative research .................. 39  
Phenomenology ......................................................................................................... 41  
INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS .................................... 43  
INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGY AND Low-Income Black Girls ........ 45  
INTERSECTIONALITY AS A METHODOLOGICAL LENS .................................. 46  
SITE AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION ................................................................. 47  
Participants ................................................................................................................ 51  
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS ............................................................... 51  
Interview Protocol .................................................................................................... 55  
RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ............................................................................... 58  
Member Check ........................................................................................................... 58  
Reflexivity .................................................................................................................. 58  
TRIANGULATION .......................................................................................................... 60  

## Chapter 4
Contextual Portrait of Harper School ................................................................. 61  
Unit 4 School District ............................................................................................... 61  
Controlled Choice Plan .............................................................................................. 63
EDUCATIONAL EQUITY PLAN .............................................................. 64
RACIAL DISPARITIES IN UNIT 4 SCHOOL DISTRICT ....................... 64
RACIAL DISPARITIES AND HARPER SCHOOL ............................ 66

CHAPTER 5

DISCIPLINE, TEACHER PERCEPTION OF BLACK STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND HARPER .................................................. 67
THE ROLE OF ADVANCEMENT VIA INDIVIDUAL DETERMINATION (AVID) ................................................................. 72

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .................................................. 101
MAJOR THEMES ........................................................................ 101
TEACHER PERCEPTIONS .......................................................... 101
OWNERSHIP ............................................................................ 101
MISCOMMUNICATION .............................................................. 101
SELF-PERCEPTIONS ................................................................. 102
DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT .................................................... 102
INTENTIONALITY ................................................................. 102
POLICING OF BLACK GIRLS’ BODIES .................................... 103
BULLYING AND LOW-INCOME BLACK GIRLS .......................... 103
IS IT RESISTANCE? ................................................................. 104
TRADITIONAL RESISTANCE THEORY .................................... 104
CONTINUUM OF RESISTANCE ................................................ 106
INTERSECTIONALITY ............................................................. 106
IMPLICATIONS ......................................................................... 107
EXISTENT LITERATURE ........................................................... 108
TEACHERS AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE ............................ 109
STANDARDIZED IMPLEMENTATION OF DISCIPLINE ................ 112
BLACK GIRL WELL-BEING AND SERVICE PROVIDERS ............. 113
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS ................................. 114
REFERENCES .......................................................................... 117
APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL LETTER.................................................................125
APPENDIX B
  PARENT CONSENT FORM..........................................................126
APPENDIX C
  YOUTH ASSENT FORM.............................................................127
APPENDIX D
  STUDENT INFORMATION FORM..................................................128
APPENDIX E.
  PARENT INFORMATION FORM......................................................129
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Choosing to conduct a study focusing on the behaviors of Black female youth was a decision embedded in my personal and professional experiences as a Black girl and woman. Throughout my elementary and secondary educational experiences, I was assumed to be “like those other loud Black girls.” It was at this defining moment that I began to understand the distinct intersection of my gender, race, and presumed class and how it would affect expectations of me—namely, perceptions of my intellectual competence. Experiences like these, which perpetually questioned my competence and presence, continued into my academic experience post-high school and within my professional career.

Like my own story, the experiences of Black female youth in the classroom can oftentimes be lost within the existing literature on Black males or Black students as a whole. Living within the confines of stereotypes that affect the perception of Black girl behavior, this population of youth deals disproportionately with an overrepresentation of behavior labeled as misconduct and defiant. While the experiences of African American youth are a necessary topic for research, focusing on educational inequity through a racial, gendered, and classed lens is imperative to contribute to the comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Black female youth.

Research has shown that Black girls are conscious of the complexities of their social identities and the ways in which they affect their treatment within the educational system (Pugh-Lilly, Neville, & Poulin, 2001). With this said, what is needed from current research is not only a study that will address the issue of a racialized, classed, and gendered view on the behaviors of Black girls but also research that allows Black girls’ voices to describe and ascribe meaning to their own behavior (Pugh-Lilly, Neville, & Poulin, 2001).
The Problem

Perception of Black Student Behavior in Schools

Scholars have long documented the alarming effects of institutional forms of racism and discrimination on the educational experiences of Black students in K-12 schooling (Delpit, 2006; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, b; Sanders, 1997). For instance, Black students reportedly have the least access to honors/AP courses (Joseph, 1998); have the lowest retention rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013); and are more likely to come from low-income communities and subsequently attend schools that are under-resourced with ineffective teachers (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2012). In fact, according to the Civil Rights Data Collection (2012), Black students are more likely to receive harsher disciplinary penalties than students of other races in school, as over 70% of students arrested on school grounds are Black or Hispanic. This picture of disparity and inequity in education for Black students has urged many researchers to unpack the multifaceted issues that contribute to this unequal educational experience.

Limited racial and socioeconomic diversity in educational circles of power has inhibited professionals’ recognition of school disciplinary practices as socially defined constructs. Because prevailing beliefs and practices often go unchallenged, the culturally based nature of school discipline has remained an unquestioned component of school life (Monroe, 2005, p. 46).

Because teachers and administrators are often White and middle class, the agenda or hidden curriculum of the school oftentimes reflects the culture of the majority in positions of power. Due to the stereotypes and beliefs about the intellectual capacity, academic productivity, and behavioral issues of Black students and the disregard of some of those students’ culture,
they, especially those of lower socioeconomic class, often experience what Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (2003) calls cultural discontinuity in schools. Specifically, Irvine points out that a cultural mismatch for students of color can often be a determining factor in the academic success of students of color.

The behavior of Black students in the classroom has been the source of much controversy in contemporary literature. More specifically, the perceptions of those behaviors by teachers in these classrooms are often labeled as misbehaviors, maladaptive, and defiant (Skiba & Rausch, 2004). A plethora of studies have been conducted that address teacher bias toward Black student behaviors that contribute to misperceptions of the intent of their behaviors (Monroe, 2005; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Downey and Pribesh (2004) specifically employed a quantitative study on the classroom behaviors of kindergarteners as well as adolescents surrounding this very issue. The findings of this study indicated that race played an influential part in the perceptions of student behavior. Their White teachers rated Black students in this study as lower classroom citizens, but this pattern did not persist if the teachers were Black. The assertions of the researchers support the notion that some White teachers may not completely embrace the cultural background of these students or use classroom management styles that aren’t conducive to the development of some Black students within a classroom context. Furthermore, the classroom experience and the cultural lens by which teachers perceive student behavior are integral components for the discussion around the experiences of Black students, especially Black girls. An example of this cultural mismatch in teacher perception of student behavior is highlighted by the Gregory and Thompson (2010) study that consisted of surveying White teachers about the behavior of Black students. In their study, Black students with lower grade point averages were perceived to be more defiant. Also, those students who perceived that their teachers treated them unfairly were
the recipients of more disciplinary infractions (Gregory & Thompson, 2010). These findings highlight the existence of some miscommunication and misperception between students, their behaviors, and their teachers.

**Perception of Black Girl Behavior in Schools**

In order to sufficiently understand the multifaceted issues, oppressions, and lived experiences of Black women and girls, a historical context of their experiences in America is necessary. For years, Black women and girls have been misrepresented and categorized as Jezebel (hypersexual), Sapphire (angry Black women), and Mamie (maternal and self-deprecating) figures. From entering America as chattel and having a sexuality that was only defined within the context of breeding “product,” Black women have historically been silenced, invisible, marginalized, and rendered as America’s “other.” Black women and girls have been situated in a complexity of oppression that has developed and produced a lived experience unlike any other race, gender, or intersection thereof. With respect to Black girls specifically, historical stereotypes of Black women have taken a familiar yet unique form within the context of school and community. A number of issues like colorism, language, dialect, class, race, and gender all play into the perception of Black girls in schools as well as the stereotypes and beliefs projected on them. Black girls are often at risk of being labeled as overly aggressive, defiant, overbearing, loud, audacious, overly expressive, or angry (Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010). Situating Black girls within the intersection of their racial and gendered identities exposes a lived experience oppressive in nature but navigated by many Black girls today. Including class within that intersectional lens also highlights a myriad of issues that situate Black low-income girls within a unique context. Black girls in schools are more likely to be reprimanded or praised for social behaviors rather than academic pursuits, face lower teacher expectations compared to
White girls, and also are more likely to experience racist remarks within the school setting
(Scott-Jones, 1987, as cited in Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010). Add to those experiences
class issues as well, and Black low-income girls often face the policing of their Black bodies
(often made a spectacle), are reprimanded for not upholding traditional standards of femininity
(remaining quiet, submissive, and reserved) versus actual behavioral problems, are disciplined
for perceived oversexualization, and have their sexual expression rendered immoral (Blake et al.,
2011; Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010; Froyum, 2010).

Living within the confines of stereotypes that affect the perception of Black girl behavior,
this population of youth deals disproportionately with an overrepresentation of behavior labeled
as misconduct and defiant. Costenbader and Markson (1994) conducted a study looking at types
of infractions Black females are disciplined for.

Although most students who were suspended from school self-reported physical
aggression as the primary reason for their suspension, female students were more
likely to self-report minor behavioral infractions such as gum chewing, failure to
comply with a prior discipline sanction, and defiance as reasons for their
suspension. Out of the 15 most common infractions in which students were
suspended, Mendez et. Al, (2003) reported that Black girls were more likely to be
referred for defiance, disruptive behavior, disrespect, profanity, and fighting
relative to their racial-ethnic representation in the school district. (p. 71)

While defiance, disruptive behavior, and disrespect all seem to be valid reasons
for referral, they are also very subjective behaviors. Research has shown that some White
teachers view Black girls’ decorum negatively and oppositional to traditional forms of
femininity (Blake et al., 2011). While Black girls generally may come off as assertive and
loud within classroom contexts, educators and school staff may prefer a façade of agreeableness and composure and therefore discipline these girls based on perceptions of femininity versus their behavior’s actual potential for violence, which is a criterion for referral (Blake et al., 2011).

Stricter school-based discipline of Black girls has almost doubled in the last few years (Morris, 2007). Again, stereotypes like Jezebel (hypersexual) or Sapphire (angry Black woman) have opposed acceptable forms of femininity, which has placed them at risk for verbal reprimand, suspension, and expulsion. In addition to the role these stereotypes play in reprimands, teacher misperception reinforces a push toward the control of Black girls within the classroom, meaning more punitive punishments even when unnecessary, increasing a student’s disciplinary record (Morris, 2007). The subjectivity of the behaviors of Black female youth thus is directly connected to the socialization of this population to societal norms regarding acceptability and appropriateness. The relationship between these behaviors and discipline varies in origin from cultural reference points to conscious and purposeful resistance.

The theory of social capital plays a huge part in the interpretations of behavior of Black students in the classroom. If students aren’t displaying socially normative behavior, or refuse to, they often fall prey to unfair disciplinary procedures and marginalization within the school system. Ogbu and Simon’s cultural-ecological model attempts to discuss these very inequalities in education by positing that Black children take on a form of oppositional culture in an attempt to resist the societal and structural discrimination of the schools, and thus chose not to achieve so as not to “act White” (as cited in Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). While elements of Ogbu and Simon’s theory regarding the school’s reproduction of culture ring true at both a structural and interpersonal level, Black girls are not displaying oppositional culture. Black girls
have demonstrated resilience through allyship within the schools and have demonstrated their own investment in and value of education. Black female youth have been able to navigate the arena of race, gender, and low social capital, understanding their position within the school, and found ways around it to matriculate (Evans-Winters, 2005; Mirza, 2009).

Educational desire and resistance are intricate and interconnected notions for Black girls (Mirza, 2009). Problematizing Black girls instead of structural oppression and institutional opposition, educational desire and the academic experience for Black girls are perceived to be nonexistent and impossible for them. And while some Black girls resist by disengagement as cited in Mirza (1992), some strategically use their agency and autonomy to dismantle oppressive infrastructures and call out systems that protect White privilege. In Race, Gender, and Educational Desire, Mirza presents several accounts on how Black girls and women resist within the confines of the educational system by successfully surpassing gendered and racialized expectations while actively protesting and voicing the injustices presented in these societal institutions. “As data from this study reveal, black women’s grassroots activism is not rooted in ‘defensive engagement’. On the contrary, they have actively evolved gendered/racialised forms of community solidarity and collective voice that refuse to privilege dominant definitions of a decentered, multiply positioned, self-articulating postmodern citizen” (Mirza, 2009, p. 102). In this particular study, we see Black women once again as resisters yet in a different realm. While school is the institution in American society that perpetuates social norms and privileges certain behaviors, we see young Black girls using those same social norms as a vehicle to voice their concerns on inequity. Refusing to assimilate to social standards, Black girls resisted through withdrawal, questioning, and success.
In considering the classroom experiences of Black girls through the distinct lens of their race, gender, and class, the behaviors of these girls can be impacted by a plethora of out-of-school contexts as well as assumptions, discrimination, and marginalization due to their racial, gendered, and classed selves. These misperceptions, whether coming from faculty, staff, or administration, can highlight issues within the school setting such as cultural competency, cultural miscommunication, and a magnification of a school’s hidden curriculum. Necessary from research is a closer look into how Black girl behaviors are perceived by teachers and administrators within the school setting. When discussing behaviors in the classroom, oftentimes the narrative of Black girl behavior is constructed as negative, with focus given to outcomes of their behavior and intention of the behavior often left out. Using an intersectional lens, what is needed is an inquiry into intent of behavior, not only from the perspectives of teachers but also from the Black girls themselves. Further inquiry in the dissonance that may exist between teacher definition and self-definition of Black girl behavior is also necessary.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of low-income Black girls within the school context. This study’s focus will be placed on moments of conflict and “misbehavior,” teacher perception of their behavior, and the girls’ own ascriptions of meaning to their behavior. Observations and interviews will be employed to gather a sense of the experiences of these girls on a daily basis as well as to note interaction with other school members. More specifically, this research seeks to investigate acts of resistance amongst low-income black girls (as identified by free or reduced-price lunch), particularly investigating what those acts are, how they manifest themselves, and how the girls define those behaviors. This study will provide insight into how Black girls communicate and interact with each other in the
classroom, as well as with their teachers, through the lens of resistance and intersectionality.

With that in mind, the research questions in this study will focus on the behaviors of low-income Black female youth in the school setting, how they define their behaviors, and how those behaviors fit within the concept of resistance (the conscious decision to reject or refuse compliance).

**Research Questions**

Based on previous literature and situating the research in resistance theory and an intersectional framework, three central research questions will guide this study:

1. Are low-income Black girls displaying resistant behaviors within the school? If so, how?

   Subsidiary question: Is there a manifestation of these behaviors in this context? If so, do these behaviors fit within the traditional sociological framework of resistance?

   Subsidiary question: If these behaviors are found to be resistant by the girls, does the intersection of race, class, and gender impact whether Black girls define their behaviors as resistant as they understand resistance? If so, how?

   Subsidiary question: Does the intersection of race, class, and gender impact how the teacher perceives their behavior? If so, how?

**Terminology**

**Resistant behavior:** As used in this study, resistant behaviors will be defined as active or passive behaviors by the student that oppose dominant school culture in the form of teacher requests, policies, classroom processes, school processes, etc., with attention given to the outcome of that behavior as indicated by traditional resistance theory (Apple, 1995; Giroux, 1983; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

**Significance of the Study**

This study is being conducted to shed light on the lived experiences of Black female youth and to inform the work of those who teach, mentor, or interact with them in any way
within the school setting. The significance of this comes from shedding light on the outcomes of the behaviors of Black female youth and explicating how they are defining the intent of their behaviors. Including socioeconomic status (SES) within the lens of analysis will also illuminate specific class issues that compound and make unique the experiences of this population of girls. Observing teacher and Black girl perceptions of Black girl behavior will allow greater insight into dissonance that may exist between Black girls and staff within the school setting. Also, this type of research can add to the growing literature on Black girls specific to the realm of education. Increasing research like this, that allows Black girls voice in creating their own narrative, will hopefully aid in opposing deficit-based discussion around misbehavior and Black girls. It can also assist in creating better pedagogical approaches within the classroom as well as influencing disciplinary approaches and teacher preparation.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

As with any study, there lie certain limitations to generalizability. While this study will add to the literature on resistance and Black female youth, the specificity of the age group and grade levels employed in this study may affect the extent to which one can generalize the results to Black female adolescents. Also, context matters when investigating discipline, teacher–student interactions, and resistance and therefore may shift when investigating the same types of themes and behaviors within a different context. Lastly, including Black female youths’ understanding of their own behaviors and how it relates to resistance may prompt challenges to these girls’ understanding of resistance. As stated by George Herbert Mead in *Mind, Self, and Society*, the experiences that one has, and the beliefs thereof, are considered right and true (Mead, 2009). Using Mead’s idea as well as exploring the phenomena of resistance, this study will unpack the narratives of eighth-grade Black female youth and their behaviors in the school setting.
Organization of the Study

This study is organized around six chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction to the study, which covers the background, problem, research questions, and purpose of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of literature that explores the following major themes: 1) contextual underpinnings of Black students in the classroom and Black female youth in the classroom, 2) perception of Black girl behavior, and 3) the role of resistance in the classroom experiences of Black girls. In addition, intersectionality as a theoretical framework is introduced in this chapter. Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach and intersectionality as a methodology, followed by an explanation of the data collection and data analysis process. Chapter 4 will focus on the context of the Champaign–Urbana middle school site in which the research took place. Chapter 5 will be dedicated to the contextual portraits of classroom-based interactions of Black girls within the classroom and school setting. In Chapter 6, I will present any additional research findings, discuss those findings, and conclude with implications for the study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

The review of literature will begin with a discussion of Black girl behavior in the classroom and the perceptions thereof, followed by the influence of cultural production and reproduction on the perception of those behaviors. The investigator will also illuminate the role of cultural reproduction and production regarding the population of low-income Black girls, directly connecting it to the concept of the hidden curriculum. Also included in the literature review is an analysis of the theory of resistance. The literature review will conclude with a discussion of intersectionality as a conceptual framework. Concluding the review of literature with an analysis of resistance and intersectionality as a conceptual framework will provide the foundation for which the study is based.

Black Girl Behaviors in the Classroom

While teacher bias may influence the perception of Black student behaviors, Black students’ own voices need to be taken into account to fully understand the intention of these students’ behavior. Many researchers have begun to represent student voice and counter-narratives within their research (Harper, 2009; Henry, 1998; Kynard, 2010; Yosso, 2013). Determining the underlying motivation or intention of the behaviors of Black students, acknowledging their voice and their self-perceptions, is an integral part of understanding why those behaviors exist. Much scholarly work and social focus regarding behavior and Black students in the classroom have revolved around Black males. Missing from much of the literature regarding classroom behaviors are the specific issues that Black girls face. These issues encompass not only race but also gender and oftentimes class, and many Black researchers are beginning to bring these issues to the forefront. Elaine Richardson (2009) examined the
behaviors and actions of Black girls and also explored these girls’ own understanding of their behavior. Framed within new literacies theory, locating individual action within social and cultural processes, Richardson explored what she terms young-Black-female-hood. More specifically, she explored the way poor Black adolescent females are socially constructed and how they negotiate social situations. Using the theoretical orientation of Black female literacies, which focuses on Black women’s special ways of being in the world, and Critical Race Theory, Richardson used her own street literature memoir and counter-narrative to illustrate the complexities of navigating life from poverty to a PhD. What this counter-narrative and autoethnography unveiled was that Black women are positioned by society to speak, think, and act in ways that conform to White standards and to accept or refuse those positions. When the choice is refusal to conform, that resistance is often misinterpreted as submission to abuse or acceptance of victim identity instead of a search for agency. While Richardson’s only subject was herself, it seems her findings are indicative of the lives of Black girls. Institutions, like schools, often disseminate scripts based on White male patriarchal values that marginalize and oppress Black women (Richardson, 2009).

While Black girls’ experiences and narratives often highlight the oppressive forces that lie within American institutions, the intersection of their identities also creates a unique experience for them within schools. The norming of White womanhood polarizes and marginalizes the experiences of Black women by labeling them deviant and does so similarly to Black girls in a school setting. Grant (1994) examined the intersections of race and gender and found that teachers tend to treat Black girls differently than White girls or Black boys. Grant also emphasizes how the educators in the study focused on the social, rather than the academic, skills of Black girls (1994). Morris (2007) explored the issue of intersectionality for Black girls within
an educational setting by studying how this population of students experience schooling. Framing his research within intersectional theory, Morris asserts that the understanding of being a woman is markedly different for White and Black women regarding their experiences, responsibilities, and social status.

In this 2-year ethnographic study of a public middle school comprising seventh- and eighth-grade classrooms, several themes emerged. These themes included Black girls standing up and speaking out, high educational aspirations, perceived challenges to authority, perceived loudness, and “un-ladylike” behavior from Black girls. Morris concluded from these themes that the interconnectedness of race and gender impacted perceptions of Black girls’ femininity, and these Black female youth experienced different forms of discipline and teacher–student interactions based on those perceptions than their White counterparts. Stated explicitly in the study was how these girls’ assertive behaviors were interpreted as abrasive and aggressive. This study supports the notion that White femininity tends to be the lens by which a majority of Black girl behavior is viewed. If Black girls are thus truly being held to a standard never created for them to fit, they are being starkly marginalized and disadvantaged from an institution that is supposed to modify their current social position. Specifically, for low-income Black girls like the participants in the study above, they are then faced with appearing inadequately feminine and dealing with the pressure to re-form into what this White patriarchal system deems more feminine (Morris, 2007).

Integral to understanding Black girl behaviors is not only how others perceive them but also how they perceive their own behaviors. Black feminist scholars purport that a complex web of interactions among social forces and personal qualities shapes Black girls’ experiences (Collins, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2005). Pugh-Lilly, Neville, and Poulin (2001) investigated Black
adolescent girls’ self-perceptions of delinquent behaviors. Using ethnic modeling, Pugh-Lilly, Neville, and Poulin (2001) conducted semi-structured interviews with adolescent Black girls in an alternative school specifically for delinquent students. In their study, it was concluded that these girls used aggressive behaviors to protect themselves from perceived threats. From this, two themes emerged, which the researchers described as *hold off* or *face down* strategies. Hold off strategies were the behaviors the girls used to avoid conflict, and face down strategies were the behaviors the girls used when physically threatened or disrespected, or in retaliation to others. Pugh-Lilly, Neville, and Poulin (2001) note that many participants resorted to face down strategies when they felt they had no supports within the school to assist them, the school didn’t care, or they had no voice. These girls also noted that they understood how race and gender factored into the consequences they faced from school officials because of these behaviors. While the girls believed that race and gender did not factor into their decisions to act out, they did believe race and gender factored into how school officials responded to them and noted a marked contrast in how they were treated compared to the White girls within the same school setting.

Teacher perception and the resulting treatment of Black girl behavior are essential to understanding the experiences of these girls in the classroom. Lei (2003) discussed teacher perception of Black girls’ behavior, often labeled as loud and aggressive by teachers, which was incongruent with the girls’ own understanding of their behaviors. Teachers and staff were observed or quoted in the study saying Black girls were frustrating because of their aggressive behavior and their need to exude an “I don’t take no shit from nobody attitude” (Lei, 2003). Teachers in this study also responded that they were afraid to confront the Black girls on some of their behaviors, because they didn’t want the situation to escalate. One particular White female
teacher did recognize the girls’ behavior and position as a sign of strength in their knowledge of self and a demand for respect. The teachers in this study also tried regulating these girls loudness, often leading to them to being disciplined (Lei, 2003).

Teachers may not only misperceive the behaviors of Black girls but also label these behaviors in very intentional ways. Teacher perceptions of low-income Black girl behavior are often quite negative and include perceived challenges to authority and perceived loudness, as well as seeing them as being too assertive and interrogative (Fordham, 1993; Koonce, 2012; Morris, 2007). Studies show Black educators, on the other hand, tend to be more knowledgeable of the issues these girls face and encourage more resiliencies against the stereotypical beliefs about them. Teacher perception of Black girl behavior shows a trend of being aligned with historical stereotypes (Jezebel, Sapphire, Mamie, etc.) of Black women in general. Recognizing the parallel of stereotypes and prejudiced assumptions of Black girls with their teachers’ labels illuminate embedded assumptions within the institution of education.

Added layers of assumptions come into play when class is added to the identity “pot” of Black girls. Low-income Black girls face not only the issues that come with the intersection of race and gender but also the impact of class at the core of the intersection as well. In much of the literature, low-income Black girls are discussed in reference to their sexuality, their opposition to traditional (White) forms of femininity, and the perpetuation of misconceived stereotypes (they’re loud, angry, etc.). Much of the literature on Black girls assumes a low SES or working-class background, but to explicitly tease out the experiences of low-income Black girls, a few studies will be highlighted.

Froyum (2010) completed a study on the emotional capital of low-income Black girls and how they are taught by educators to employ emotional responses in the school setting. In the
setting for this ethnographic study, not only were displays of “attitude” discouraged and seen as unfeminine and troublemaking, but the staff also encouraged actions and emotions that would foster a sense of connection to those in power. These girls were taught to recognize the racial implications of actions that may arise in school but to respond in more socially acceptable ways that wouldn’t aid in harsh disciplinary infractions. These girls’ instinctively responded with resistance or opposition to authority figures in school when they felt wronged or disrespected, but adults in the particular program under study encouraged other methods of problem solving.

Sexuality and the female body is also a prevalent experience in schools for low-income Black girls. Oftentimes, low-income Black girls endure constant policing of their bodies as demonstrated by discipline due to body movements, body language, and bodily expressions (Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010; Froyum, 2010). These girls also face harsher dress codes and are seen as “bad black girls” for any expression of sexuality (liking a boy, kissing a boy, flirting, etc.), all of which their White counterparts do and are not as disciplined for (Froyum, 2010). Also, studies have shown that sexuality for low-income Black girls is situated in morality (theirs being immoral), and they are often restricted of agency with regard to sexuality and their bodies within the school setting.

Fordham (1993) also looked at the experiences of low-income female youth in schools in a popular ethnography on Capital High. This ethnography explored the multifaceted issues facing Black girls navigating the academy as well as their lived experience with perception as “loud Black girls” and their perception of their behaviors. Some low-income Black girls in this study were often rendered silent and invisible by themselves in order to succeed. These girls in particular purposely disassociated themselves from the “loud Black girls” in order to matriculate through schools without conflict. It is also important to note that 1) it was mostly the high-
achieving Black girls who took on this façade of silence and invisibility and 2) their silence and invisibility were a method of resistance, purposely opposing the expectations of many authority figures and staff members in the school. Resistance for low-income Black girls at Capital High came in the form of a ghost-like existence within the school, as Fordham puts it. It is also important to note that these girls were aware of how authority was expressed and how they were expected to respond to it with regard to their raced, gendered, and classed selves. There were also participants of note in this study who did not conform to silence and invisibility. Those low-income Black girls participated in a very visible resistance to school culture without explicitly entering into the realm of oppositional or bad behavior as defined by school officials. This deliberate resistance (for example, writing on a different topic than given, subverting cultural expectations, and challenging authority figures with democratic ideals), although not outright misbehavior, caused some teachers to overlook their intellect and label them as difficult.

Therefore, low-income Black girls have a unique school experience and resist in a variety of ways. From purposeful silence to methodical questioning, many understand that there are certain cultural expectations imposed on them by authority figures. Most of the Black girls in the studies described understood the racial implications for them in the school setting and chose to resist, albeit in different ways. While much research categorizes some of their behaviors as oppositional, some methods of resistance, such as silence, are those that undermine traditional social reproductive outcomes and in a sense assist their successful matriculation through school.

**The Role of Cultural Production and Reproduction**

Cultural production and reproduction offer possible explanations regarding the misperception and stereotyping of Black girls. Cultural capital defines one’s access to the accepted social values of society that are used by someone in exchange for a higher social status
in school or the workforce (Ballentine & Hammack, 2007). The more cultural capital you have access to, the more access you have to social mobility and to higher social class statuses. Inherent in the idea of equality of educational opportunity is the idea of needing a certain type of capital to successfully navigate the institution of education. Bourdieu (1986) discusses two main forms of capital: cultural (non-monetary assets such as intelligence, skills, and knowledge) and social (such as group membership, social networks, etc.), which contribute to social and cultural reproduction by limiting access to these exclusive traits to individuals of similar capital who belong to certain status groups. Social reproduction therefore is supported by the amount of cultural and social capital a student has when entering the school system.

In Amanda Lewis’ (2003) *Race in the Schoolyard*, she discusses how the role of economic, social, and cultural capital perpetuates racial inequality in urban elementary schools. Lewis summarizes the role of economic capital on parents’ school choice and social capital’s role in parents’ protesting the reserved seats for “neighborhood” youth in their schools, but of particular importance to the conversation of Black girl behavior and resistance is her discussion on cultural capital and the role it plays with acceptable forms of interaction. As stated by Lewis, the cultural resources that may serve a student well at home or in their community may not always produce advantages in the school setting and sometimes can produce disadvantages. She goes further to establish that a student’s culturally embodied performances in the classroom can be read as disruptive or troublemaking (Lewis, 2003). Lewis notes many instances where Black students behaved in a culturally appropriate way in the classroom or schoolyard but were perceived by teachers negatively and consequently were removed from the class or punished (2003). Within the narratives of these students and teachers, it was apparent that teachers brought with them their own set of cultural norms that dictated acceptable behaviors in the classroom.
Ausdale and Feagin (2001) discuss similar characteristics of social reproduction surrounding race, racial identity, and racism. Within a frame of subordination and domination, Ausdale and Feagin examined how these youth learn social rules and identity roles through racialized social cues and behavioral affirmations. For children of color in this study, the navigation of race, power, and White privilege were constant pressures. In light of cultural capital, these students often found themselves ill equipped to fit into social norms, which often made development in a socially constructed normative sense a complicated struggle (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Hooks and Miskovic (2011) broadened the notion of social norms and role development in youth in their study of race and racial ideology emitted by teachers in a predominantly Black low-income school. Their study confirmed that teachers tend to discipline and interact with students through a racial lens, interpreting student behavior through perceptions of racial constructs (Hooks & Miskovic, 2011).

Cultural reproduction is intricately tied to social reproduction by perpetuating existing social structures through cultural capital and limiting access to that cultural capital to those of similar networks and social groups (social capital). Based on the work of Bourdieu’s forms of capital, cultural capital refers specifically to non-monetary social assets including cultural goods; access to the preferred societal language; and tangible and intangible forms of cultural knowledge, presentation, and ways of being that confer social status and power (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital thus is directly related to cultural reproduction by perpetuating itself through the embodied state (based on familial background), the objectified state (the symbolic or economic values of cultural capital), or the institutional state (often the educational value of cultural capital or credentials) (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital refers to social group memberships or networks of actual or potential resources. Similar to cultural capital, social
capital supports social reproduction by limiting access to class groups of similar social capital and in similar group memberships and networks.

Schools are often scrutinized for being an integral factor of reproduction. Traditionally, schools are critiqued for corresponding to the social structures of society and inadvertently stratifying students into corresponding educational paths based on social class (and oftentimes race as well). In *Learning to Labor*, Paul Willis (1977) attempted to go beyond reproduction theories and move toward cultural production. The cultural production theory, primarily advanced by Paul Willis, maintains that participation in counter-school subcultures leads to the attainment of manual working-class jobs in a self-inductive way among working-class youths and to the reproduction of the capitalist social order in the wider social structure. The main points highlighting this paradigm are the working-class boys’ own perception of behavior codes, their rejection and resistance to mental labor, and their ascription of meaning to manual labor, as well as meaning making and cultural beliefs produced within cultural relationships.

For Willis’ participants, the boys’ own belief that manual labor was representative of masculinity and power encouraged their rejection or resistance to mental labor or schooling and thus also effected their own placement in blue-collar positions (Willis, 1977). It can be argued that these youth were a victim of reproduction not from an outside constraint per se but through their own cultural relationships, ascribing meaning to varying types of behavior, knowledge, and work choice that restricted them to their social status. Essentially, it was these youth’s own cultural meaning making within the context of the group that concluded in cultural production, according to Willis. These youth, confined from ways to resist within the school, created their own agency by opposing and resisting the normative and societal definition of success by rejecting mental labor and valuing manual labor instead.
Cultural production therefore speaks to the ways in which youth creatively occupy education and schooling (Levinson & Holland, 1996). Specifically regarding Black female youth, cultural production can speak to the ways they understand their positionality within schooling and education grounded in the broader context of their place in society and how they actively respond to that knowledge. Acknowledging that youth often develop self within a context of home, school, and community, Black girls’ ways of developing self in the school context are often impacted by a plethora of factors.

Jones, Hoxha, and Hacker (2013) discuss how Black girls develop within the school context. The researchers specifically sought to understand the contextual factors of gendered racial identity development for Black female youth. Focusing on Black female youth in a school setting, the researchers found that family and parents were a positive influence in the girls’ development of sense of self, which seemed to act as a coping mechanism for oppression the girls recognized within the school. The Black female youth also recognized the existence of stereotypes and societal images, and the researchers found that those images posed a risk to positive identity development in the girls. The Black female youth in the study also were able to name, recognize, and describe historical images about their culture, often felt assaulted by teachers and school personnel, and proposed they had unsafe classroom environments and unsupportive teachers, all of which the researchers asserted posed a risk to their positive self-concept (Jones, Hoxha, & Hacker, 2013). Jones and colleagues also interviewed non-Black faculty and staff, who were all found to use historical stereotypes of Black women as well as their modern manifestations to structure and ground their expectations of Black students within that school setting. For these young ladies, they were positioned uniquely within the confines of historical stereotypes. While the study didn’t implicate it, the ramifications of this positionality
situate the girls in the margins to respond to these prejudices. Capital and cultural production thus become active within the school context for these girls as they navigate resistance within the school context.

Class and Black Youth

The Myth of Meritocracy

It is apparent by the former discussion that social reproduction by various educational constructs maintains and perpetuates educational inequality in America. A common American ideology is that of meritocracy, the belief that achievement when coupled with hard work will supersede the inequalities of ascription and produce merit (Goldthorpe, 1996). The main issue with meritocracy and its relationship to educational inequality is that this ideology is based on a notion of equality of opportunity, which is often a myth for many lower-income people and people of color. To be a meritocratic society means to be a society that provides the same access to and quality of education to all, which the previous discussion of reproduction has shown is not completely true. It also demonstrates that American society is not completely a contest system, as typically popularized, but contains more traits of a sponsorship system by which “selection” or privilege is based on ascriptive characteristics.

Annette Lareau (2003) in Unequal Childhoods demonstrates the idea of the “unequal playing field” in her study on class, race, and family life. Lareau found that differences in family life lie not only in the advantages that certain middle-class families can give their children but also in the skills being transmitted and socialized to their children (2003). Annette Lareau concluded that the differences in childrearing practices across social class, despite race, privilege the cultural practices of middle-class families because their norms are often affirmed by institutions.
In the United States, people disagree about the importance of social class in daily life. Many Americans believe that this country is fundamentally open. They assume society is best understood as a collection of individuals. They believe that people who demonstrate hard work, effort, and talent are likely to achieve upward mobility. Put differently, many Americans believe in the American Dream. In this view, children should have roughly equal life chances. . . . This perspective rejects the notion that parents’ social location systemically shapes children’s life experiences and outcomes.

(Lareau, 2003, p. 235)

Lisa Delpit (1993) also opposes the myth of meritocracy in *The Silenced Dialogue* when she discusses the implicit nature of what has real currency in education. For Delpit, there is a culture of power within education whose rules are not explicitly told to those who do not have that power. In essence, isolating certain students from access to this power solidifies the myth of meritocracy and educational inequalities.

**Educational Inequality and Class**

Education, democracy, and the economy are all interrelated in integral ways. Lauder (1991) discusses the necessity of a true democratic system for education. According to Lauder, no matter the school choice a parent has for their child, without a reformed democratic system families will still be the sole source of support for their children, for which some families just cannot provide. Essentially, even with school choice, types of capital will still play into the amount of knowledge one has and their ability to matriculate based on that knowledge. Massey and Denton (1993) focus on class within the frame of segregation. Due to what they call American Apartheid, or de facto segregation, many communities were left segregated and in poverty, creating what is known as the urban underclass. These communities face a great deal of
disadvantage and because of their poverty lack a great deal of resources, especially in regards to education. Children from these communities face low cultural and social capital and an unequal playing field compared to their peers. Class for them is a central hindrance to a quality education and social mobility.

Because education is seen as a means of social mobility, many Americans of lower socioeconomic status are missing out on the one thing that can provide opportunity and advantage. “The theory anticipates that the encouragement by significant others will vary according to the societal position and demonstrated ability of the child, and that this encouragement will affect the level to which he aspires. The family and school are seen as the institutional settings of this socialization process” (Kerckhoff, 1976, p.370). According to the socialization model, the children of a wealthy familial background with high social and cultural capital are the students who are “free” to move within the social system. The familial socioeconomic status and educational background of their family are enough to push these students to academic success. There is no barrier to academic and social success except the students’ choice to demonstrate their abilities. It can be assumed that due to the wealth and power of these students’ familial background, they receive the encouragement necessary to prime them for academic success. If this remains true, the interaction of education and family for wealthy students will provide a sea of opportunity and a plethora of resources to help these students excel.

On the other hand, if one is not wealthy, the socialization model doesn’t work quite as well. Jay MacLeod (2009) conducted an ethnographic study that looked at attainment in a low-income neighborhood. In this study, education was a central factor in the perpetuation of poverty for students. The students, named by MacLeod as the hangers and the brothers, attended schools
with low financial resources and subpar academic and student resources. These students’ schools placed a high value on occupational education instead of college preparatory education for their students. The results indicated that education for these students played a part in the perpetuation of their poverty. As MacLeod (2009) critiqued, the support of meritocracy, ignorance to the impact of social inequalities on their students’ lives, and a lack of responsive curriculum tended to support social and cultural reproduction for these students. Class in this case was seen as the determinant of attainment, and despite aspirations to do more (especially by the brothers), the lack of cultural and social capital because of class and poverty restricted these students from fulfilling their aspirations. It is in cases like these that we see, despite race or gender, class and the opportunities afforded with it can be a great predictor of a student’s future.

“A socialization model simply doesn’t work well for blacks, and our best guess is that this is because no matter what the socialization outcomes are, there are externally imposed limitations on their attainments” (Kerckhoff, 1976, p. 371). For the more disadvantaged students, being restricted by societal variables is often the reality that inhibits their choice and opportunity to excel. Kerckhoff (1976) provides a synthesis on the power of decision makers to categorize students and how the decisions made by them often affect who receives specific resources, which students are primed for college, and which students are seen as achievers. Applying this theory to access and social mobility, one can see how lower-income students are restricted by what high schools they attended, what community they lived in (and the resources the community offered them), and the financial ability to invest in an education. For lower-income students, the inability to have access to quality education, books, teachers, and technology often leave them lagging behind educationally, socially, and occupationally.

**Social Class and Low-Income Black Girls**
Class plays a pivotal role in the perception of Black students (Anderson, 2008; Lareau, 2003; MacLeod, 2009; Massey & Denton, 1993). Research has shown that when race is coupled with class, low-income Black students fare worse and are disproportionately represented in the achievement gap, discipline gap, and dropout rates. Research has also shown that teachers perceive Black students more negatively when race is coupled with a low-class social identification (Fordham, 1993; Froyum, 2010; Jensen & Rosenfeld, 1974). Black girls specifically may fare better than their Black male counterparts, but they still face a disproportionate overrepresentation in dropout rates, underrepresentation in STEM classes, and underrepresentation in honors/gifted courses, as well as a decrease in school-based self-esteem, than their White counterparts (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2012). And although data have shown that Black girls fare better than Black boys, the lack of research specifically on Black girls does not allow an accurate picture and a full understanding of what their educational experience is holistically, especially for low-income Black girls.

Situating class within the conversation of resistance of Black girls is important due to the role intersectionality may play in how marginalization and the hidden curriculum of schools encourage resistance that therefore results in social and cultural reproduction. Much research has shown that low-income Black girls are often stereotyped as loud, violent, or hypersexual students without regard to the oppressive lens used within school settings that categorize these girls (Blake et al, 2011; Evans-Winters, 2005; Koonce, 2012). Understanding their own plight, low-income Black girls readily recognize those injustices and often respond to them through various means of resistance and opposition.

Social class in school may manifest itself in typical and predictable ways, such as free and reduced lunch, clothing, or lack of access to extracurriculars, but for Black students and
Black girls in particular, social class indicators can be very nuanced and tied to misconceptions of these girls whether true or not. These indicators include language, clothing, and single-parent households, but biased indicators could also include expression of sexuality, level of opposition, and low academic achievement. While these indicators are not empirically accurate, given the context of the school they may be socially promoted, positioning low-income black girls to address an added barrier.

**Resistance in Black Feminist Literature**

Indeed, it was not uncommon to find teachers expressing openly their misgiving about the intellectual capabilities of the Black girls in their care. During informal conversation and formal interviews that I had with them, 75% of the teachers in the study made at least one negative comment about the Black girls they taught. (Mirza, 1992, p. 43)

Black girls often come face to face with the residue of historical stereotypes within the school context. In Mirza’s study, the Black girls often avoided the teachers they knew were confrontational with them. They disengaged from the learning process almost completely, only participating with a known sympathetic teacher. In this context, Black girls’ resistance came in the form of avoidance and disengagement from the educational process.

Signithia Fordham in *These Loud Black Girls* (1993) focuses on the experiences of Black female high school students and the role that “passing” played for them in the academy. Fordham examines the polarization of “loud Black girls” who were highly visible and stereotyped in the school from those Black girls who participated in silence and invisibility to disassociate themselves from the loud Black girls. The loud Black girls often undermined school rules through a refusal to conform to standards of good behavior and through that refusal were
stripped further of power within the school context. In contrast, the high-achieving Black female youth were more quiet and willing to conform, and therefore cloaked in invisibility. Resistance for the loud Black girls in this article came in the form of refusal to conform, although the outcomes of that resistance limited their voice within the school context.

**Traditional Resistance Theory**

Critiquing education through the lens of reproduction theory takes the system of education from an objective socialization entity of equal opportunity to a political structure in its relation to reproducing the societal norms of dominant society. Through the lens of reproduction theory, schooling is the primary source for social and cultural reproduction hindering the social mobility of the oppressed and encouraging the perpetuation of dominant ideologies. Viewing schooling solely through the lens of reproduction theories restricts bidirectional interactions at the micro level of individuals and the actual system of schooling and also restricts how these individuals’ social and cultural contexts make or add to their social reproduction (Giroux, 1983). While the validity of reproduction theories is without question, they can often leave teachers and students as mere players being acted upon, with little consideration given to mediation and resistance (Giroux, 1983).

Henry Giroux goes beyond traditional reproduction theory and proposes his idea of resistance theory, which is centered on the importance of human agency and highlights the struggle, conflict, resistance, and the complex relationship between schools and the dominant society. Giroux (1983) defines resistance as a theory that points not only to the role that students play in challenging the most oppressive aspects of schools but also to the ways in which students actively participate through oppositional behavior in a logic that very often consigns them to a
position of class subordination and political defeat. (p. 260)

Giroux further discusses how resistance assumes that working-class students are not just a result of capital and readily submissive to the requirements of teacher and school but are students who recognize the hidden curricula of schools and consciously resist them (Giroux, 1983). Key to the discussion of resistance theory is the sometimes-contradictory nature of education itself. Schools are not homogenous institutions only perpetuating dominant ideologies; they are complex institutions with diverse school knowledge, ideologies, and classroom relations. In these complex institutions, students of lower/working class and students of color also take part in a complicated process of human agency oftentimes resisting as well as contributing to their own reproduction (Giroux, 1983). Giroux posits that resistance has less to do with oppositional behavior as learned helplessness and deviance and more to do with political and moral indignation. More specifically, the subordinate are not passive in the face of domination and assimilation but mediate and respond (in complex ways) to the connection of their experience and that of the structural and cultural domination and constraint in schools (Giroux, 1983).

In line with Giroux’s discussion on resistance, Jay MacLeod (2009) presents an ethnographic study that looked at educational attainment in a low-income neighborhood. In this study, education was a central factor in the perpetuation of poverty for students. The students, named by MacLeod as the hangers and the brothers, attended schools with low financial resources and subpar academic and student resources. From a sociological lens based in resistance theory, the hangers displayed oppositional behavior toward schooling and a negative outlook on their own social mobility due to class inequalities. These students may have resisted their schooling through chronic truancy and talking back to teachers, but in essence their
resistance led to the perpetuation of their current class status. While they participated in oppositional behavior (as compared to the brothers, who conformed and complied and fared better) to the meritocratic climate of their school, the outcome of the resistance did not work in their favor (MacLeod, 2009). Traditional resistance theory in this way is concerned with not only the acts of resistance of students but also their social outcomes.

**Resistance and School**

Herbert Kohl (1994) discusses in depth the phenomenon he names the norming of excellence, which refers to schools’ tendency to normalize success and achievement based on Eurocentric ideals. Neglecting culture and often imposing West European culture on children, norming excellence has now become standard practice in schools and often goes unnoticed. Similar to the hidden curriculum often discussed in sociological circles, students often learn through informal mechanisms the subtle messages communicated to them about their culture and social identities. When texts and school policies devalue or silence core subjects crucial to the identity of students of color, there is a message sent to them about their value in that educational setting. While equity for the school system may be having the same access to books and curriculum, if those materials do not honestly represent students of color or low-income students, the equity is no longer in access to books but in the books themselves (Kohl, 1994).

Kohl (1994) discusses this issue further and suggests that occurrences like these are an issue in the democracy of education: Who controls the knowledge that youth receive? From this, Kohl documents many instances of youth who consciously made the decision “not to learn” from teachers due to the imposition of cultural ideals, somewhat assimilationist, that didn’t correlate with their own cultural identity. Kohl (1994) states, “It’s interesting how stuck parents and school authorities are on a single way to live and learn. Any youngster who refuses to perform as
demanded is treated as a major threat to the entire system . . . people like Rick then get channeled into marginal school experiences and, too often, marginalized lives.” These marginalized youth, like Black female youth, shift this refusal into resistant behavior. Like characteristics of sociologically defined resistance, these young women intentionally oppose what they may perceive as disrespect as well as other social processes occurring in the school.

Michael Apple (1995) furthers the discussion of the impact of the hidden curriculum on the power relations within schools. He specifically discusses how racialized, classed, and gendered issues are reflected in the curriculum. Apple (1995) states that economic and cultural reproduction must account for the rejection of social norms that guide school life. Like Giroux, Apple is concerned with the outcomes of the resistant behavior of low-income and marginalized youth who often are limited in their mobility because of the ways in which they chose to resist. Apple presents a theoretical discussion about being a person of color and being poor by which distancing oneself from the stereotypical restrictions and occupational confines related to race acts as a form of resistance (1995). This distancing may occur through walk, talk, or dress and contend dominant patterns of gender, class, and racial domination and exploitation. Likewise, young girls of color also have the added notion of femininity attributing to their marginalization and emphasizing the specific ways in which they resist (Apple, 1995).

**Defining Resistance**

Resistance is a topic and phenomenon interdisciplinary in nature used to define and describe intentional oppositional behavior. The diversity in application of this concept, from resistance of gender norms to political and collective forms of resistance, has complicated its use and staggered a consistent definition in different areas of study. Specifically in sociology, resistance, being rooted in theories of cultural and social reproduction, has no consistent
definition but has certain characteristics that make it distinctive. According to Hollander and Einwohner (2004), there are several components that a behavior or an act needs to have in order for it to be considered resistance. The first component Hollander and Einwohner found consistent in their interdisciplinary literature review on resistance is action and opposition. Most all definitions of resistance include action, or an active behavior, whether physical, verbal, or cognitive (2004). Also, the active behavior needs to oppose something or someone. More specifically, in work conducted by Pugh-Lilly, Neville, and Poulin (2001), which focused on the perceptions of Black girls’ delinquent behaviors, as well as Herbert Kohl’s (1994) work on creative maladjustment, the opposition of students of color in particular was against some social construction and force of dominance and assimilation.

Recognition is also a key component to the definition of resistance, although the question of visibility and who recognizes the action as resistant makes this piece difficult to define (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004). While historical, collective acts of resistance were visible and clear on behalf of the resisters as well as observers, individual, isolated acts of resistance like those of Black female youth aren’t so easily recognizable. Because of the prejudice and stereotype that often come with low-income Black girls, the perception of their behaviors may be construed as defiance instead of resistance. As stated in Hollander and Einwohner (2004), the recognition of resistant acts, whether on the part of the target of the act or onlookers, can be complicated and totally dependent on the goal of the resister. With this in mind, in regards to low-income Black girls, the recognition of the behavior as resistant needs to be recognized by the resister to be considered resistance.

Lastly, intent needs to be taken into consideration when discussing the issue of resistance. Intentionality is pivotal in understanding if Black girls are consciously resisting something or
someone within the classroom. LeBlanc (1999) states that intent, more so than outcome, is a central determinant of defining an act as resistant, although the outcome of the action may not have had the desired effect. Hollander and Einwohner (2004) also add that being a researcher of a similar culture to the population that is the object of study gives an advantage in deciphering the intent of a behavior because actions have different meanings in different cultures. Particularly, focus needs to be given to the cultural and historical context where resistance occurs to discern intention.

Based on literature in sociology as well as Black feminist thought, resistance as it pertains to Black female youth must take into consideration the behaviors of Black female youth (aggressiveness, assertiveness, and loudness) from an objective perspective. In applying traditional resistance theory with principles of Black feminist thought, resistance in Black female youth can be determined by an active behavior (verbal, physical, or cognitive) that is a conscious effort to oppose something or someone in the classroom despite the outcome of that intentional act. The outcome does become important with regard to the behaviors of Black female youth in determining social mobility and reproduction, but not in defining the acts as resistant in and of themselves.

**Theoretical Framework**

While traditional feminist theory focuses on gender as the ultimate perpetuator of sexism, for Black women being a “Black woman” (as well as class indicators) collaboratively constructs their lived experiences. Because of this, the social identities of race, gender, and class are inseparable and must be considered when exploring issues regarding this population. As noted in the historical anecdotes given in Angela Davis’ (1983) *Women, Race, and Class*, the experience historically and currently of Black women cannot be separated into sole categories of race or
gender but has to be understood together. One cannot ask about being Black without being conscious that being a woman is wholly integrated into their everyday lives. Differing from traditional anti-racist thought, whose analysis focuses on a single-axis framework, intersectionality demands an examination of the combination of social identities of Black women to sufficiently address the issues of Black women.

As Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) states, Black women’s experiences are much broader than the general categories used to discuss race, oppression, and discrimination. The constant filtering of the experiences of Black women through distinct, unrelated categories is not sufficient to understand their oppression and marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989). Many researchers have theorized and defined intersectionality around three core themes: inclusion of marginalized voices, especially women of color; the interaction of inequality and oppressions rather than independent strands of inequality; and institutional primacy of certain processes rather than the totality of oppressive processes in combination with each other (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; McCall, 2001). Often hidden amongst the discussion around race (Black men) and gender (White women) are the voice of multiply marginalized groups like Black women and girls, whose multiplicity of social identities interact and create a unique experience regarding oppression. In order to push back on the popular narratives around social identities that often lean toward highlighting a single oppression as a sort of main effect (and all others additive), theorists and Black feminist scholars have used and encourage the use of voice, specifically of the oppressed, within research as a central focus (Collins, 1990; Combahee River Collective, 1986; hooks, 1981). In addition to intersectionality being group-centered, it is also grounded in the belief that oppressions for raced, gendered, and sexed individuals are not a culmination of oppressions compounded on each other but in interaction with each other. Whether the unit of analysis is the
process of how oppressions interact to create the lived experiences of marginalized populations or how institutions construct those oppressions, the foci of intersectionality are on the interactional and complex ways inequalities facilitate oppression, effect the object of oppression, and create distinct and unique experiences for those people apart from the traditional narrative of singular inequality (Choo & Ferree, 2010).

Also imperative in the discussion of intersectionality is colorism in the Black community. The idea of colorism is ingrained in the lived experience of being a Black woman and often has similar effects to marginalization and discrimination within the Black community, just as class and race do between Blacks and dominant groups. The hue-based hierarchy has long affected Blacks, especially Black women and girls, in the areas of self-esteem, occupational attainment, and even marriage. Skin color for Black women goes beyond aesthetic principles of beauty and translates into these women’s everyday lives. As Margaret Hunter (2005) states, darker-skinned women lack the cultural capital that lighter skin provides and often are disadvantaged in education and employment. Furthermore, Verna Keith proposes that darker women are the most affected by the hierarchical nature of colorism in the Black community and receive less schooling and have poorer jobs and a lower income than lighter-skinned women (as cited in Glenn, 2009). Fundamentally, hue and skin color directly affect other social outcomes for Black women. In light of intersectionality, understanding the within-group issues such as skin tone and the complexity of understanding the context of how the experiences of various social identities affirm each other are necessary in the discussion of this concept.

Beyond the hue-based hierarchy are the fundamental ways in which intersectional approaches to research have served as a type of resistance itself. While Black political activism defines resistance as a collective force, Black women have collectively and individually resisted
sexual, racial, and gendered oppression with whatever available autonomy they had. Melissa Harris-Perry (2011) explores the ways in which the oppression of Black women is affirmed through stereotypes and preconceived expectations of behavior. Harris-Perry (2011) specifically states, “to understand why Black women’s public actions and political strategies sometimes seem tilted in ways that accommodate the degrading stereotypes about them, it is important to appreciate the structural constraints that influence their behavior. It can be hard to stand up in a crooked room” (p. 29). Dr. Harris-Perry discussed the multifaceted ways in which the identities of race and gender affect how a Black woman interacts with resistance as a political force. Addressing the issues of perpetuating stereotypes, Dr. Harris-Perry presents the context of a crooked room and the ways in which a Black woman navigates her right standing in it. The crooked room becomes for the Black woman the way in which her world and its stereotypes of her confine her actions, define her presence, and predict her social outcomes. It is the room that heightens her awareness of her dichotomous existence. The crooked room is the place where race, gender, and class cannot be separated from her experiences but are the very things that define societal expectations of her.

These societal expectations that lead to this crooked room are also addressed in intersectional research. Choo and Ferree (2010) discuss the integration of structural and cultural processes as the setting and location of intersection for marginalized groups in the methodology of intersectionality. Looking to go beyond analysis of intersectional identities, Choo and Ferree (2010) encourage sociologists to use the context of the studied population as a backdrop by which to locate the interaction of the people and the institution. For example, in understanding the behaviors of Black female youth in the classroom, it would be important to locate their positionality within the educational context and how the stratification or socialization processes
of the school heighten or illuminate their marginalization. Also by using this methodology, it explicitly states the researcher’s assumption or definition of what “oppression” or differential treatment means in that specific context.

To further the discussion of this method, Patricia Hill Collins (2008) in her response to Black Sexual Politics critiques the use of intersectionality without sufficient knowledge of separate categories such as race and class. For Collins, it is necessary to use dynamic centering (placing one or two identities at the center of discussion) in the methodology of intersectionality in order to ensure a closer analysis of two entities and their mutual construction (Collins, 2008). While intersectionality assumes in itself recognition of the mutual affirmation of oppression of social identities, as well as assumes the institutions as context for that oppression, sometimes it is necessary to highlight certain social identities within the discussion of intersectionality for proper analysis.

Utilizing intersectionality in a study like this will allow for a sufficient analysis of the experiences of Black girls within schools. Using the group-centered tenet of intersectionality will allow the voice of Black girls to come through in the research, highlighting causality of their own behaviors as well as a counter-narrative to the traditional narrative of deviant behavior from this group. Also, using the process focus of intersectionality on the interaction of inequalities these girls face will allow for a holistic sense of how institutional and structural inequalities are affecting the positionality of Black girls within schools.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In the following sections in chapter 3, I outline the research design and methodologies for this study. First, I outline why using an interpretive approach as well as intersectionality as methodology is fitting for the type of inquiries being explored in this study. Following that discussion, I explore the site and participants for data collection as well as the sampling strategy. I also describe the types of methods that were used for data collection. Lastly, the role of reflexivity and the influence of my own racial, gendered, and classed identities are explored in relation to this study.

Rationale for Using Basic Interpretive Qualitative Research

Widely used in the arena of education are qualitative methods. As noted by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative research grew in popularity among educational circles in the 1960s. Since then, popular researchers in education have used this method in employing pivotal studies respected across the discipline (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Coleman, 1966; Jencks et al., 1972). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) stated that qualitative research is inductive and emphasizes the meaningfulness of research. Choosing to use a qualitative approach with low-income Black girls and resistance will allow a better understanding regarding the context in which certain behaviors occur as well as teachers’ understanding of those behaviors. Allowing participants’ voices in a study, in a qualitative way, won’t confine participants’ explanations or insights but will keep the authenticity of the way in which participants are ascribing meaning to the behaviors of Black girls.

More specifically, qualitative methods in education have covered a variety of topics from language and literacy to teacher education and prove to be a tool in conducting in-depth research
within an educational setting. More specifically, the growing research on Black girls with regard to education is increasing, and qualitative methodologies are being employed as a way to document and authenticate the experiences of this oppressed population (Blake et al., 2011; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Fordham, 1993). There are two rationales for my choice to use a qualitative approach. First, there was a need to observe naturalistic occurrences, as resistance in Black girls can be complicated by the perception of defiance and lack of a universal understanding of what resistance is. As described by Creswell (2012), naturalistic observations allow researchers to see the context of the phenomenon that they seek to examine. By using naturalistic observations, it enabled the researcher to understand the behaviors of Black girls as they occurred naturally in everyday life. The other benefit of naturalistic observations was being able to observe how teachers interacted with Black female youth in the school setting. Secondly, Dyson and Genishi (2005) discuss the idea of qualitative research allowing researchers to gauge cultural practices, specifically the “historical, economic, and cultural forces that intersect in any local space.” By using a qualitative approach, the researcher was able not only to observe low-income Black girls but also to conduct an in-depth analysis of how the intersectionality of race, gender, and class plays into the behaviors of these youth in school.

Using an interpretive approach, the investigator is able to more fully understand a phenomenon, process, and perspectives of the people involved in the study (Merriam, 2002). The methodological approach of interpretive research is inductive, and the outcome is often descriptive (Merriam, 2002). Given that this particular study sought to understand the behaviors of Black girls from the girls’ and teachers’ perspective within a short span of time, as well as how those behaviors fit within a traditional resistance conceptualization, an interpretive approach fit best. Inherent to this approach is phenomenology. While termed interpretive qualitative
research, phenomenology is deeply ingrained in this tradition (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Phenomenology simply seeks to understand the meaning and cause of events and interactions of ordinary people in specific situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As proposed by Edmund Husserl and further developed by Heidegger, Satre, and Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenological approach is a way of exploring a subject’s interaction with a certain event or phenomena without the assumptions of the investigator, and it focuses on the meanings of experience (Macann, 1993; Silverman, 1980). The methodology also focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Phenomenology in this study will therefore use resistant behaviors as the central phenomena by which the participants interact with and create understanding. A major aspect of phenomenology that will be employed in this study is epoche. Epoche, or bracketing, is phenomenological reduction or a conscious, effortful opening of ourselves to the phenomenon as an occurrence. The researcher does not wish to see this event as an example of the theory of conceptual frameworks embedded in the study but as a phenomenon in its own right with its own meaning and structure. In order to do so, the researcher kept a journal for subjective observations, comments, and memos.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective and methodology that has been around for a long time and often gives credit for its ideals and philosophical undergirding to Edmund Husserl (Macann, 1993). Husserl’s strain of phenomenology primarily focuses on the systemic reflection of consciousness and phenomena and primarily differs from other strains of qualitative research by focusing on how reality is conceived rather than phenomena in isolation of interaction and consciousness (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). As a phenomenologist, Husserl broke from the traditional scientific method of inquiry and was committed to understanding phenomena from
the participant’s perspective and understanding. Husserl placed emphasis specifically on how an individual experiences her or his world and individual perspective. Many have further developed Husserl’s conception of phenomenology, including Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre (Macann, 1993).

The historical movement of phenomenology began predominantly in the first half of the 20th century as a philosophical perspective that sought holistic understanding of a person’s relationship with various experiences (thought, emotions, perception, etc.) and their intentionality (or conscious interaction with the phenomena) toward that experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). Intentionality is a important tenet of phenomenology because it acts as the mediating factor in understanding an individual’s perspective. More specifically, according to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,

phenomenology develops a complex account of temporal awareness (within the stream of consciousness), spatial awareness (notably in perception), attention (distinguishing focal and marginal or “horizontal” awareness), awareness of one’s own experience (self-consciousness, in one sense), self-awareness (awareness-of-oneself), the self in different roles (as thinking, acting, etc.), embodied action (including kinesthetic awareness of one’s movement), purpose or intention in action (more or less explicit), awareness of other persons (in empathy, intersubjectivity, collectivity), linguistic activity (involving meaning, communication, understanding others), social interaction (including collective action), and everyday activity in our surrounding life-world (in a particular culture). (Zalta, 2003, p. 3)

With regard to this specific study, focusing on conscious experiences and how Black girls experience them will be the key components in analysis. Because phenomenology values human
perception and individual experiences as reliable and rich data, it was employed as the chosen means of data collection and analysis. Using phenomenology will allow the researcher insight into not only the notion of resistance but also how it occurs within a school setting with a specific population, as well as this population’s understanding and experiences with resistance. In addition to focusing on an individual’s intentionality toward an experience, phenomenology also employs epoche, or bracketing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012). Bracketing is a methodological technique employed in phenomenology that allows the researcher to discard their own experiences, beliefs, and values in order to more accurately and objectively describe the experiences of participants and enhance validity and reliability (Moustakas, 1994). It entails the deliberate putting aside of one’s own beliefs in order to not influence the participants’ understanding of phenomena or influence the analyses of data. Bracketing allows the researcher to look at data impartially and deduce the experiences of participants with accurate descriptions.

More specifically, since the study is not only concerned with description but also with interpretation and understanding of the experiences of Black girls, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (a strain of phenomenology) will be employed to address the following questions:

1. Are low-income Black girls displaying resistant behaviors within the school? If so, how?

   Subsidiary question: Is there a manifestation of these behaviors in this context? If so, do these behaviors fit within the traditional sociological framework of resistance?

   Subsidiary question: If these behaviors are determined to be resistant, does the intersection of race, class, and gender impact whether Black girls define their behaviors as resistant as they understand resistance? If so, how?

   Subsidiary question: Does the intersection of the teacher’s race, class, and gender impact how the teacher perceives their behavior? If so, how?

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research method grounded in phenomenology that also includes a hermeneutic angle giving focus to the philosophy of interpretation. While phenomenology alone gives emphasis to intentionality and how a participant experiences a phenomenon, interpretative phenomenology builds on that emphasis and also illuminates the meanings that may be embedded within those experiences (Smith, 2007). Snelgrove (2014) discusses IPA as a method that allows the researcher to be inductive while managing formal, personal, and emotional knowledge. IPA’s epistemological view is grounded in using subjective data to understand an individual’s personal interpretation of their experiences. IPA has a unique position because it is grounded in phenomenology and seeks to study the perception of an individual, but it is also interpretative because it looks beyond just the consciousness and into the role understanding and interpretation play in the lived experiences of participants (Smith, 2007). Therefore, a researcher employing this specific method is interested in describing not only the experiences of a participant but also how understanding and perception embedded in those experiences affect the participant.

The participant isn’t the only mechanism by which projected meanings can come in research; they also often occur through the researcher herself. While bracketing is a central component to both phenomenology and IPA, IPA’s position on bracketing is unique to its strain of phenomenology. Phenomenology in itself locates bracketing within its paradigm as a mechanism for the researcher to completely remove herself from data collection and analyses in order to be open to unexpected meanings or phenomena that may occur (Creswell, 2012). On the other hand, while IPA utilizes bracketing as a mechanism for validity, it also acknowledges that pure objectivity may not be possible in certain situations for certain researchers (Snelgrove, 2014). Oftentimes, because the mechanism of bracketing can be aloof and vague, its
implementation can be complicated and difficult to maintain. IPA acknowledges this perplexity and recognizes that presumptions prior to data collection cannot be completely eliminated and that the technique of bracketing can be inconsistent. With that said, IPA acknowledges that bracketing cannot be eliminated but encourages researchers to use a more reflexive approach, bringing their knowledge, perceptions, and presumptions about a phenomena or experience to the forefront and acknowledging a possible lens of perception on the part of the researcher (Reiners, 2012).

**Interpretative Phenomenology and Low-Income Black Girls**

Interpretative Phenomenology was chosen for this particular research study because it allowed the researcher to look at the shared and individual experiences of resistance amongst Black girls at the research site (Harper School). The phenomenological approach is a means of exploring a participant’s interaction with a certain event without the assumptions of the investigator and focuses on the implications of experience (Silverman, 1980). Employing IPA allowed me to hold true to phenomenological principles by describing how Black girls displayed resistance as well as how they and their teacher perceived their behaviors. As stated by Creswell (2012), this methodology also focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. IPA also allowed to me to utilize bracketing to the extent possible to incorporate validity while also holding a reflexive position on data collection and analyses, allowing transparency within the research process as well. Reflexivity allowed me as a researcher to acknowledge my own position as a Black woman from a similar background who understood the ramifications of social and cultural reproduction (although not exposed to the terminology) and often utilized whatever autonomy available to resist it (although not always resulting in positive consequences). To ensure bracketing was used to the best extent possible,
suggested techniques from Chan, Fung, and Chein (2013) were utilized, incorporating the use of a reflexive diary, semi-structured interviews (primarily allowing participants to guide the tone of the interview), and member check and validation of data interpretation.

**Intersectionality as a Methodological Lens**

A major critique of the interpretive approach as well as phenomenology is its focus on the micro level and its neglect of larger sociocultural and macro-level issues. Essential to understanding marginalized groups like low-income Black girls is contextualizing their experiences within those larger macro-level structures. In order to offset this limitation, the researcher consistently employed intersectionality as a methodological lens. Using McCall’s intracategorical complexity as a methodological lens, the girls’ own narratives served as the analytic starting point to further understand their experiences within the school and with regard to resistance (McCall, 2005). This lens assisted in illuminating and analyzing the macro-level issues these girls faced specific to the intersection of their identities. Intersectionality as a specific methodology allowed the researcher to gauge how low-income Black girls’ experiences are shaped through their positionality within their social identities. As Yuval-Davis (2006) states, intersectionality as a methodological lens includes ways in which different identities are intermeshed as well as how context and locations affect specific positioning of women of color. The perception of their specific behaviors goes beyond an issue of stereotypical perceptions due to race but also call into question perceptions of their femininity, sexuality, and intellectual capability, as well as the hindrance of academic mobility (which in turns affects their social mobility). The use of intersectionality as methodological lens not only affected how the investigator collected data specific to this population of girls but also included contextual analysis to uncover other identities that may have affected their disadvantage.
Historically, intersectionality was created to give voice to women of color, whose narratives were often lost, and bring to the forefront confirmation of the qualitatively different experiences these women had and how their identities did not parallel but intersected each other to confirm experiences of oppression. Hancock referred to this as content specialization of intersectionality, which gives voice to women of color in research and allows the researcher to locate specific standpoints that could reveal complicated and contested configurations of power and disadvantage (as cited in Choo & Ferree, 2010). While arguments exist that the illumination of the voice of women of color, specifically on the basis of difference, neglects positions of power these women have and only perpetuates social norms, I posit that the voice of Black female youth (in this case) will serve as a counter-narrative to the master narrative of the social processes of schools. Specifically highlighting their stories will allow them to self-define in ways often stripped from them in traditional literature and research.

Using the method of intersectionality, particularly for analyzing the behaviors of Black girls, allowed their voices to define and give meaning to their own behaviors in the classrooms. Secondly, it allowed the researcher to observe and understand their behaviors in light of all of their social identities and how those identities affirmed each other in the reality of oppression and marginalization. Thirdly, it allowed the researcher to understand how their behaviors, and the reactions and outcomes thereof, interacted with the system of schooling and critique how the social processes that occur within the school affected their experiences. And lastly, it brought context to the girls’ perceptions and understanding of the relationships their teacher had with them in light of their social identities.

**Site and Participant Selection**
The site for this study, based on information of similar studies as well as racial identity development literature, is a racially mixed junior high school (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Morris, 2007). Based on racial identity development literature, children learn racialized roles from an early age, but the recognition of racial prejudices and the ability to verbalize what those are tend to emerge in adolescence (defined as beginning at age 12) (Lewis, 2003; Tatum, 2003). The site for research is Harper School (pseudonym given). Harper School is a school in a small Midwestern town composed of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade classrooms. According to city data, the boundary in which Harper resides has a median annual income of $21,290, lower than the national median of $23,550, labeling this neighborhood a low-income community. It is an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) school and also a part of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. It is situated within an Urbana-Champaign community that is predominantly Black and whose student enrollment is predominantly Black. More specifically, Harper School is 45% Black, 30% White, and 7% Latino (see Figure 1). Sixty percent of Harper School students qualify for their free lunch program, and over 80% of their teachers are White (see Figure 2 and 3). Their mission is to “partner with the community in order to guide all students in gaining knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to direct their lives, improve a diverse society and excel in a changing world by providing dynamic, resource-rich learning environments and experiences in which people and lifelong learning are valued.” (About our School, n.d.). Harper is also a rather large middle school enrolling approximately 610 students. In the past, Harper was known in the district for their high disciplinary infractions and unstable administration, which is now being restructured and redeveloped (About our School, n.d.).
Figure 1: Racial Composition of Harper

Source: Illinois Report Card
Figure 2: Income Composition of Harper

Source: Illinois Report Card

Figure 3: Teacher Demographics of Unit 4 School District

Source: Illinois Report Card
Participants

Classroom observations in this study took place in two eighth-grade classrooms taught by the same classroom teacher at Harper School. All eighth-grade classrooms were pooled for participation by the researcher. One classroom teacher (out of six eighth-grade classroom teachers) allowed the researcher entry for classroom observations after being introduced to her by the principal and having the topic of research explained. The classroom used to gather observations was a mixed education (some general, special, and AVID education students) English classroom. Classrooms primarily served as sites for observations of teacher–student interactions, observations of the resistant behaviors Black girls’ were displaying, and teacher responses to those behaviors.

In consultation with the principal and the general classroom teacher, interviewees were selected using purposive sampling. A total of nine low-income Black girls who were enrolled in the observed classroom were invited to participate and confirmed participation in the study. All participants were of low or working-class backgrounds as indicated by the qualification for free or reduced-price lunch. The knowledge of which students receive free and reduced-price lunch came directly from the administrative list of free and reduced-price lunch students from the principal and teacher, and the investigator received confirmation of this classification from interviewees at the beginning of the interview.

In addition to observing student-to-teacher interaction in the classroom setting, it was also integral to have informal conversations with the classroom teacher regarding the perception of behaviors of the Black girls in their classroom. These conversations occurred once a week during the two-month data collection period.

Data Collection and Analysis
The primary methods in this study consisted of individual semi-structured interviews and classroom and school observations. Patton (1990) defines interviews as a purposeful conversation between two or more people that intend to get information from the other as well as to gather descriptive data in the participant’s own words to determine how the subject interprets some piece of the world. The primary purpose of using individual interviews with the teacher and the girls was to allow the participants to provide personal reactions to Black girls’ behaviors as well as to understand whether Black girls regard their own behavior as resistant or not. Interviewees were previously determined in conjunction with the classroom teacher and the principal (primarily based on the girls who attended the classroom in which observations occurred). The girls who were identified for an interview were those who self-identified as Black females and were low income as indicated by qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch.

In order to protect the welfare of the participants, each student was assigned a pseudonym. Along with this, no information will be mentioned in the results about participants that make it possible to distinguish who they are. Interviews took place in a private classroom in the school without any staff or administrators present so that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences and didn’t feel any threats to their anonymity. Also, student and parental consent was given for students to participate in interviews. Students were given a parental and student consent form to return approximately a week before their scheduled interview. Consent forms were collected at the beginning of the interview. Interviews were semi-structured in that the investigator had a core set of questions to ask participants but also allowed for slight deviation depending on participant responses. A follow-up interview was conducted to ask any questions on the interview protocol that weren’t asked during the first interview because of time constraints and to discuss any incidents that may have occurred during observations in classroom
relative to the girls’ behavior. The follow-up interview, originally planned to be individual interviews, organically turned into a group interview with the girls desiring to have each other there to talk about major issues. The researcher allowed it to happen so as to observe the difference in responses from the primary individual interviews. Observations and interviews with students took place from October through November of 2013. Interviews ranged from 45 to 50 minutes during the student’s lunch period and covered student’s behaviors in the school setting, how they defined those behaviors, and their beliefs about others’ perception of their behaviors. The follow-up interview was requested and conducted in November. Finally, participants were constantly reminded that their participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time without penalty. Interview participants were compensated with a $10 gift card to a restaurant of their choice.

Classroom and school observations provided insight into the behaviors of Black girls as they occur throughout the school day and insight about the interaction between students and staff from an objective perspective. As discussed in Hatch (2002), observations serve as a mechanism to understand certain phenomena from the perspective of the participants. They also allow the investigator to inductively understand how participants understand their setting and observe what events or interactions are occurring within that setting that participants may neglect or be reluctant to discuss in interviews (Patton, 1990). Observations were naturalistic and did not include any additional activities other than the prescribed lesson plan of the classroom teacher. I sat in the back of the room. Observations took place three times a week, for a total of two class periods a day (50 minutes each). They took place from September to November 2013. Observations focused on student–teacher interactions as well as peer interactions of all students in the classroom, highlighting the experiences of the Black girls. The investigator also observed
hallway interaction of the selected interviewees during passing periods and lunchroom interactions during lunch to gain a holistic view of the participants’ school experience.

Data from this study were recorded two ways: via audio recordings that took place during participant interviews and handwritten field notes recorded by the investigator during observations. Audio recordings were for transcription purposes only and were not to be disseminated elsewhere. Prior to recording interviews, participants were made aware that what they share would be recorded and that they had the option to decline participation. They were also made aware that if they did not consent to an audio recording, they would not be eligible for participation in the study. Additionally, during the audio-recorded interviews, the investigator took handwritten notes to be included in the final write-up of this study. Interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and coded with a pseudonym prior to the beginning of their interview in order to further protect their identity. The key that matches the pseudonym name to a participant is in a password-protected file on the investigator’s computer. Additionally, the field notes that the investigator will keep during the duration of the study will only use pseudonyms and will be stored in a password-protected file on the investigator’s computer.

Data were kept via formal field notes; summaries of theoretical, methodological notes; the observer’s comments; thematic memos; and transcriptions from interviews and observations. The data were analyzed using descriptive coding. The researcher also kept a research diary summarizing personal feelings, experiences, and thoughts during data collection.

Underlying most interpretive qualitative research, more specifically interpretative phenomenology, is the assumption of general induction within data analysis. As the methodology employed in this study is interpretative phenomenology, the analytical approach will be a general inductive approach. The inductive approach was employed to 1) condense raw data into succinct
and brief summaries; 2) establish connections between the research objectives and the findings; and 3) create a framework to understand the thematic issues Black girls are sharing in regards to behaviors and resistance in the classroom (Thomas, 2006). Using inductive analysis allowed for themes to emerge from frequent and systematic coding of the data. More specifically, Hycner’s (1985) guidelines for phenomenological analysis coding followed the following format:

1. Read notes and listen to interviews for general understanding.
2. Highlight statements, quotes, or events that are relevant to the phenomena being studied or research questions.
3. Categorize those statements and quotes.
4. Condense categories into themes.
5. Refine codes (themes) based on overlap and similarity.

While Hycner (1985) acknowledges that phenomenological analysis is more about approach than a set of “how to” instructions, he does offer suggestions for analysis that were used in this study. Firstly, I listened to audio data and read field notes uninterrupted to get a sense of the whole context of the data. Also, as Hycner suggests, I combed through data to delineate units of general meanings that seemed like they were relevant to the research questions and then condensed those units even more until the most relevant themes and codes remained.

Keeping in line with interpretative phenomenology, a reflexive journal was also kept to acknowledge a possible lens of bias on behalf of the researcher.

**Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol was comprised of 20 open-ended questions that covered the following categories:

1. Moments of conflict/resistance
2. Student perception of their behavior and what it signifies
3. Teacher perception of Black girl behavior and what it signifies
4. Impact of race, gender, and class on understanding/meaning making of moments of conflict

Questions in the interview protocol were guided primarily by literature on resistance theory as well as social and cultural (re)production. Literature like Morris (2007) and Pugh-Lilly, Neville, and Poulin (2001) guided the questions centered around student understanding of conflict with administrators and their own understanding of what their behaviors represented. Lastly, literature on intersectionality and culturally relevant pedagogy guided questions centered around teacher perception of these girls’ behaviors. Table 1 summarizes all research questions, data sources, and reasons for analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Reason for Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are low-income Black girls displaying resistant behaviors within the school? If so, how?</td>
<td>• Classroom observations</td>
<td>• Analysis of observations and interviews for the types (and frequency) of behaviors being displayed in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviews with teachers and Black girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidiary question: Is there a manifestation of these behaviors in this context? If so, do these behaviors fit within the traditional sociological framework of resistance?</td>
<td>• Classroom observations</td>
<td>• Analysis of classroom observations for types of behaviors and outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviews with teachers and Black girls</td>
<td>• Analysis of interviews for intention or perceived intention of the behavior of Black girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidiary question: If these behaviors are found to be resistant by the girls, does the intersection of race, class, and gender impact whether Black girls define their behaviors as resistant as they understand resistance? If so, how?</td>
<td>• Interviews with Black girls</td>
<td>• Analysis of interviews for understanding and employment of resistance, how they view their own behaviors, and what they believe about the outcome of their behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidiary question: Does the intersection of race, class, and gender impact how the teacher perceives their behavior? If so, how?</td>
<td>• Classroom observations</td>
<td>• Analysis of how teachers view the girls, how teachers view their behavior, and how they view the intentionality of their behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviews with teachers</td>
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Reliability and Validity

Member Check

In order to keep the integrity of IPA and promote bracketing in the most unadulterated way possible, member checking was used to ensure accurate interpretation of data (Merriam, 2002). As stated earlier, member checking is the technique used in phenomenology whereby participants are allowed to verify or confirm that a researcher’s interpretation of data is accurate. Member checking enhances the reliability, validity, and credibility of the researcher’s analysis. During this process, I allowed participants to read a transcription and hear what my interpretation of that piece of data was. Participants were then allowed to confirm that the interpretations accurately represented their understanding, intent, or feelings or to make corrections. Member checking was done at the end of the study after all data had been collected. Out of the nine students contacted to do member check, five responded and participated, all verifying that the researcher’s interpretation was accurate.

Reflexivity

The role of the researcher may vary, depending on site selection to conduct research, but will include some consistent themes. Those themes include recognition of self and the role of the researcher in the classroom. My position as a Black woman has shaped my desire to explore this particular topic and is also a pivotal lens in how I understand Black girls’ behavior and resistance. Due to similar backgrounds and identification with some experiences of these Black girls, subjectivity might come into play. I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge the generational, class, and cultural separation that I have through my current social identities that could inhibit and cause difficulty in establishing rapport with low-income Black female youth. Because the experiences of Black female youth are not monolithic, although some trends in
experiences are similar, I cannot assume I will wholly identify with all that occurs within the classrooms and school setting with these girls. In order to address these issues, the use of reflexivity will be crucial to research design, development, and data collection and analysis.

Parahoo defines reflexivity as the continuous process of reflection by the researcher on his or her values, preconceptions, behavior or presence and those of the participants, which can affect the interpretation of responses. This involves researchers recognizing that they are part of the social world under study (as cited in Jotoon, McGhee, & Marland, 2009). As stated by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), no qualitative research is value free on the part of the researcher, and with that in mind, it will be integral for a researcher of similar background and who shares similar experiences as the participants to acknowledge that reality throughout the research process. Understanding and being consistently reflective of the values and perspectives the researcher has toward her research will not only provide clarity regarding the researcher’s lens of analysis but will also add more credibility to the research itself. By constantly scrutinizing what she knows and how she knows it, the researcher can separate herself in a way to make explicit her own biases and possibly remove herself from the lens of analysis. Jotoon and colleagues (2009) discuss how their research on nursing education as faculty members helped them realize the reciprocal nature of the learning process during research implementation and through tools such as research diaries. These tools enhanced empirical rigor and allowed the researcher to be transparent in his research analysis and findings.

Venus E. Evans-Winters (2005) also used the concept of reflexivity in her study on the resiliency of Black girls in urban classrooms. Because of Evans-Winters’ identification with the Black female youth she was studying, she was able throughout her text to insert her own narratives exposing her location within the research itself. She connected the girls’ stories to her
own experiences in education and her home community (Evans-Winters, 2005). Evans-Winters’ ability to be open and critique her own bias brought to the text and studies a perspective no other researcher could provide. Her ability to connect with her participants and their community allowed for richer and more honest data. Similarly, reflexivity will be a method used to enhance my research on Black female youth and provide an honest and transparent interpretation of their behaviors.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation refers to the notion that each method reveals a different aspect of empirical reality; no single method can adequately confirm an empirical explanation and therefore should be strengthened by the use of multiple methods (Patton, 1990). Denzin (1978) further expands on triangulation as something beyond just multiple methods, including a variety of factors such as time and space and studying phenomena under multiple conditions. To strengthen my study and use triangulation as Patton and Denzin discuss, I will use multiple sources of information as well as multiple sources of data collection. For example, I am interested in not only Black female youth’s understanding of resistance in their own behaviors but also how teachers are interacting and perceiving these behaviors. Because of this, I gathered data from teachers, staff, and students to have a more objective sense of the lives and behaviors of this population of students. Also, observations occurred at different sites within the school (classroom, hallway, and lunch) during different times of the day during observation days. I used member check, communicating my interpretations to interviewees, to ensure my interpretations were valid. I shared with my interviewees my understanding of their stories and allowed them to share their thoughts with me. Lastly, the use of interviews and observations will assist in supporting the triangulation of my data.
CHAPTER 4

CONTEXTUAL PORTRAIT OF HARPER SCHOOL

The contextual portrait of Harper School will begin with an overview of the school district as a whole. In order to appropriately situate data and findings into a descriptive backdrop of the school and describe how certain racial attitudes came to be, a brief discussion on the consent decree, its findings, and implications will also be discussed. Finally, a descriptive snapshot of Harper School specifically will be presented.

Unit 4 School District

Unit 4 School District is a K-12 school district that serves approximately 9,600 students and serves Champaign, Savoy, and Bondville, IL (“About Our School”, n.d.). Composed of a total of 12 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 3 high schools, Unit 4 came to inception after World War II in 1948 and has continued to grow ever since (“About our school”, n.d.). Unit 4 has faced some prominent issues throughout the years though, especially in regards to (de jure and de facto) segregation. After the Brown v. Board decision of 1954 was issued, Champaign and Urbana, Illinois, faced several issues regarding integration and desegregation of schools regardless of level. As a result of Unit 4 School District’s issues with upholding the spirit of Brown v. Board, a lawsuit was filed in 1996 against the district by the Johnson family and included the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) as well as Racial Justice Now regarding their disparate educational practices from 1968 to 1997 that disadvantaged Black students (“Second Revised Consent Decree,” 2002; “About our schools,” n.d).

Ironically, segregation still reared its ugly head for Unit 4 School District. As a result of de facto segregation, the district faced a lawsuit in 2002 from several Black families regarding mandatory one-way busing of Black students, an overrepresentation of minorities in special
education, discrimination in student school assignment, within-school segregation practices, and tracking, discipline, and staffing. In May and July of 1996, several Black families initiated complaints with the United States Department of Education and the OCR regarding student assignment and educational services for mandatorily bussed Black students. After a period of review, the Board of Education initiated a redistricting plan, a comprehensive education equity audit, and a controlled choice plan to remedy family and community concerns. The lawsuit found that there was inequitable treatment of Black students in Unit 4 schools (“Second Revised Consent Decree,” 2002; “About our schools,” n.d).

The plaintiffs in this case represented not only the current Black families of Unit 4 School District but also future Black families, and they specifically filed the complaint to fight for educational practices that served the best interests of Black students. Shortly after the OCR filed the complaints on behalf of the families, the district established a redistricting plan. The plan included initiatives to re-work school zones. The OCR purported the re-worked school zones did not fully address their concerns and the district needed additional modifications to ensure diversity (“Second Revised Consent Decree,” 2002; “About our Schools,” n.d). Shortly thereafter, OCR threatened litigation and a few resolutions were proposed on behalf of the district to address the allegations of the families:

1. A memorandum of understanding was enacted, which gave parents the right to choose which school their child attended.

2. A detailed review of the statistical disparities between minority and majority students in the district were documented, and actions appropriate to resolve the issues filed in OCR’s original complaint were noted.

3. A comprehensive equity audit was conducted by Dr. Robert Peterkin.
4. The parties developed an Implementation Plan, which was approved on June 12, 2000, that outlined the detailed steps the district would take to ensure that educational equity was sought and achieved specifically regarding African American students (“Second Revised Consent Decree,” 2002; “About our Schools,” n.d).

All parties involved in the lawsuit agreed that working together on addressing education disparities within the school district would be the most advantageous route to ensure community buy-in and to ensure the effectiveness of proposed efforts (“Second Revised Consent Decree,” 2002). In efforts to avoid litigation, all parties involved agreed to what is now known as the Second Revised Consent Decree, allowing focus to be placed solely on the implementation of resolutions instead of detracting resources and staff by taking the case to court. Two specific components of the Second Revised Consent Decree are the Controlled Choice Plan and the Educational Equity Plan.

**Controlled Choice Plan**

The Controlled Choice Memorandum for elementary schools, written in consultation with Dr. Michael Alves, was implemented to provide parents with more autonomy with regard to choosing which school their students attended, as well as ensuring students had equitable access to a variety of schools and classes. The memorandum included establishing and maintaining a parent information center, which would provide parents and guardians with detailed information regarding school processes, application processes, and school choice (“Second Revised Consent Decree,” 2002; “About our Schools,” n.d). The Controlled Choice Plan also proposed a plan for magnet schools and their application process, solicited participation for community members and organizations regarding implementing the plan and its components for increased accountability, and set forth a four-prong plan to increase seat capacity within the district. With the Controlled
Choice Plan, Stratton Elementary was highlighted as a special desegregation school due to historical circumstances and also included its own plan to increase racial and socioeconomic diversity of the student body ("Second Revised Consent Decree," 2002; “About our Schools,” n.d).

**Educational Equity Plan**

The Educational Equity Plan consists of four goals stemming from the Educational Equity Memorandum, a memorandum containing an established plan and program to address the complaints of the plaintiffs. The goals included seeking to eliminate disparities in the special education and gifted education programs, seeking to eliminate disparities in enrollment of minority students in upper-level courses, reflecting a culturally responsive curriculum, and hiring a diverse staff. Specifically relevant to this research topic was the goal of improving school climate and discipline for students of color. More specifically, this last goal of the Educational Equity Plan was to eliminate disparities in discipline and sought to use discipline solely as an intervention strategy and a means to improve student performance ("Second Revised Consent Decree," 2002; “About our Schools,” n.d.). As seen by the various components of the consent decree, the Champaign-Urbana School District has had a long history of discriminatory practices and educational disparities for their students of color, specifically their Black students. While remedies have been put forth, most have been focused on overt, macro, and obvious discriminate practices. What may be beneficial to look into further are micro-level practices that may unintentionally lead to discriminatory practices such as the achievement gap and the discipline gap. What makes Unit 4 unique is that after implementing this plan to address educational disparities, is that it may be facing similar issues still currently.

**Racial Disparities in Unit 4 School District**
After the revised consent decree, Unit 4 School District launched a variety of initiatives to address the racial disparities ranging from parent choice to school discipline. Unfortunately, while some initiatives have improved access to resources for families of color, increased the number of Black students in honor and AP courses, and decreased the number of Black students in special education, there remains a deficit in equity regarding a range of issues for Black students in Unit 4 School District. More specifically, racial disparities persist regarding discipline and teacher perception of behavior for Black students. According to a major university-based news publication, Black students are more susceptible to discipline in Champaign schools and less likely to be enrolled in honors or AP courses (Davis, 2014). Data cited in the *Daily Illini*, originally published by the Office of Civil Rights in 2011, illustrate that Unit 4 School District’s data mimic that of the national trend of disproportionately high cases of discipline of Black students compared to their White counterparts (Davis, 2014). A specific observation of a high correlation of discipline and low-income Black students was also noted.

Black students in Unit 4 School District specifically make up 34.8% of the district’s population but 73% of all discipline cases, which has risen from 68.1% in 2000. Comparatively, White students comprise 40.7% of the district enrollment but only 13.8% of discipline cases (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2012). Clearly, some racial disparities remain in Unit 4 School District that derive specifically from race and, as noted in OCR’s report, often from the intersection of race and class disproportionately affecting low-income Black students. Mark Aber, a researcher for Unit 4 School District and psychology professor, stated, “I think it reflects primarily the fact that our schools are not as well designed to meet the needs and interests of African-American youth as they are to meet the needs and interests of White children . . . our schools aren’t well designed to meet the needs and interests of low-income kids as they are to
meet the needs and interests of kids from middle and upper-income families” (Davis, 2014). Not only do data like these demonstrate that there may be a cultural dissonance between staff, faculty, and students, but racial disparities like these go beyond simple infractions and can impact a student’s access to higher education or post-secondary vocations. Combining the existing discipline gap at Unit 4 School District with the disparate enrollment of Black and low-income Black students in gifted, higher math, and higher science courses can impact school culture and marginalize certain students within the school context. Immense underrepresentation in positive aspects of schooling like advanced math or science courses and immense overrepresentation in negative aspects of schooling like discipline can impact a student’s self-esteem as well as the way they perceive that others value them.

**Racial Disparities and Harper School**

Harper School was not exempt from the racial disparities faced by Unit 4 School District. Situated in an economically challenged neighborhood, Harper has faced a challenging past and dealt with years of racial discord, segregation, and lawsuits, specifically feeling the impact of the consent decree for their overrepresentation of Black students, especially low-income Black students, in special education (Ritsch, n.d.). Despite the consent decree, the achievement gap, attendance, and discipline issues were pervasive for Black students as of 2002 (Principal Leadership, 2011). Since then many initiatives were implemented to try to resolve the issues, but one principal in particular, Sarah Wright, was able to directly address some of the continuing issues of Harper. Principal Sarah Wright began working at Harper as a teacher and has worked there for more than 16 years in various positions. She noted the persistent issues with Harper, such as discipline and achievement, and she implemented some effective programs that have decreased trends. However, she notes there is still work to do in regards to addressing these
trends (Ritsch, n.d.). Examples of initiatives that Principal Wright implemented include a “To Exceed Expectation” motto composed of a regulated review with staff of achievement gap data specifically for Harper and professional learning communities for teaching staff (a group of teachers coordinated by subject for curriculum planning and achievement gap review) (Principal Leadership, 2011). Also, a notable program was implemented, Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID), which sought to provide enhanced academic rigor for historically underrepresented populations who were interested in a university experience (Ritsch, n.d.). As demonstrated by the wealth of knowledge and experience of Principal Wright, many of the issues originally faced by Harper lessened but did not subside. Notably, Harper was awarded the 2011 Breakthrough Schools Award for its considerable work at addressing racial disparities, and while Principal Wright states there still remains work to do in many areas, Harper has made considerable strides (Principal Leadership, 2011). But with the given district data on the overrepresentation of discipline of low-income Black youth and Black youth overall, as well as new administrative leadership at Harper, there still remain questions around overrepresentation of Black students in the discipline gap.

**Discipline, Teacher Perception of Black Student Behavior and Harper**

The reality that Unit 4 School District and Harper School have an overrepresentation of Black students receiving disciplinary sanctions compared to their White peers demonstrates that something is occurring within Harper that is specifically disenfranchising Black students and oftentimes low-income Black students. Nationally, youth of color disproportionately face harsher disciplinary procedures compared to their White counterparts. Consistently shown in research, Black and Latino youth have a higher probability of being expelled or suspended than do their White peers (Children’s Defense Fund, 2007). Compounded by race, the issue of school
discipline is not only an issue of equal treatment of students at its most basic level but also an issue of access to higher education, the achievement gap, and civil rights (with regard to an equitable education experience).

Reasons underlying the issue of the discipline gap vary across studies but tend to center around a number of core tenets. These core themes include teacher cultural competency, criminalizing Black students, and zero tolerance policies (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Monroe, 2005). These core tenets are usually reported in reference to Black boys, who are the most affected group and the group most reported on in research. Lacking from current research is the state of the discipline gap and Black girls. While the gap in discipline with regard to Black boys is high, the rising trends in the discipline gap with Black girls resembles the disparity Black males face. The underlying reasons for the disparity in discipline for Black girls are parallel to those of Black males and have great implications for Black girls who are facing harsher disciplinary procedures. Similar to Black males facing higher probability of entering the school-to-prison pipeline, Black females are becoming the rising statistic in that same system.

Looking at discipline and Black students is important because removing students from the school setting has extreme consequences for the affected youth who receive that punishment. These students not only are missing pivotal instructional time but also may consequently develop a negative academic identity, become truant, or even drop out (Skiba et al., 2002). Also, discipline referrals are not evenly distributed across student groups and typically affect males (Skiba et al., 2002), lower socioeconomic groups (Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982), special education students (Skiba and Peterson, 2000), and lower achieving students (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987) (as cited in Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Racial disparities in discipline stay consistent even after considering socioeconomic status (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; Skiba et al., 2002; Wu et
Irvine (1990) even reports of qualitative findings that indicate teachers confine reprimands to Black students even when youth of other races engage in the same unsanctioned behavior, and Black students receive harsher punishments than peers of other races for subjectively defined offenses.

The fact that Black students may be receiving harsher disciplinary practices for the same behaviors White students may display calls for a closer look at what is occurring in school, both at the macro and micro level. Specifically utilizing the data of Unit 4 School District, which mimics the national trends of the discipline gap, allows one to go beyond the factual nature of the discipline gap and also look into why it is perpetual. “Popular views of African American life are connected to threatening images with predictable regularity. Both media and scholarly portrayals of contemporary black life often highlight cultures of violence, drugs, anti-authoritarianism, and other social deficiencies . . . threatening and criminal archetypes frequently ground their perceived existence, particularly in low income environments (Canada, 1996)” (as cited in Monroe, 2005, p. 47). Teachers and administrators in schools that comprise a mostly Black student body often find themselves operating out of these misconceptions and, because of that, pushing for school policies that will protect themselves and allow them control of the school (Monroe, 2005). The issue that arises out of these policies is the assumption about student behavior based on cultural stereotypes. Teachers give punitive disciplinary infractions for students’ behaviors that are perceived to be violent and aggressive and are labeled as maladaptive but whose intentions may not align with those perceptions.

“In one urban school district with 19 middle schools, the categories of ‘disobedience’ and ‘disrespect’ were the most common of the 33 offenses . . . (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). Some studies have found that teachers perceive Black middle school students as more defiant,
disrespectful, and rule-breaking than other groups (Skiba et al., 2002).”). Teacher perception of maladaptive behavior is a crucial determinant in the discipline gap as it stands today. One misconception for the existence of the discipline gap is that some students from certain racial or ethnic backgrounds misbehave more and contribute to a lack of school safety. Generally, research disproves this idea, yet schools implement disciplinary procedures as if under this assumption (e.g., Skiba et al., 2002; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Stereotypes and implementing school policy on the basis of assumptions and stereotypes inhibit equity in education, because specific populations of students, in this case Black students, will face an additional oppositional barrier in schools.

Harper School proves to be a unique case in that it has had a history of overrepresentation of Black students in special education, the discipline gap, and the achievement gap. Given its improvements, it also still faces issues regarding racial disparities like the rest of the district. As research has shown, students who are overrepresented in these areas often are the recipients of stereotypes and preconceived notions from teachers and staff within the school. While Harper has specifically sought to address their discipline issue with Black students, their referral system still represents some subjective behaviors, which can be misperceived in some cases. More specifically, Black female youth may also participate in “loud,” “teasing,” or “confrontational” behaviors as defined by Harper’s disciplinary referral procedures, but as indicated by Unit 4’s overrepresentation of Black students (especially low-income Black students) there may be some misperception of intentionality regarding those behaviors (see Table 2 and 3).
Table 2: Discipline of Students Without Disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>American Indian or Alaska Native</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Two or more races</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Corporal punishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students receiving one or more in-school suspensions</td>
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<td>Students receiving only one out-of-school suspension</td>
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<td>44%</td>
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<td>38%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<td>Students receiving more than one out-of-school suspension</td>
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<td>12%</td>
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<td>Expulsions with educational services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expulsions under zero-tolerance policies</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total enrollment</td>
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<td>15%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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Due to rounding (both numbers and percents), individual cell values may not add to the Total shown.
In 2011-12, OCR implemented new rounding rules to protect individual student privacy.
Additional Information on Rounding to Protect Privacy.
All data come from the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection.
### Table 3: Discipline of Students With Disabilities

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sex</th>
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<th>Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</th>
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<th>White</th>
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<th>Total</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>LEP</th>
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Due to rounding (both numbers and percents), individual cell values may not add to the Total shown.
In 2011-12, OCR implemented new rounding rules to protect individual student privacy.
Additional Information on Rounding to Protect Privacy.
All data come from the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection.

**The Role of Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)**

Amidst having three principals in the last 6 years, Harper School has attempted to rectify its achievement gap by implementing and supporting a program called AVID. AVID is a program
implemented in Unit 4 School District to address the achievement gap and specifically prepare minority and low-income students for college. AVID provides in-school academic support for sixth- through twelfth-grade students enrolled in Champaign schools. As a result of the consent decree, AVID has been implemented in a number of Champaign schools, and its primary goal is “to level the playing field for minority, low-income, and students in the middle who may be the first in their families to attend college” (“About our Schools, n.d.). Most students enrolled in an AVID program are students who display academic potential achieving at least average test scores and at least average grades, as well as students who have displayed the desire to achieve academically. AVID is an honors program for students who, while in school, attend an elective period and receive instruction in a variety of skills from writing and reading skill development to research skills and college entrance preparation. AVID was specifically created as a part of the programming efforts stemming from the consent decree seeking to address educational disparities for Black students. Inclusion in AVID begins with an application process that takes into consideration a student’s discipline referrals as well as teacher recommendations, among other things. While AVID is a prestigious program with great benefits for its students, it also sometimes comes with social stigma as well. Scholars have discussed the stigma some Black students face when labeled as gifted or are placed in honors programs (c). The implementation of AVID may bring with it awareness on the behalf of students who realize that students are tracked or separated in Harper with perceived different expectations. For instance, AVID students at Harper may be perceived as the college-bound students with different expectations than students in other placements within Harper.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

In the following sections of chapter 5, I will present the themes that emerged from qualitative inquiry investigating the following questions:

1. Are low-income Black girls displaying resistant behaviors within the school? If so, how?
   
   Subsidiary question: Is there a manifestation of these behaviors in this context? If so, do these behaviors fit within the traditional sociological framework of resistance?

   Subsidiary question: If these behaviors are found to be resistant by the girls, does the intersection of race, class, and gender impact whether Black girls define their behaviors as resistant as they understand resistance? If so, how?

   Subsidiary question: Does the intersection of race, class, and gender impact how the teacher perceives their behavior? If so, how?

More specifically, I will explore the phenomena of resistance and perception of resistance that were the central foci of inquiry. As stated in chapter 3, data was collected primarily through classroom observations, school-based observations, and semi-structured interviews in a racially mixed junior high school. Observations primarily took place within 6-minute passing periods (a total of three each observation day), lunch times, and two eighth-grade English classrooms. Nine Black female youth were selected for interviews, all of whom were students in both of the English classrooms. Three other Black female youth were referred for interviews but declined to participate for reasons not stated. Interviews also took place during the lunch period in this classroom, except only the researcher and interviewee were allowed in the space during that time.

Participant Profiles
While classroom and school-based observations were employed, the total number of Black girls observed was eleven, nine of whom participated in initial and follow-up interviews. A brief background of the girls follows:

**Emily:** Emily is a 14-year-old eighth grader who is currently a participant of AVID at Harper. She self-identifies as Black and is low income as indicated by the receipt of free lunch.

**Lily:** Lily is a 13-year-old eighth grader who is currently placed in general education. She self-identifies as Black and is low income as indicated by the receipt of free lunch.

**Tanisha:** Tanisha is a 13-year-old eighth grader who is currently placed in general education. She self-identifies as Black (as she states, “extra black”) and is low income as indicated by the receipt of free lunch.

**Monique:** Monique is a 13-year-old eighth grader who is currently a participant in AVID. She self-identifies as Black and is low income as indicated by the receipt of free lunch.

**Sherri:** Sherri is a 14-year-old eighth grader who is currently a general education student but does receive some special education services. She self-identifies as Black and is low income as indicated by the receipt of free lunch. She is also the cousin of Stacey.

**Shania:** Shania is a 13-year-old eighth grader who is currently a general education student. She self-identifies as Black and is low income as indicated by the receipt of free lunch.

**Stacey:** Stacey is a 13-year-old eighth grader who is currently a general education student but does receive some special education services. She self-identifies as Black and is low income as indicated by the receipt of free lunch. She is the cousin of Sherri.

**Tracey:** Tracey is a 13-year-old eighth grader who is currently a participant in AVID. She self-identifies as Black and is low income as indicated by the receipt of free lunch.
**Joey:** Joey is a 13-year-old eighth grader who is currently a participant in AVID. She self-identifies as Black and is low income as indicated by the receipt of free lunch.

**Erica:** Erica is a 14-year-old eighth grader who is currently a special education student. She self-identifies as Black and is low income as indicated by the receipt of free lunch. She was not reflected in the interviews but was reflected in some observations as she was placed in an alternative school due to behavioral problems a couple of weeks into observations. Participant information can be found in Table 4.

**Table 4: Participant Profiles**

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<th>Name</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Yes (free)</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
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<td>Yes (free)</td>
<td>AVID</td>
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Table 4: Participant Profiles (cont.)

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School-Based Observations

The first thematic occurrence in this study refers specifically to the behaviors of Black girls within the context of the classroom as well as the larger school context. Classroom- and school-based observations yielded insight that the behaviors of Black female youth aren’t starkly different compared to their classmates and peers overall. Most classroom observations were indicative of the examples below:

Stacey tends to work silently at her desk. Some of her peers are chatting around her but she remains attentive and focused on her writing. She doesn’t seem to get distracted easily and even when her peers talk and disrupt the class, she does not, and follows the directions of her teacher.

Two Black boys in front keep talking and disrupting the teaching flow. Ms. C. keeps warning them to stop or she’s going to move them. Other students then start to talk to each other as well regardless of race. The 4 black girls present in class today sat next to each other in the back of the classroom doing work quietly.

Stacey got up from her seat during quiet work time to talk to Tracey. They chat for about 2 minutes before Ms. C. comes over to them. Ms. C. asks them nicely to return to their seats. Stacey immediately goes back to her seat and both girls return to doing work.

A majority of the time, there were no major moments of conflict between the girls and the observed classroom teacher. As with any class, normal talking out occurred in which the teacher redirected behavior. Most times, the Black girls within the class readily obeyed the teacher and got back on task when asked. While Black female youth were more apt to speak out without traditional classroom cues such as raising their hand or asking permission to speak, other
students did the same, and there’s indication that it may be the climate of this specific classroom. Black girls were observed play fighting with peers, using their cell phones in class, and chatting with peers while the teacher was talking. For example, one student, Erica, who was in special education and placed into an alternative school a couple of weeks into the observations, was often distracted in class. She would question the teacher a lot or chat with her peers, but nothing that was perceived as drastic and nothing the teacher couldn’t redirect. For example, most class periods she would get on her phone, but as soon as the teacher told her to put it away, she would. When she felt the teacher wasn’t looking, she would pull it out again; she did the same with talking in class and getting out of her seat. These incidents never turned into a conflict between student and teacher as the teacher displayed patience in constantly redirecting her, later revealing the personal issues she was dealing with at home (her close cousin was shot and killed) as well as her many referrals in school due to fighting other students and interrupting the teacher.

Unfortunately, Erica was placed in an alternative school two days before our scheduled interview. From conversations with Ms. C., “she wasn’t disruptive in all of her classes and only posed problems with certain teachers. I knew what she was going through at home and tried to show as much patience and understanding as I could.” During an observation, Erica was having a conversation with Lily about a White male teacher named Mr. S. She indicated this teacher always picked on her about her volume and how she talked back.

Erica was asked to put down phone and move to correct seat. She moved and then got on phone again. Erica then said to Lily, “I can’t stand Mr. S. he always wants to start something with me. Like he be looking for something to say before I even get in the classroom. And he always gotta look for me in the hallway.” Lily then tells Erica, “Yea, you have to control that mouth to boo boo. Stop getting in trouble.” Erica then responds, “Naw, he disrespectful and he ain’t gonna keep embarrassing me in front of the class.”

This conversation between Erica and Lily, as well as other conversations with other girls throughout the observation period, alluded to a theme of feeling disrespect, lack of listening on
the part of the teachers, and being embarrassed in front of classmates. While the other girls didn’t explicitly state how they reacted to these teachers during the short conversations in the class, they were explicit that they felt disrespected and embarrassed by teachers. Also, this conversation between Erica and Lily, combined with Ms. C.’s perception (as well as what she thought other administrators’ perception of Erica was), was the first time volume and talking back were noted as legitimate offenses for which a student was repeatedly punished.

**Intraracial Interactions**

Another theme to note was the interaction Black girls had within the school setting with each other and other Black students. Often during observations, the Black students talked to each other and didn’t really interact with members of other races within the classroom. The girls tended to talk to each other and the Black boys. They rarely interacted with any other race within the classroom. When interaction did occur across racial lines, it was usually the Black boys taunting the White boys. Very little interaction occurred between the Black girls and girls of other races. Additionally, within-group interaction between the Black students were highlighted with play fighting, roasting, talking, and texting each other.

The 3 black boys, Sherri, and Shania all get up after Ms. C. gives the instructions for group work and walk toward the back of the classroom and converse. Their conversation is inaudible and they continue to huddle in the corner. They begin to snicker loudly. Ms. C. finally notices but the bell rings and she doesn’t address them but reminds the class of tomorrow’s assignment.

Joey gets up from her seat and punches Amari (Black boy) in the arm. Nothing seems to have prompted the altercation, but both parties begin to laugh immediately after. Amari tries to chase Joey to hit her back but she gets to her desk first and Ms. C. notices him. She instructs him to sit down and he obeys.

The observed Black girls in both classrooms tended to associate more with other Black students than any other group possibly explaining why these students were disciplined as a group a lot as well. When discipline was observed by teachers (mainly a White male teacher named Mr. S.), in
the hallway and at lunch, the whole group of Black girls present were disciplined instead of the singular person committing the act. Mr. S. is also a teacher that came up during interviews that the girls complained about being disrespectful and picking on them. While other students were disciplined as well, there are two examples of Mr. S. calling out the girls for volume in the lunchroom as well as talking back in the hallway.

As I entered the lunch room, I noticed 4 of the girls I was observing sitting at a table in the front of the lunchroom. They hadn’t yet gotten called to get their meals but they were talking and laughing. I could hear Tanisha’s voice clearly from the opposing wall I was standing on but didn’t take particular notice of it because the lunchroom was loud as a whole. Teachers were mainly standing around the perimeter of the room and students were sitting at long tables in the center of the room. Mr. S. as well as two other teachers I did not recognize were canvassing the tables and dismissing students table by table to go get their lunches. As the girls continued to talk Mr. S. stopped at their table and told them to all quiet down and they were too loud. Monique pointed out everyone in the lunchroom was loud and talking and asked why are they the only ones getting in trouble. Mr. S. responded that he could hear their voices across the room. The girls groaned to each other and rolled their eyes and Mr. S. walked away. Monique states “We weren’t even loud talking though, if anything Tanisha you were laughing super loud.” Tanisha responds “But still, he ain’t have to come over here. Everybody talking. He always got something to say.”

As I exited Ms. C.’s room during passing period, I noticed Joey, Stacey, Tracey, and Shania together at someone’s locker. Greg, a black boy known for getting in trouble often and tends to have to be redirected quite often in Ms. C.’s class based on observations, comes over and playfully slaps Stacey on the back of her head. Stacey turns around and screams ‘stop’ to Greg and reaches to punch him back when a White male teacher, Mr. S., yells at them to stop and then asks all the girls to leave the hallway. One of the girls says ‘why do we all have to leave our lockers if we ain’t do nothing. See that’s why I can’t stand some of these teachers.’ Mr. S. apparently overhears it and tells the girls one more word and they’ll spend their lunch in his class.

Another thing to note about these within-group behaviors and relationships is how they treat perceived “smart Black girls” and students in AVID. AVID is a special program that seeks to close the achievement gap by supporting and preparing low-income, minority students for college. Typically, in observing behaviors and conflicts in the classroom, I noticed that some girls, typically the girls who other girls deemed “smart” or in AVID, weren’t as vocal as the
others and didn’t seem to be a part of the “in” crowd. These girls, mainly Emily and Lily didn’t get in much trouble, never spoke out or became distracted in class, and sometimes seemed to be invisible to the teacher and other peers. For example:

Emily sits in the middle of class in the row closest to the window. She does her work attentively and doesn’t become distracted by the chatter around her. She tends not to associate with anyone. Greg (a black boy) comes in the class with his homework unfinished. He exclaims he needs to copy Emily’s work because he knows she has all the answers. She seems to be the “smart girl” of the classroom. I have noticed other Black students may interact with her minimally but you can tell she isn’t a part of the “in” crowd as indicated by never convening with them in class or lunch. But none of the other black students bother her either. She seems a bit invisible most times to other students and even the teacher sometimes. She doesn’t participate a lot but always turns in work on time and when the teacher was giving out grades, I overheard she has an A.

Troy (Black boy) exclaims, “I thought you was in AVID.” Lily responds, “I am in AVID. Don’t mess with me little boy.” Troy then says ok and states to another black boy in the class that she’s smart, a goody two shoes, and doesn’t talk to anyone. Lily doesn’t respond and continues to do her work as if she doesn’t hear their conversation.

Both of these girls seem to use silence as a means of getting through their school days without conflict or controversy. Both of these girls mentioned getting bullied by other Black students in interviews, which could add to the intentional use of silence as a means of protection and staying out of trouble. These girls were called teacher’s pets and they believed that is what caused their bullying. As stated before, these girls sometimes seemed invisible, which for them may be intentional and a tool to combat previous problems with other students. They also noted that they didn’t have problems with teachers and often felt as though they could talk to their teachers about anything. The image of these girls as “good” and quiet students on behalf of teachers may aid in that positive relationship.

Emily: “I was here since the 6th grade. So far, it’s been okay. In the 6th grade, when I first got here it was difficult because everybody thought they could run over me and stuff just like I would just ignore it. Sometimes I didn’t know what to do. It was my first time experiencing this. I had a lot of support from my mom and friends and stuff to get me through it. Then, in 7th grade, I just felt like it got worse. It was just a lot of bullies. They
didn’t know that it was affecting me and stuff. Now, I’m in 8th grade. I’m just fine. I try to stay focused in school. I try to stay to myself sometimes more. For me, I don’t really... I stay out of trouble. I don’t get into trouble to the point I got bullies. I got into one time. That was my first time getting suspended. At first, I felt like they (teachers) take sides. Then, I just got over it because I just didn’t think it was fair. They made it seem like they didn’t see her do something. Then, when I did something, I got caught. But the girl was light skinned so...”

Lily: “I’ve been here for three years also. My experience of the 6th grade, it was alright. I wasn’t nervous about coming or nothing because most of the people I already knew. When I started getting up in 7th grade and stuff started changing. Now, since I’m in the 8th grade, people have tried to bully me, but I’ll protect myself. I don’t want to protect myself too much so I get kicked out of school or suspended because I’ve never been suspended before. I come to school to learn, not to fight. Now, I’m not getting bullied and stuff no more.”

**Interracial Interactions**

The Black girls observed oftentimes associated with each other and other Black students and no one else. There were a few instances when interracial interactions did occur. They represented two separate type of interactions: camaraderie and conflict.

Tracey befriends the Asian American girl sitting at her table. The girls begin to talk and laugh. As the girls talk the Asian American girl seems to be comfortable with Tracey and both of their body language (leaning in to each other and touching each other’s arm) demonstrates that they are having a good conversation. The Asian girl begins to use African American Vernacular English frequently within their conversation and with ease. Neither girl seemed surprised or off put by this. The Asian American girls’ use of AAVE may be an illustration of her comfort with being around the black girls or Black people in general.

The students began to enter the class. The biracial girl enters as well talking with two White girls. During the last couple of weeks of observation, the biracial girl (race known because of her screaming it at a boy the day before) doesn’t associate at all with any other Black girls in the classroom but she does talk to most of the Black boys in class. As observed in the hallway and lunch she does have a racially mixed group of friends, but most of her female friends resemble herself (light-skinned, long hair).

Stacey and one of the White girls in class get into an altercation. The trigger is unknown but as Stacey’s voice gets louder, I immediately took notice. Stacey: “Don’t do that. Don’t look at me like that. I’m not talking about you. So don’t do that and stay over there.” The White girl just looks at her and then rolls her eyes and looks back at her phone.
These moments indicate that Black girls did get along with girls outside of their race but may not have included these girls from other races in the inner circle. The mixed girl, who did not want to do an interview, may be displaying some trends typical of the hue-based hierarchy in the Black community, desiring to associate with aesthetically similar girls or those deemed “pretty girls” (Glenn, 2009). There was one other incidence reported by Emily who was suspended for fighting but felt the fairer-skinned girl didn’t get in trouble like she did. While the above example dissipated with an exchange of words, the following examples show a harsher interracial climate and may provide insight to the reason some Black girls don’t associate outside their race.

Sherri: “And sometimes, um, the kids they be like, saying rude comments and they be thinking they be playing but, you take offense because I don’t like when the White boys and White girls going around calling each other niggas. That’s not funny, I don’t like that word.”

Monique: “I think that, the White people think that they can say that word nigga because a lot of us African Americans use it like it’s nothing. I mean, so, it’s not right to say it, and we don’t want them to start saying it then we need to stop saying it to other African Americans as well. But it’s still not right they say it at all. You hear it every day. I don’t think, I don’t think none of the teachers, from what I heard, heard the White people say it. Just mostly the Blacks.”

During interviews several girls began to speak about the use of the “N” word in school and how White students would use the word freely within earshot of Black students. While none of the girls reported being called the “N” word, they reported the discomfort with White students calling each other the word and using the word at all. The girls varied in their reasoning of why the word was used (varying from racial tensions to the constant use of the word by Black students which gives the perception that it’s okay), but they all agreed that it was uncomfortable to be around those students when they said it. They also indicated that they don’t feel the need to tell staff because they don’t believe they’ll listen to them.
Teacher–Student Interactions

Observations also yielded interesting themes regarding student–teacher interactions. While only one teacher was formally observed within the classroom, this teacher seemed to show more patience with the girls than they reported other teachers had. Although the girls would get off task in class, Ms. C. was able redirect them and for the most part they responded positively in obeying her requests. Ms. C. typically did not raise her voice with the girls, and there were no observed conflicts in her class between the Black girls and herself.

Tracey went over to Stacey to talk. The conversation isn’t audible from my chair but Tracey then starts to sing in the middle of their conversation. Ms. C. comes over to them and Tracey immediately goes back to her seat.

Stacey comes over to Tracey’s seat. They have a conversation that is inaudible for a few seconds. The classroom is still working and Ms. C. seems not to mind or notice. Stacey and Tracey begin playfully pinching each other and pushing each others’ arm for some time, then Stacey comes back to her seat and begins to doodle. Ms. C. glances up but doesn’t say anything.

Ms. C. proceeds to give instructions for the class. “Do we have to do visuals? Cuz not everybody wants to draw”—Biracial girl. Ms. C. responds “yes.” Ms. C. then requests that students turn in their late work for 1st quarter in order to receive some credit. “First quarter is done, I wish y’all would just move on”—Biracial girl. Ms. C. seems to purposely ignore the comment and continue to teach. The biracial girl stops talking and begins to work shortly thereafter.

Stacey comes in and moves her desk to be angled toward her friend. “Stacey move your desk the right way.” Stacey doesn’t move it and the teacher doesn’t follow up. Teacher tells all students that they will present their claims and then she will collect their papers. A couple of students explained they didn’t do it. Stacey also tells the teacher she didn’t do it. Teacher then tells Stacey to do it now. Stacey says no. Teacher didn’t say anything else but seems to move on to a new student. After Stacey rebuts, Ms. C. seems to not pursue the matter further. A few minutes later Stacey begins working on the assignment later turning it in when the bell rang.

Ms. C. ignores possible conflicts a lot as a means to de-escalate a situation. While there have been moments where conflicts could have and probably would have arisen had she chosen not to
move on, Ms. C. purposely continues her lesson after the Black girls refute or talk back.

Typically, this tool results in the girls dropping the situation at hand and moving on as well.

**Teacher Perceptions**

**Background of Teacher**

Ms. C. is a White, first-year, eighth-grade English teacher at Harper who also did her student teaching there as well. She graduated from an Illinois university with a bachelor degree in elementary education. She lived in an urban suburb until kindergarten, then moved to a small town in Illinois. She lived there until 2013, when she moved to Central Illinois. She admits that when growing up, her elementary, middle, and high school weren’t diverse at all. She states, “we learned about culture and different kinds of culture, but I never experienced it. When I went to college that’s when I experienced it a lot more. I guess my college is cliquey. It’s really cliquey. The Black and White sororities and fraternities don’t really associate with one another. I guess in my classrooms I experienced more diversity, rather than like high school and middle school.”

Her parents still live in Illinois along with her younger siblings. She now resides near the school in which she teaches and affirmatively loves to teach. She appreciates Harper because of its diversity. She said, “The schools that I’ve been to, other than college, it was not a diverse school at all. I felt as though everyone is very equal here because there is so much culture in this school.”

After multiple requests, Ms. C. is the only teacher that agreed to participate in this study and assisted the researcher in trying to solicit other teachers in the study as well to no avail. She self-acknowledges that she strives to have a positive relationship with all of her students and is able to connect with her students easily because she is closer to their age (only 10 years older). When observing Ms. C, she walks around her classroom a lot and aesthetically looks young,
wears modern hairstyles as well as clothing possibly lending credit to her ability to connect with her students as well (as students may see her more so as one of them). Ms. C is also a new teacher, which she attributes to her ability to connect with students and just have fun. She admittedly is still getting to know the culture at Harper and has focused her efforts on building relationships with her students and finding her classroom management style as her primary goals in her first years of teaching.

**Perception of All Students**

Ms. C.: “I think, and this is probably negative on my part. I feel that at the beginning of the year I was really lenient. I also felt like I connected with them, with the 8th graders. Just because I understand the kinds of things that they like. I'm only ten years older than them, so I try and connect with them more on a personal level. I'm also lenient even though I should have started off strict. That might be the reason some of the girls feel as though they can connect with me better. A lot of the teachers, they've been teaching and they have a lot of practice so they're more strict. They know better classroom management techniques than I do. I think sometimes they dislike teachers because maybe they take it personally when they're reprimanded for talking.”

Ms. C. has demonstrated her genuine concern for her students through observation, informal conversations, and interviews. She admittedly is new to teaching and classroom management techniques but also states she doesn’t want to be overtly mean to her students without cause. She attributes the small age gap to her desire to understand her students and develop a classroom climate that isn’t grounded in control. She holds a positive view of all of her students and believes they all can succeed academically with the right supports. She is quoted as saying she loves her students, thinks they are hilarious with a lot of personality, and has never been disrespected by them. The two English courses she teaches, also the observed classrooms, were starkly different in climate and behavior. Ms. C. recognizes the difference and attributes it to the time of day of the classes (the second class is right before lunch) as well as the types of students in that class. While Ms. C.’s morning class overall performs better academically than
her afternoon class, the increase in cases of distraction and redirection may be because of the
higher number of lower-performing students that require a different level of support and
instruction than the general education students in the class.

Ms. C.: “…my 2 periods are like night and day. The morning period is smooth and
usually has no problems. The afternoon period, two of the girls almost got into a fight.
Some of my lower performing students will get up and chat a lot but that’s because they
may think the material is daunting to them. But I won’t give them less work. I just try to
be understanding and help them along the way.”

This statement shows that while Ms. C. believes some of the disruptive behaviors come
from her lower-performing students, she also acknowledges that it may be a way of escaping
work that might be too hard for them. Both classes, although taught by the same teacher, have
very different responses to directions and redirection as indicated below. These examples also
show Ms. C. as sterner and more straightforward with her afternoon class, which may come from
her expectations that those students are more difficult.

Morning class: Seating is changed in the classroom from 4 desks in a square to normal
lines of desks. The lesson today is on how to talk to and relate to each other. Teacher had
a list of statements and how to ask questions. Teacher states that these are “more polite
ways of asking for clarification.” She then has the class prepare for evidence sharing and
group discussion around topic. As the students begin to pull out their worksheets, the
teacher continues to give instructions. As she continues with the lesson and asks students
questions, the students seem to be not listening to the teacher at all. She is talking and
there is minimal participation and the student barely looks up. She addresses the class and
states she can just give a quiz. Students immediately begin to participate.

Afternoon class: After finally quieting the class, Ms. C. announced the quiz wasn’t
multiple choice the 3 Black boys in the front sighed loudly. Greg, a Black boy who tends
to get in trouble a lot in Ms. C.’s class exclaims “man . . . why? That’s not fair.” Ms. C.
responds “It’s not fair, life’s not fair, so get used to it.” This is the first time I have seen
Ms. C. get visibly upset. Ms. C. then hands out the quizzes, gives directions, and returns
to her desk. The Black boys in front begin talking during quiz. Ms. C. approaches them
and tells them to stop. They state they weren’t doing anything. She responds “Stop lying.
I would appreciate it if you stopped talking and didn’t lie to my face.”
While Ms. C. believes her class is talkative overall, she does note that other staff members have warned her that this 2018 class is more difficult than those in the past years and takes that into account when teaching. She admittedly listens to her more tenured colleagues because this is her first year. Lastly, many times in her class Ms. C. has asserted that her class “acts proper” or uses tools “that are for AVID students but can benefit some of you too.” More specifically, her instructions for her Socratic seminar were, “For the Socratic seminar, don’t use inappropriate language. We’re going to act proper and like we know what we’re doing.” While instructions like these did not come often, they were significant enough for me to notice and document as students’, especially Black students’, reactions were not positive as indicated by ignoring her, smacking their lips, and rolling their eyes.

**Perception of Black Girls**

More specifically, Ms. C.’s perceptions of the students at Harper and in her classroom are similar to her perceptions of the girls in general. She admits they’re talkative but doesn’t think their behavior is starkly different than other students.

Ms. C.: “They love to talk. Are they different from any other students? That’s hard for me to say, because I feel like I’m always addressing different types of groups. The males. I feel like, I more address than males. Maybe, they’re maturing at a slower rate than the girls are? That’s where I feel where the negative behavior is coming from.

Comments by Ms. C. also illuminate that while she doesn’t perceive the girls’ behavior as starkly different from other students, she does note that they tend to react when they feel disrespected or feel that they are treated unfairly. Ms. C. has intentional conversations with the girls so that they understand the reasoning behind her discipline.

Ms. C.: “Maybe with some of the girls I get a little bit more of a snippy reaction. I pull them aside. I always let them know. I let everyone know that when I address you, don’t take it personally. You’re talking while any other person is talking, or while I’m talking, it’s disrespectful. Sometimes they do take it really personally.”
According to Ms. C., Black girls at Harper may talk back or question the teacher, but the reason is because they take discipline personally. Her perception of the girls’ behaviors isn’t necessarily resistance but their own internalization of disrespect or unfair discipline not originally intended by staff and faculty.

Ms. C.: “In general, I feel like I do have to reprimand those girls more so than White or Asian kids. There’s quite a big Asian population here, too. Sometimes they may take that as, why are you coming at us like that? I never mean it in that way. It’s just sometimes they can be a little bit chattier than others. I have a few White female students that I’ve also had to lay into as well. They take it personally when I ask them to be quiet and I do get a lot of attitude back. That’s when I have that conversation. ‘I’m not trying to come at you like that. I would like for you to not come at me like that.’ I think they kind of understand. I do get some of that nippy behavior back. I do. It might also be how everyone is. I feel like I just get that all day, from everyone. I’ve never taught 8th grade, so I’m not used to all the attitude. I do get those responses back. I do like to speak with them one on one about how that’s not how you respond back. Maybe at home that’s how they talk to one another. That’s completely okay. I have to be sensitive to that as well, I guess.”

According to Ms. C., not only does the issue lie within misperception on the girls’ part but also possible disconnect from what connotes acceptable behavior at home or in the neighborhood versus at school. She has never had a moment of conflict with the girls, but she has witnessed conflict between the girls and other teachers.

Ms. C.: “They love to talk. There was once where I was like, ‘ladies, you need to stop. It’s really distracting to everyone.’ They just didn’t know how to take ownership of what they were doing. ‘You were talking, I know you were talking.’ After class I spoke to them and they were really apologetic. I think at first they get snippy but then . . . Tanisha once and Monique, I had an issue with them in class because they were arguing with another male student. Then during lunch they came in and we talked for a half hour about it. That was good.

“I get a lot of ‘you gave me a warning, but you didn’t give him a warning.’ Sometimes it’s really difficult to uphold and make sure who I’ve given how many warnings to. Sometimes I do have it written on the board, which is awesome because they see their name and they need to redeem themselves. We try to let them know it’s our responsibility to keep track of the classroom and we’re trying our hardest. I don’t want you to feel as though it’s unfair. I also don’t want you to bring up another student and inquire about their misbehavior. You’ve got to focus on yourself. I do get that a lot. I do. I understand. I
remember when I was that age. Everything wasn’t fair. I know. I understand what they are talking about.”

Ms. C.’s account of incidents of conflict and the girls’ reaction illustrates that the girls’ questioning does come from a genuine concern about inequality in discipline and that they may believe that questioning staff and teachers is standing up for themselves. However, Ms. C. believes it doesn’t allow them to take ownership of their behavior and only creates a more problematic situation for themselves.

Ms. C.: “I wouldn’t really call it resistance. I would think that sometimes it’s lack of ownership of your actions. They don’t see that they’re talking when they’re not supposed to or they’re up out of their seats. Lack of communication, sometimes yes, because at first I might get an attitude, but then if I speak with them one on one after class it’s totally wiped out of the way and you can cash it out. Maybe embarrassment in front of their peers? Sure. At first they get a little resistance. Like, I’ll address them when they’re talking and they’ll say ‘I wasn’t talking.’ Seriously, you moved your mouth and a noise came out of it. Would that be considered being resistant? Maybe at first. I always feel the need to follow up. I don’t like to have anyone leave the class feeling bitter.”

**Black Girls’ Perceptions**

**Perception of Their Own Behavior**

The girls themselves have a much different reason for their responses to teachers and their conflict with staff compared to Ms. C. They attribute unfair disciplinary practices as their motivation for their constant questioning and occasional conflicts with teachers. They are persistent that while not all teachers are unfair, some do treat them differently as Black girls. The following excerpts from interviews demonstrate their views on dress code.

Tanisha: “We can’t wear shorts. These girls be wearing trash shorts like up to here and as soon as we put them on, they told us, like . . . no.”

Monique: “They told us because of our . . . because of our butts. They make the African Americans change and I don’t think that’s right about, if you’re going to make a rule, it needs to apply to everybody, not just African Americans. They come with the high-waisted shorts that’s all the way up, and they don’t say nothing to them little girls. We wear it and we put on gym shorts.”
Tanisha: “I’m going home. They ain’t gonna make me change.”

Tracey: “Miss S. was like ‘you need to change.’ I wasn’t not going to wear shorts. Walking in the third hour I didn’t change because she didn’t make nobody else change and she was telling me ‘you need to change.’ But I told her I’ve seen you talk to other people (White girls) with the same kind of shorts on and you didn’t tell them to change. I pointed that out. And I didn’t change.”

Almost all of the girls interviewed discussed the disproportionate application of the dress code, with one girl even noting the principal said they have to change more because they have more curves. What can be seen as the policing of Black girls’ bodies is explicit here, resulting in an oversexualization of a certain group of girls. The girls on the other hand, while not naming it oversexualization, recognize that the policing of their bodies and not other girls’ in the school is not right. They also have a unique position on why people perceive them as oversexualized.

Monique: “Some of these girls, they put down Black people, because of the way they act. They give us a bad title.”

Tanisha: “I don’t think teachers necessarily will point it out or act differently, it’s just from us kids seeing it, ourselves. There’s just so many examples, like, for example, girls in the bathroom twerking. Who does that? They recording themselves. That’s an example. That’s the reason why people say, ‘Oh these Black girls are fast, because you do stuff like that.’”

Monique and Tanisha were very vocal in recognizing that teachers made assumptions about all of them based on their perception of a few of them. While I disagree that labeling any girl as “fast” because she expresses her sexuality in non-normative ways is wrong, the girls realize that there is an additional pressure to conduct themselves in a certain way in order not to be stereotyped. Tracey and Joey also indicated in their interviews that they might question teachers because they feel they aren’t treated fairly. For them, respect is expected regardless of your role or title. Joey indicated this with her response in an interview.
Joey: “With Ms. S. it’s when I say something to her that she’s mad. If we sit there argue back with her she be like stop talking back, and then she start cursing at me, then she’ll get mad if I repeat what she say back to her. I was like you see how I feel don’t you so don’t say it to me if you don’t want me to say it back to you.”

Joey is one example of talking back because mutual respect was not given. Her intentions weren’t to talk back but to communicate how she felt about being disrespected. Many of the girls brought up similar examples of “talking crazy” to teachers because teachers “talked crazy” to them.

**Perception of Teachers**

One major theme consistent throughout the narratives of the participants is the girls’ perception of some of their teachers as disrespectful. While they don’t feel this way about all teachers, there were about three consistent teachers that came up as disrespectful. Some of the girls recounted stories like the following:

“I mean she, we had some good times in Science, but it’s like, everyday, when we sitting there at lunch, and we know that we gonna get caught for something or warned for something. And it’s like, oh, this class gonna be bad. We just prepare ourselves. We know that she’s going to start off snapping at us.” - Tanisha

“She’ll take her anger out on us. She’ll be like, ‘I’ve been through a lot today!’” - Monique

“If I’m telling you, you probably would listen, but she be like ‘Mm-hmm, I’m sure you did’ sarcastically. So we be like, ‘Have I ever disrespected you like that?’” - Sherri

“It’s like they pick on us.” - Shania

They also noted that they believe some of their conflicts with teachers are the result of racial stereotypes. Some responses in interviews illustrate that these girls feel as though some teachers treat them differently solely based on race.
They expect us to act bad because we’re Black.”

“If you sit in our class, you would see that she yell at Tanisha stop, Monique stop and then it’s somebody else, it’s another kid that’s not African American and she start laughing with them about what they do. And we just sit there confused. One day she thought that I said, ‘Now if I was White, you would said that.’ She got so defensive against me, like, ‘What did you say?’ I told her, ‘I didn’t say that. I said now if it was a different teacher they would let me go to the bathroom.’”- Tanisha

“They think it’s funny because, like, if you’re a quiet kid or they think you quiet, and you say offensive things, they think it’s funny. They be like, ‘Ah, don’t say that.’ They’ll laugh at it and I don’t think that’s funny. You shouldn’t play about certain things that are offensive to Black people. I know, like, you shouldn’t take it to offense, but, you’re not Black, so you don’t know how it feels to be called a nigga or anything like that.” (In response to the N-Word and other racially charged comments.)- Stacey

“Or, like, if we’re in a class and if I say something, and then a White person say it, they’ll get recognized more than me. The teacher will say ‘Oh, Monique thanks for your point, but so and so point . . .’ It happened before. When I pretty much said the same thing.” – Monique

Participants like Stacey, Tracey, and Monique believe some teachers and staff don’t listen to them because they expect them to act badly. These students end up feeling unsupported and not included at Harper. They don’t believe Harper celebrates who they are.

**Intentionality**

The data have yielded that Black girl behavior at Harper isn’t starkly different from other students but does often result in disproportionate discipline, negative perception, or high student–teacher conflict. However, it’s important to understand the meaning the girls are ascribing to their own behaviors. First, the girls have a keen understanding of fairness and inequity. For them, disproportionate treatment for similar infraction causes them to question and at times defy requests from certain teachers. Their verbalization of differential treatment is clear.

Well, one time when I was in the class this boy had said something and that about our race. Then he was saying, ‘I’m White.’ I had to say something to him. I just had to tell him. He was basically trying to say since he’s White he could get away with it.”- Tracey
“Because sometimes, if another colored person (non-Black) was doing something wrong, they wouldn’t get in trouble. To me, it seems that they seem to look at us as bad people sometime. Especially, I feel like that if we do something bad, they pay attention to when we do this bad thing because the other colored people, they don’t pay that much attention.” - Emily

“I think it has everything to do with race.” - Joey

“Right, they saying like, we’re fast or something like that. They’re expecting us and they don’t even know us. I mean, like, they’re judging us and don’t even know us.” - Monique

Their understanding of racial tension, marginalization, and differential treatment is clear and manifests itself not only in their verbalization of situations and events but also in their actions.

The girls recognize that their behaviors may be wrong sometimes or are counterproductive and still get them in trouble, but some of them feel the risk of not saying anything at all is greater.

The girls verbalized feeling like they can’t do anything that White people can do, and according to a couple of participants, in particular Tanisha, when Black girls bring up issues relevant to being a Black girl, it is thought to be “racist” by some teachers and students. As stated by Tanisha, “I mean if I say that me getting in trouble and not the White girl is racist . . . like what? . . . that isn’t racist. What is the other way to put it? I know I would be racist if I said cracker, that’s racist and then they would get mad.” For the participants in this study, the motivation for them defying a teacher or having conflict with a staff member is because they’re being picked on, watched more closely, disrespected, or treated unfairly. Stacey recounted an incident at lunch that is a perfect illustration of how the participants typically described how they felt about a few teachers at Harper and the reason why conflicts exist with some teachers and staff.

Stacey: “We all sit at the same table but Mr. O. breaks us up real fast but when Terry, Amber, and John (White students) sit together and mess with people, he just be like, ‘You all stop and stuff like that.’ We can be our phone or playing or whatever he try and break us up and take our phone but when Kelly and Sabrina do the same right in front of him, he won’t saying nothing.”

**Highlighted Case: Tanisha**
Most of the participants were very open about their experiences at Harper, but there was one participant who was not only open but stood out due to her constant questioning of authority figures as well as verbalization of differential treatment of Black girls at Harper. Initial observations of Tanisha illustrate that she is an animated eighth grader who is quite outspoken, popular, and smart. I wish to highlight her because she, more than the rest of the participants, had conflicts with staff at Harper despite being disciplined often for it. She attributes her main motivation for her disdain in being treated differently than the White girls. A typical day in the class for Tanisha looked similar to the following excerpts from class observations:

Boy snatched paper from Tanisha. She immediately yells at him to “Give me my paper back.” Students started to go back and forth. Teacher responds and tells them to stop and asks what is going on. Tanisha yells “He took my paper.” The teacher instructs the boy to give her back her paper and says “next time I have to talk to you I’m going to split you apart.” He gives her the paper back and quiets down. Tanisha and boy still fight, just quietly. She takes something of his. He threatens to go to her locker and take something. She starts to plead with him not to. He asks teacher to go to the bathroom and she exclaims to the teacher “no! don’t let him, he’s trying to go to my locker and take something!” Teacher instructs Tanisha that he’s not and to have a seat. Tanisha pleads with the teacher but she repeats herself. Tanisha sits down.

The class begins to share their work. The teacher calls on folks until bell rings. Tanisha has her hand raised but doesn’t get called on. Exclaims “I didn’t even get to go. OMG!” Then loudly moans and keeps interrupting class until the bell rings because she didn’t get called.

Admittedly, Tanisha has been in a few altercations with teachers and students. While she has never physically hurt anyone, she has had many verbal altercations (as defined by teachers; she defines them as disagreements). Ms. C. describes Tanisha as a student with a lot of personality and one that hasn’t personally posed her any problems. She notes that a few of her students have had issues but,

Ms. C.: “I’ve called home on a couple of them. Most of them seem like they have really supportive parents. I know a few are divorced. Like I said, when I’ve called home for behavior or other things in general, parents are very, very supportive at home. Tanisha, I
had to call home because of an incident. Her mom was on top of it. Tanisha has been awesome ever since.”

On the other hand, other teachers, according to Tanisha herself, don’t feel so positively about her. She notes that she gets in trouble quite often with two particular teachers, a White male teacher and her White female science teacher. Tanisha especially notes that she does not like her science class and dreads going. She discloses that she gets in trouble a lot in that class but attributes the cause to her teacher not liking what she has to say when she questions her, as well as her teacher’s desire to be right. A more notable comment by Tanisha about this teacher is that she doesn’t like to hear the girls’ side of the story when incidents do arise. This notion of not being listened to and not being believed seems to be a consistent trend for the girls and really comes through in Tanisha’s narrative. Tanisha tells the story of an altercation she observed with her science teacher and another Black girl.

Tanisha: “I don’t like sixth hour. Because I get in trouble a lot in there. She don’t like to listen to what we have to say. She likes to be right, like she don’t like to hear what our side of the story is. If she feel like you’re in the wrong, then you will get in trouble. It’s like the other day, we had to go to the bathroom. She didn’t let this Black girl go, because they made it an agreement, unless it’s an emergency you can’t go to the bathroom, you can’t go to your locker, you can’t do nothing for after lunch. She wouldn’t let her go to the bathroom. If I was her, I would have walked out. If I have to go to the bathroom really badly, that’s my business. That’s not yours. If I’m telling you that it’s an emergency, and you don’t believe me then, there’s something wrong with you. I don’t take discipline as well when you don’t listen to what . . . to my side of the story.”

For Tanisha specifically, her reactions and motivation to “do things anyway” stem highly from her view that some teachers perceive Black girls negatively. She readily admits not all teachers are bad and “whether Black or White, some teachers are really cool.” But she is adamant that there are some teachers who not only treat Black girls differently but also don’t listen to them or believe them when conflicts arise and they share their side of the story. Tanisha explicitly has stated, “They (teachers and staff) expect us to be ignorant.” While Tanisha had numerous stories
of unfair treatment or not being heard by teachers, the following excerpts are typical of the narratives she told.

Tanisha: “Well, okay, in Science, I was in class, and this one boy, he just irritates, like he messes with me on purpose. He threw nails at me, forks, he threw his pencil, wiped his wet hands on me, ripped my paper, he bit himself and said it was me. Of course the teacher believed that I did it. I was like, you can’t just assume that I bit him. Why would I bite him? That don’t make sense to me. We was arguing about that, and then her response was, ‘This is not the right place to do this. You can come in after class.’ I said, ‘I’m not coming after school.’ I was like, ‘If I feel a certain way, I’m going to address it now and not wait after school. You just embarrassed me, basically, in front of the whole class. I’m going to say what I have to say.’”

For Tanisha, it’s not just not being heard or being believed that offends her, it’s also the embarrassment in front of her classmates. With this particular story, she illustrates not only a conflict with the teacher, her questioning the teacher, but also the miscommunication between both parties. While it was important for Tanisha to clear her name in front of her peers because she had been lied about and embarrassed in front her peers, her teacher seemed to only focus on silencing her and defusing the situation. Tanisha’s desire to “say what’s right” often leaves her as the one getting in trouble, as indicated below.

Tanisha: “The milk incident. Okay, so it was a light skin girl at my table and then it was this boy named Sam. Then, I was sitting there and I was talking to Shay, and then I saw Sam and I was watching him and he was cutting the top off a milk, and then he put it on the edge of the table but I didn’t see that part. Clay had told me that when I wasn’t looking, he put it by my arm so if I went like this (mimics turning around), it would fall. When I turned and Ann called my name, she was like, ‘Tanisha!’ then I was like, ‘Huh?’ She was like, ‘I was just gonna tell you watch out for that milk.’ Then it spilled. Then a teacher, who I have had an argument with before, she’s White, she was like, ‘Who did it?’ She was like, ‘You did it?’ I was like, ‘No.’ She was like, ‘Then who cut the milk?’ She was like, ‘You’re the only one at the table.’ She was like, ‘If it wasn’t Clay and it wasn’t Sam, then it would have to be you.’ I was like, ‘It was most definitely Sam.’ She made me clean it up after I said a thousand times, it wasn’t me. Sam was in there laughing, she know it was him. She wanted to call me out because of the past. I even told her to ask people around us but she wouldn’t.”
She also discusses how she feels individual teachers can validate their differential treatment through policies, specifically noting the dress code. Tanisha believes the dress code is another way to hold Black girls to a different standard than everyone else. She discusses how she views the dress code and how it has gotten her in more trouble, even though she isn’t wearing anything different from other students at school.

Tanisha: “This is something that happened to me this week. I wore an American flag shirt, and I didn’t know that that was disrespectful to the country; I did not know that. I walked in to class and it was cute, too. I walked into Ms. A.’s class, which is Social Studies, for Spanish. I don’t actually have her as a teacher. And she said to me, ‘You can’t wear that.’ ‘Why can’t I wear it?’ ‘Because that’s disrespectful.’ Then she’s say it’s just a dress code in her classroom, but I’ve seen pretty, plenty of White girls that have American flag shirts here just like mine and she has never said anything to them. Basically, it made me feel like, ‘Well, should I take this off or not?’ I’m like no, she can sit there and talk about it. And every time she walked by me she would give me a look. Like I was disrespecting our country, which I didn’t know that was anything.”

She goes on and talks about how she believes Black girls get punished for things they have no control over, especially regarding their bodies. Tanisha is adamant that Black girls should love their bodies, but dress codes that result in different infractions for the same type of clothing don’t promote that.

Tanisha: “It’s not our fault that our mama got big booties and they passed it down to us. I mean, it’s not our fault, but it’s not a bad thing either.

“Even now, girls, White girls, they wear this or that, some skirts that come up to their stomach and they wear long socks with it. That’s cute when they wear it, but if I try to wear it, it’s gonna be a whole different story from Ms. Cutie.”

While shaking her head and rolling her eyes during her interview, Tanisha talks about how she gets tired of trying to stand up for herself and just gives up sometimes.

Tanisha: “I just, sometimes, if I had enough of it, I just shut down and I stop talking to her (discussing her science teacher). If she talks to me, I’ll just look at her like . . . I just go along with what she say, because you can’t win with her. Like, there’s no point of
arguing. You just go along with Ms. T. At this point, now, in class, all I do, I just sit there silently. I don’t even try to argue with her because I know I’m gonna lose. It’s like, whatever. It’s like a waste of my breath trying to get my point across if she not going to listen.”

She further explains her frustration as stemming from how people perceive Black girls differently from other students and their expectation of those groups. She feels the need to push back because she doesn’t believe that treating students differently based on stereotypes is fair.

Tanisha: “It’s been centuries, so I don’t know why people haven’t changed. Say I did something and then the person, the other person did the same thing, they wouldn’t get the same consequences as me. They would get something totally different. They’ll probably get a warning, but I would get a detention or I get sent downstairs. If it was a, ‘they don’t normally do this . . .’ no, they do. People that we call the nerds, they would be like, those kids are good, though. They’re loud just like us. They be doing stuff that we do too, they’re not goody two shoes, they’re bad.”

Tanisha recalls also trying to do things the “right” way about being treated unfairly or treated based on her past. She asked for a parent–teacher conference with Ms. T., a teacher she frequently has conflict with. Tanisha recalls not only that Ms. T. was rude with her mother but also that now her mother complains about Ms. T. to administration as well.

Tanisha: “Well, when I did, she had a parent teacher conference with my mom. One thing she said to my mom that, that really made my mom upset is she wish that I would stop acting so slow in class. That’s what she said. My mom really knows how she is. How you gonna say that to my mom in her face at the parent teacher conference? Yeah. No. I have, I was like, she just done the same thing as me. I was like, is it because of my race? She’s like, ‘It has nothing to do with your race.’ Then she gets smart with me and started getting all defensive. I said, ‘I was just asking you a question, because it seems like to me, like it had something to do with my race.’”

Tanisha epitomizes a lot of what participants have noted about their experiences at Harper. While some of her peers have stood up every now and then, Tanisha has consistently taken stands against what she feels isn’t right, often gaining a label as a troublemaker. Tanisha herself states she isn’t always innocent and doesn’t mind paying for her mistakes, but her struggle is
when discipline looks different for different people based on gender and race. “It’s just not right.” All of the participants were very vocal in naming motivations of differential treatment as having racial undertones, but Tanisha showed lack of fear in “telling it like it is,” as she puts it. Even though her push back at school may land her a detention, for Tanisha standing up for what’s right and acknowledging she sees racial undertones at Harper are well worth it.
Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter I will discuss the major themes that framed the experiences of Black girls at Harper, their understanding of their behaviors as resistance, and the teacher’s understanding of the girls’ behavior regarding resistance. Also, a discussion on how the data and themes fit within traditional sociological-based resistance as well as intersectionality will be presented along with implications and future directions.

Major Themes

Teacher Perceptions

Ownership

One of the most glaring themes found within data was how teachers viewed Black girls and their behaviors, and how that subsequently affected their interaction and treatment of Black girls. First, examining how teachers viewed Black girls yielded one main consistent theme: lack of ownership of behaviors. Ms. C. constantly and repeatedly attributed the conflicts Black girls may have within the school to Black girls not taking ownership that they’ve done something wrong. For her specifically, it wasn’t that they were different than any other students, and she often believed they were not. She believed their perception of differential treatment came from the inability to believe they were wrong or to simply to get out of trouble, like most other students would try to do. Although all teachers weren’t interviewed, the dismissal of the girls’ presumption that differential treatment did occur (that was observed or learned through second-hand accounts) alludes to the fact that the meaning and understanding teachers have of the girls was that they were far from purposeful resisters, but that they were teenagers testing boundaries.

Miscommunication
Teachers also understood Black girls’ reactions to discipline or the root cause of conflict as misunderstandings and miscommunication. In their understanding, Black girls at Harper responded more harshly when they didn’t feel heard or believed the teacher was intentionally singling them out. This intentionality of discipline played a pivotal part in defusing conflict. For some teachers, simply explaining the intentions quickly defused tensions between themselves and the girls.

**Self-Perceptions**

**Differential Treatment**

While teacher perceptions of the intentionality of Black girl behavior at Harper were based out of miscommunication and lack of ownership, Black girls themselves understood their behavior as opposition often to the race- and gender-based differential treatment at Harper. For the girls, there was no question about differential treatment, and their shared experience with that differential treatment often promoted a variety of reactions. Some girls responded with silence to stay out of trouble, some girls verbally opposed the inequity, and some refused requests of staff members. Whatever the response, it is clear Black girls at Harper shared the belief that they were not always treated the same as their peers.

**Intentionality**

Another shared experience for the participants is the intentionality behind their responses to conflict, requests, or perceived inequity within the school. Regardless of how they responded, a majority of these girls consciously opposed what they believed was unfair. Even those who chose silence did so consciously, not because they agreed with teachers but because they wanted to stay out of trouble, they didn’t believe they would be heard or believed they could not win the
argument anyway. They understood the role of authority in the school and understood the power
dynamic would not serve their best interests as students and as Black girls.

**Policing of Black Girls’ Bodies**

Another major shared experience for Black girls at Harper was the policing of bodies.
Dress code had a very different impact on these girls than the rest of the school. For them, dress
code was not just monitoring presentable clothes but a criticism of body type and body
presentation. It represented constant reminders that people thought Black girls were “fast.” It
sexualized them in a way not apparent for others within the school. Not being able to wear the
same shorts or skirts that their White female peers wore was another reminder that they weren’t
the same. This shared experience seemed to be most prevalent for the girls because while
objectively it’s a policy that everyone had to abide by, in its implementation it became an
institutional way of “othering” girls of color.

**Bullying and Low-Income Black Girls**

One theme that stood out in the data was the notion of the “smart black girls” and
bullying. While these girls turned to silence as a means to protect themselves and stay out of
trouble, the idea of being perceived as smart and being teased is not a new one. Gifted Black
girls often are teased by their same-race peers of different educational placements, face low
recognition in gifted programs, and are misunderstood by their teachers (Grantham and Ford,
1998). This choice of silence often resulted in invisibility for these girls. While they did not
participate in oppositional culture or resistance, their conscious choice to be silent (in order to
avoid further teasing) rendered them invisible to their classroom teachers. It wasn’t until one
participant got into an altercation that she became noticed again, and then it resulted in
discipline. For her, the intention of silence was to protect her from bullying and gain the support
of teachers. The intention was to disassociate herself from the “bad Black kids” that left her unacknowledged by staff. This illustrates that 1) there may be a stigma about AVID and being smart for Black students, especially Black girls; 2) teachers and staff provide a disproportionate amount of attention to students who display oppositional behaviors, are vocal, or overtly seek that attention; and 3) there may be a subset of Black girls labeled as quiet or silent that experience bias within school and resist it but in a non-observable way (Fordham, 1993).

Is It Resistance?

Traditional Resistance Theory

In chapter 2, I discussed the components of resistance as proposed by Hollander and Einwohner (2004). The first component of resistance is a conscious action in opposition to someone or something. Primarily demonstrated through the girls’ own narratives, participants like Tanisha, Monique, and Stacey consciously questioned teachers, refused to change clothes, and even verbalized racial undertones in mistreatment. They were conscious not only of their actions but the intention and reasoning for their actions. The next component discussed is recognition of the action and opposition. Recognition may be a bit complicated in this scenario because teachers don’t readily recognize their behaviors as resistant. But broadening the concept of recognition to include self-recognition (the participants themselves recognizing the behavior as resistant), then the conscious action on the part of most participants to directly oppose what they perceived as differential treatment could therefore fit within this definition. Lastly, and maybe most important to traditional sociologically defined resistance theory, is the idea of reproduction or the conscious opposition only restricting the girls to their original social position instead of the original intent of liberation. This particular component of resistance is difficult to define for the participants as a whole because some girls have resolved themselves to silence.
after receiving so many infractions. Tanisha on the other hand provides an in-depth portrait of resistance leading to reproduction. For Tanisha specifically, her constant questioning, refusal to comply, and speaking up has led to her constant warnings and detentions and has also gained her a reputation as a “bad” student, or one expected to cause trouble. Due to this type of labeling, Tanisha’s teachers are less apt to listen to her or believe her when defending herself. Not only that, but she also has been resolved to silencing herself and has accepted that she has no power or autonomy to make any real change.

In chapter 2, using traditional resistance theory as well as resistance grounded in Black feminist thought, I defined resistance as “determined by an active behavior (verbal, physical, or cognitive) that is a conscious effort to oppose something or someone in the classroom despite the outcome of that intentional act. The outcome does become important with regard to the behaviors of Black female youth in determining social mobility and reproduction, but not in defining the acts as resistant in and of themselves.” Based on that presented definition, the actions of the participants can be categorized as resistant. While outcomes do lend themselves more to reproduction, not all cases end that way. For example, girls like Emily and Lily, who use silence as their conscious resistance, albeit resisting the stigma that exists about Black girls at Harper versus actual teachers and mistreatment, usually end up being labeled the “good” and “smart” girls who then become rendered invisible (no real acknowledgment of existence in class from teachers or students) within the school setting.

One complex issue within the literature regarding resistance and reproduction and highlighted in this current study is student awareness of the consequences of their behavior (Giroux, 1983; Willis, 1977). Within this particular study, the girls, specifically Tanisha participated in exacerbating their discipline but not consciously. They resisted to be heard but it
perpetuated their interaction with discipline in most cases. As indicated by Giroux, the students’ resistance produced the very outcome they were trying to avoid. While they did not intentionally resist to get into trouble, the girls’ understood the consequences of their resistance came from what they perceived as a misunderstanding and refusal to acknowledge social and cultural biases on the behalf of those in power.

**Continuum of Resistance**

Based on the data in chapter 5, there were levels of resistance that occurred on a continuum or spectrum. Ranging from little to no resistance (Emily and Lily) to total resistance (Tanisha), with other girls falling in between, it can be suggested that these girls may follow a type of typology that associates itself with the level of resistance they employ in the school setting. For instance, Emily, labeled a “quiet Black girl” who was liked by teachers, avoided bullying, and was not seen as a troublemaker, is also one of the girls who did not resist consistently or overtly and was quiet and silent within the school context. Tanisha on the other hand was perceived as one of “those loud Black girls” who constantly spoke out and resisted. Within the school context, she was also disliked by teachers, constantly disciplined, and perceived as a troublemaker. While the other girls fell within the middle of this spectrum, often choosing their battles by what was worth fighting, Emily, Lily, and Tanisha are examples of the extremes of the continuum of resistance in this study.

**Intersectionality**

Utilizing intersectionality as a methodological lens allowed me to situate the experiences of Black female youth at Harper within broader macro and micro-level issues. For these girls, race and gender played a highly impactful role in treatment and discipline, self-perception, and understanding of other’s perception of them. While income didn’t reveal itself as a strong
classifier within intersectionality as the girls understood it, race and gender were the vehicles that left the girls feeling marginalized at various moments in the study. Using McCall’s (2005) intracategorical complexity as a categorical lens allowed the girls themselves to recount their own narratives uniquely as low-income Black girls without having to isolate any social identities. With that being said, their feelings of mistreatment, not being heard, and being “othered” within Harper are experiences shared through the intersection of being a Black girl from a low-income background. Being criticized for volume or having teachers readily believe reports of misbehavior about the girls illustrate that their construction of self isn’t always accepted within the school.

A unique result of intersectionality noted in this study shines through Emily and Lily’s narratives. Being labeled the “smart” Black girls, they were as also the silent Black girls who employed their silence as a means to escape bullying which in result also solidified their positioning as “good” and separated them from the more vocal girls. Emily and Lily often did not actively participate and their silence was a vehicle for separation from those “loud, defiant, black girls.” For Emily and Lily, silence became a way of passing, similar to what Fordham describes in *Those Loud Black Girls* (1993). The underlying implications of these behaviors illustrate the reality and complexity of being black, female, and low income in schools. For girls like Emily and Lily, finding ways to separate themselves from “those loud Black girls” was important to decreasing bullying and increasing teacher acceptance. The fact that being silent and consciously choosing invisibility as a means of survival and acceptance further highlights an issue with social and cultural expectations of students based on race as well as highlights the need to further deconstruct the biases that come with race, class, and gender.

**Implications**
Existent Literature

The lived experiences of Black girls in schools have been documented in literature by researchers to share common themes affirming the role race, class, and gender have played in these girls’ lives. Grace Evans (1980) in *Those Loud Black Girls* discussed how her invisibility and silence lead to her success as a student. Similarly, Emily and Lily shared the same sort of silence and invisibility at Harper choosing to disassociate themselves from the “problem” students by remaining quiet and therefore invisible. This silence and invisibility ultimately becomes correlated with achievement and success in school as indicated by the comments toward Emily and Lily about being smart and teachers’ reception of them. Similarly in Fordham’s (1993) work, silence and invisibility meant a sort of passing for black girls in school. I would propose that silence in this study was initially an intentional tool to avoid bullying and trouble that later lent itself to a version of “passing” at Harper. On the other hand, when a black girl opposes silence the implications thereof and perceptions of her change drastically.

Speech, volume, and its relation to resistance, has been documented as an oppositional tool used by Black girls when perceived hostility and disrespect is directed at them (Fordham, 1993; Evans-Winters, 2005; and Koonce, 2012). While “talking back” or “talking with attitude” often support a sapphire image of Black women, within the cultural and social context, questioning and resistance sometimes indicates a struggle to merge two divergent identities. For instance, in the case of Tanisha, while she was intelligent and bright as indicated by her grades and teacher’s validation, she was grossly perceived as a troublemaker because she spoke out about inequity in discipline amongst other things at Harper. Her voice and resistance positioned her, and some of the other girls who also spoke out, in the margins. As stated in previous literature, black girls who speak out in schools and make a conscious choice not to remain silent
often become victim to school policies, disparate discipline, and differential treatment by
teachers and staff (Evans-Winters and Esposito 2010; Koonce, 2012; Mirza, 1992; and Pugh-lily,
Neville, and Poulin, 2001). This unequal educational experience based solely on resistance and
speaking out (ways of being not accepted by the majority) disadvantages and targets black girls
resulting in a lived experience in school that can often lead to stratification and socialization
based on stereotypical norms. For example, Tanisha being bright was often impaired by teachers’
discipline of her when she spoke out, opposed, or questioned them. While her intentions in
speaking out derived from a genuine opposition to inequity, the result of it affected her
interaction with peers, teachers, and affected her educational experience.

**Teachers and Cultural Competence**

This topic primarily sheds light on the gap in cultural competency that may exist between
teachers and Black girls within the school setting. Seeing as though the ideas of disrespect,
embarrassment, and differential treatment, and the girls’ response to that, were consistent and
strong themes undergirding the actions and behaviors of Black female youth, cultural
miscommunication may be occurring within the school context between Black female youth and
staff. While teacher accounts assert that Black girls aren’t “resisting” but solely not taking
ownership of their actions, it may also demonstrate their realization of the lack of autonomy they
have regarding voice in the school or their need to know more outlets in which they can gain and
use their voice within that context.

If Black girls are truly resisting consciously and in meaningful ways within the
classroom, then that resistance needs to and should be articulated in a way that allows staff to
hear the voice of these girls and not misinterpret their behaviors. If a bridge can be built that
allows these girls to have voice within the school and classrooms, defining themselves and who
they are, then hopefully cultural relationships can be built on understanding and a new theoretical lens can be constructed to cultivate the educational experience these girls have.

While the perception of Black girls as loud, defiant, and oppositional has still remained a constant in literature, the perception of these girls based on the race of teachers has varied. While Black teachers’ in literature often see Black students in general as competent and able, their views of Black students aren’t always shared by their White counterparts (Milner, 2006 and Delpit, 1993). Black teachers in literature often used atypical pedagogies or strategies in reaching and teaching Black students acknowledging the difference their background and experiences relative to race and class brings to their educational experience. Researchers like Delpit and Milner have documented that the experiences of Black teachers who were committed to their students’ success to the point of stepping outside of the typical pedagogical box, were often ridiculed or accused of being too radical and not being collaborative enough with their fellow White teachers. Delpit cites a Black teacher explaining her experience with White teachers in a multicultural school.

“There comes a moment in every class where we have to discuss "The Black Issue" and what's appropriate education for Black children. I tell you, I'm tired of arguing with those White people, because they won't listen. Well, I don't know if they really don't listen or if they just don't believe you. It seems like if you can't quote Vygotsky or something, then you don't have any validity to speak about your own kids. Anyway, I'm not bothering with it anymore, now I'm just in it for a grade. (Delpit, 1993, p. 582)

While the struggle to commingle experience and research for the betterment of Black students by Black teachers is a tumultuous one, the benefit of having Black teachers within schools far outweighs that struggle. While this current study could not ascertain a Black teacher as an informant or participant, the girls did acknowledge one Black teacher in particular whom they deemed an ally and describe in a more familial tone. This teacher for them was not only
someone they would vent to but also a teacher who created extracurricular activities specifically for Black students at Harper.

Even still, regardless of racial composition of the schools and teaching faculty, most studies support that the perception of Black girls by White teachers in schools are more apt to be negative, stereotypical, and highly correlated to the intersection of their identities (race, class, and gender). While White teachers’ negative perception often comes from a desire for black girls to conform to a white defined form of femininity (Morris, 2007), this current study seems to support a different explanation. Ms. C, while middle class, did not share a tumultuous relationship with the girls and often made attempts at providing them space to voice their concerns. Although she admittedly doesn’t come from a very diverse background, her age may be attributed to her ability to connect, on some level, with the girls. The girls even admit that Ms. C is their favorite teacher and attributes most of their frustrations with other teachers within the school. Ms. C is also new to the school and may not have been completely ingrained in the school culture by seasoned teachers. According to Irvine (1990) White teachers approach teaching Black students, as well as their communication styles and expectations of Blacks students, differentially for Black male and Black female students. Middle class teachers also have an added layer of complexity in their expectations of Black students as well as their own cultural conflicts due to dissonance between their own cultural background and that of their students. Middle class teachers may privilege a type of social and cultural capital and disregard that which Black students bring to the table. Ms. C acknowledged her cultural dissonance from the girls also noting she didn’t experience real racial and class diversity until attending college. Still for Ms. C, she persisted in trying to close that cultural gap and miscommunication by actively listening and allowing space for the girls’ to voice their own concerns. She cites her age
as her ability to identify with the girls in some way and often employed what Ladson-Billings (1995) regards as inserting education into culture and not culture into education. Research has indicated a plethora of issues with the White female dominated teaching pool teaching primarily Black students, but Ms. C differentiates herself from these normative issues through her consciousness and acknowledgement that assimilating students is easy to do but still wrong. She knows her race and class separates her from her students but actively uses other commonalities to connect with them. She also doesn’t try to pretend to know their issues; she allows them to lend voice to it themselves but also redirects them to stay within parameters of school policy.

Given the discussion on the benefit of Black teachers as well as the cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding that stems from White middle class teachers not always identifying with their students, it is beneficial for all schools, especially diverse or predominantly Black schools, to actively recruit Black teachers (and other teachers of color) and participate in culturally relevant pedagogy. These teachers don’t just bring cultural identifiers but also lived experiences, counter narratives, a commitment to Black students, and different approaches to teaching that would be lost if a majority of White teachers continue to make up the teaching population (Delpit, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; and Milner, 2006).

**Standardized Implementation of Discipline**

“Black females have received limited attention in the school discipline literature relative to Black males. When studies have explored the discipline experiences of Black females, research has mainly focused on Black girls’ discipline sanctions in relation to Black boys, with Black girls rarely mentioned outside of descriptive statistics” (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Daresbourg, 2011). In this particular study, most times a conflict was recounted, it was followed by discipline in some way. If these girls are being discipline more often and for
subjective behaviors, they are facing an impending introduction to the discipline gap. Black females have been shown in literature to receive harsher consequences than any other race of the same gender. That being said, it’s imperative to address specifically how Black girls are treated with regard to discipline, especially for subjective behaviors.

In comparison to Latinas and White girls, Black girls are more likely to be suspended from school (Mendez et al., 2002). Black girls are also four times more likely to be suspended as compared to White girls (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). These statistics reveal the alarming rate at which Black girls are receiving harsh punishments for school behavior. Not only are these girls at risk for punitive discipline but more specifically they are at risk for being removed from school by suspension and expulsion. With that being said, standardization of discipline may be advantageous. Being able to ensure that policies, like dress code, aren’t unequally implemented not only will increase positive inclusion for Black girls but also will decrease institutionalization of inequity. Also, holding staff accountable for discipline based on subjective behaviors may also encourage a greater appreciation and allow space for student voice. Possible communication and value for student voice may also enhance student–teacher relationships, decrease inequitable discipline, and oppose preconceived stereotypes of Black girls.

**Black Girl Well-Being and Service Providers**

There are several factors that work toward the achievement and well-being in low-income Black girls. Given that the girls at Harper do not feel valued, allowing them voice and a space to be heard would be beneficial. Some of the issues brought up in data resulted from the girls feeling unheard and not believed when giving their side of the story. Encouraging and providing training for teachers to listen or defuse situations with a student-centered lens could help assist in
allowing student voice as well as defusing conflicts. As indicated by Ms. C.’s narratives, she did not have many altercations with Black girls because she took the time to explain why they were being disciplined or invited them back after class to discuss the situation. Expanding this approach to other teachers and staff may combat differential treatment as well as lessen the disproportionate representation of Black girls in the discipline gap.

Overall, providing more service providers can address lack of support for Black girls holistically. By providing the girls a space their own where their voice is valued and the feel included in the culture of the school may prove beneficial in their participation in school. Also, service providers versed in literature and practice about things like social and cultural (re)production may also be able to not only provide the girls an outlet but also equip them with tools to resist in ways that are effective and doesn’t lead to oppositional outcomes.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

While the study is an initial step in exploring the phenomenon of resistance among Black girls, it lacks the longitudinal necessity to study a phenomenon like this. While the findings presented demonstrate that resistance and the resulting reproduction exist for Black girls, there needs to be a more in-depth analysis to understand how resistance is occurring for this population. For instance, Emily and Lily being quieter didn’t yield as much information in their interviews about their lived experience as did Tanisha but played an integral part in analysis as the comparative opposite to Tanisha. By having more time in the site to interview these girls, more in depth information could be gathered for a broader understanding of their point of view. In addition to a longer data collection period, the inclusion of home and family life would strengthen future studies in establishing the behaviors of this population and solidifying their resistance as not just misbehavior. Family and home life could bring greater context to these
girls’ understanding of resistance as well as how they define it. For example, Emily and Lily valued certain types of behaviors that were starkly different than Tanisha. While all of these girls come from the same racial, gender, and class background, their behaviors created for them a very different educational experience. Things like familial involvement, family values, amongst other things effect how these girls experience school and act within that context as well. Clarke (1983) in his research highlights some of these issues and discusses how total family culture impacts students’ achievement and their educational experience. Utilizing the context of family culture, as well as community and neighborhood culture, may provide insight into aspects of who resists and why. Also, it could provide insight into how the girls are making sense of their response to certain behaviors or situations.

Also, interviewing non-black students to contextualize their educational experiences as compared to Black girls might further validate the claims of Black girls. Bringing in the narratives of students who are not Black girls could highlight the reality of differential use of punishment and discipline schools as well as the implication and impact thereof. Also, the narratives of a variety of teachers, Black, non-Black, male, and female will also assist in contextualizing the experiences of Black girls. Incorporating all of these voices will solidify the girls’ experiences as well as illuminate how reproduction is occurring within schools.

In future studies, there needs to be access to Black girls and their understanding of their behaviors as well as their understanding of resistance. Being able to gauge their understanding will also allow the researcher insight into whether a collective resistance is conscious among Black girls or if it’s individual motivations that prevail in their resistance. Also, more participants of staff and teachers will affirm the emerging trends noted in this small-scale study. Other means of data collection and interviews with several types of staff members and identities
within the Black female youth subset could yield more affirmative answers to the questions of Black girl behaviors as well as support triangulation.
References


Reiners, G. M. (2012). Understanding the differences between Husserl’s (descriptive) and Heidegger’s (interpretive) phenomenological research. Journal of Nursing & Care, 1, 119. doi: 10.4172/2167-1168.1000119


Second Revised Consent Decree (2002)


Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
Institutional Review Board
528 East Green Street
Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820

July 2, 2013

Denice Hood
Ed Organization and Leadership
356 Education Bldg
1310 S Sixth St
M/C 708

RE:  
Fight The Power!: Defining Resistance amongst Black Female Youth in a Middle School Classroom
IRB Protocol Number: 13805

Dear Dr. Hood:

Your response to stipulations for the project entitled Fight The Power!: Defining Resistance amongst Black Female Youth in a Middle School Classroom has satisfactorily addressed the concerns of the UIUC Institutional Review Board (IRB) and you are now free to proceed with the human subjects protocol. The UIUC IRB approved, by expedited review, the protocol as described in your IRB-1 application with stipulated changes. The expiration date for this protocol, UIUC number 13805, is 06/30/2014. The risk designation applied to your project is no more than minimal risk. Certification of approval is available upon request.

Copies of the attached date-stamped consent form(s) must be used in obtaining informed consent. If there is a need to revise or alter the consent form(s), please submit the revised form(s) for IRB review, approval, and date-stamping prior to use.

Under applicable regulations, no changes to procedures involving human subjects may be made without prior IRB review and approval. The regulations also require that you promptly notify the IRB of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated side effects, adverse reactions, and any injuries or complications that arise during the project.

If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me or the IRB Office, or visit our Web site at http://www.irb.illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Anita Balgopal, Director, Institutional Review Board

Attachment(s)

c: Janine Franklin

telephone (217) 333-2670 • fax (217) 333-0405 • email IRB@illinois.edu
Appendix B

Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent,
Hello! My name is Janine Franklin, I am currently conducting a research project at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, under the supervision of Dr. Denice Hood, the Responsible Principal Investigator monitoring this study. This study focuses on the behaviors of Black female youth and their experiences in schools and I am looking to interview your child. To give you insight into themes the interview will cover, some interview questions are as follows:

• Tell me about a typical day for you at school?
• Tell me about your experiences with discipline?
• Have you ever been corrected for your behavior at school? Explain? For what?

We do not anticipate any risk greater than normal life and children may benefit from having another adult interested in their experiences within the school setting. Some risks may include students admitting negative experiences they’ve had within the school setting. To minimize that, your child will be allowed to skip over any questions they don’t want to answer and stop the interview at any time. If your child takes part in this project, they will take part in an initial individual interview, as well as a follow up interview, to discuss their experiences within the school setting. Interviews will be audio recorded. A $10 gift card to Chipotle or the student’s restaurant of choice will be given if they agree to an interview. Even if the students remove themselves from the study, they will be able to keep their gift card.

Your child’s participation in this project is completely voluntary. In addition to your permission, your child will be asked if he or she would like to take part in this project. Only those children who want to participate will do so, and any child may stop taking part at any time. The choice to participate or not will not impact your child’s grades or status at school. The information that is obtained during these interviews will be kept strictly secure and will not become a part of your child’s school record. The interviews will be recorded and any audio files will be stored in a password-protected file on the computer of the researcher, which will only accessible to the researcher. The interviews will be coded to remove children’s names and any audio files will be erased after the project is completed.

If you have any questions, you may contact Dr. Denice Hood (email: dwhood@illinois.edu or phone: 217-333-1886) or Janine Franklin (email: jfrankl3@illinois.edu or phone: 708-528-0843). If you have any questions about your daughter’s rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

In the space at the bottom of the letter, please indicate whether you do or do not want your child to participate in this project. The second copy is to keep for your records.

• I have read and understand the above consent form and I do/do not (circle one) give permission to allow my child to participate in this study.

___________________________________
Participant Signature

___________________
Date
Appendix C

Youth Assent Form

Greetings!

I am inviting you to participate in an interview because you identify as a Black female youth and I am interested in the behaviors of Black female youth and their experiences in schools. The interview will take anywhere between 45-50 minutes. I will ask you several questions about your experiences in school in which you can answer any way you like. If you do not like a question or would rather not answer, you can tell the researcher that you would like to skip it. Also, if you no longer want to participate in the interview, you can remove yourself at any time. If you take part in this interview, you will take part in an initial audio recorded individual interview as well as an audio recorded follow up interview, to discuss your experiences within the school setting. A $10 gift card to Chipotle or your restaurant of choice will be given if you agree to an interview. Even if you remove yourself from the study afterwards, you will be able to keep your gift card.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. In addition to your permission, your parents/guardians will be asked for permission for you to participate in this study. The choice to participate or not will not impact your grades or status at school. The information that is obtained during these interviews will be kept strictly secure and confidential. The interviews will be recorded and any audio files will be stored in a password-protected file on the computer of the researcher, which will only accessible to the researcher. You will be given a fake name for the interview to protect your identity and any audio files will be erased after the project is completed.

If you have any questions at any time, you may contact Dr. Denice Hood (email: dwhood@illinois.edu or phone: 217-333-1886) or Janine Franklin (email: jfrankl3@illinois.edu or phone: 708-528-0843). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

Sign this form only if you:

• have understood what the research is about and why it’s being done,
• have had all your questions answered,
• have talked to your parent(s)/legal guardian about this project, and
• agree to take part in this research

The second copy is to keep for your records.

________________________________________  __________________
Participant Signature                       Date
Appendix D

Student Information Form

Greetings!

My name is Janine Franklin, I am currently conducting a research project at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign focusing on the behaviors of Black female youth and their experiences in schools and I will be conducting observations in your classroom. Observations will not interrupt daily classroom activities or instructions. Observations are only to observe what naturally happens daily in the classroom.

I am asking permission for you to be in the study. The purpose of this letter is to provide more information to you about the study to decide if you are willing to be observed. Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

In addition to your permission, your parent/guardian will be asked for permission as well. Only those who want to participate will do so, and you may stop taking part at any time. The choice to participate or not will not impact your grades or status at school. The information that is obtained during observations will be kept strictly secure and will not become a part of your school record. Observations will not include any information that identifies you. Names will be changed and kept completely confidential.

If you have any questions or if you would like to deny permission to participate in this project, you may contact Dr. Denice Hood (email: dwhood@illinois.edu or phone: 217-333-1886) or Janine Franklin (email: jfrankl3@illinois.edu or phone: 708-528-0843). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.
Appendix E

Parent Information Form

Dear Parent,

Hello! My name is Janine Franklin, I am currently conducting a research project at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, under the supervision of Dr. Denice Hood, the Responsible Principal Investigator monitoring this study. This study focuses on the behaviors of Black female youth and their experiences in schools and I will be conducting observations in your child’s classroom. Observations will not interrupt the classroom activities or instructions and the investigator will not be disruptive at any time. Observations are only to observe what naturally happens daily in the classroom.

I am asking permission for your child to be in the study. The purpose of this letter is to provide more information to you about the study to decide if you are willing for your child to be observed. Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Your child’s participation in this project is completely voluntary. In addition to your permission, your child will be asked if he or she would like to take part in this project. Only those children who want to participate will do so, and any child may stop taking part at any time. The choice to participate or not will not impact your child’s grades or status at school. The information that is obtained during observations will be kept strictly secure and will not become a part of your child’s school record. Observations will be coded to remove children’s names and kept completely confidential.

If you have any questions or if you would like to deny permission for your child to participate in this project, you may contact Dr. Denice Hood (email: dwhood@illinois.edu or phone: 217-333-1886), Janine Franklin (email: jfrankl3@illinois.edu or phone: 708-528-0843), or Franklin Middle School (email: shodaro@champaignschools.org or phone: (217) 351-3819). If you have any questions about your child’s rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

If you would like to deny permission for your child’s involvement in this study, please sign and return the letter to Franklin Middle School.

________________________  ______________
Parent Signature          Date