UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Hidden Roses:
Exploring Narratives of Hyper-Punishment and Misogynoir Violence Among Black Girls at an Urban High School

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Jamelia Nicole Harris

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Hidden Roses:
Exploring Narratives of Hyper-Punishment and Misogynoir Violence Among Black Girls at a Ghettoized High School

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Professor Kimberley Gomez, Chair

Hidden Roses centers the narratives of a purposive sample of Black girls (n=13) with discipline records to understand how these students name and construct knowledge about the punishment and everyday misogynoir they face at an urban high school. Their reflections on Desert Rose High School, a high school where Black girls are suspended at one of the highest rates in Southern California (CDE, 2018), provides an in-depth examination of how Black girls who face exclusionary punishments live and interpret the school/prison nexus phenomenon. Guided by *Matrix of Domination* theory (Collins, 1990, 2000), this multi-method critical case study interrogates systems of schooling as oppressive structures that perpetuate intersecting and layered forms of violence against Black girls along the axes of race, gender, class, age, and place. Additionally, this research examines Black girls' engagement in the *Concrete Rose Project,* an after school-based Black-girlhood-centered counter space to explore how youth

participants use *CRP* as a site of epistemic agency, resistance, and placemaking (Butler, 2018; Hunter et al., 2016; McKittrick, 2006). In so doing, this dissertation expands upon the work of Black Feminist Thought and contributes to the emerging body of theoretical scholarship about Black Girlhoods by centering the *Concrete Rose Project* Black girls as contributors of their own intellectual and activist tradition. Data from this dissertation reveal how Black girls conceptualize a theory of power that accounts for how anti-Black racism, misogynoir, and classism operate as structural conditions in their everyday schooling experiences, rendering them vulnerable to excessive punishment and dehumanizing learning conditions. The dissertation offers research, policy, practice recommendations for future examinations of these issues.

The dissertation of Jamelia Nicole Harris is approved.

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2020

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mama, Tammie
to all the Black women who casted their bread upon the waters,
& to the 13 Concrete Rose Girls who entrusted me with their stories.

Hidden Roses
Roses seem to grow only in the mid fall
Some roses live through each season and stand tall
We are the roses filled with prickly thorns
Thorns that become labels showing we are "loud" "ugly" and "pitiful"
Hidden roses
The rose symbols enduring passion, humility and innocence
The innocence part was taken long ago and never returned
We have fought decades to receive equality and people still want to stick with old testaments
Never trying to see the best of "them" we are the "lesser" branch
Who "never" stands a chance to advance
Hidden Roses
One of the strongest nations to survive
With our kinky hair, luscious skin, plumped lips, gorgeous smiles
We drive the races wild until we are praised as queens
Another race seems to always weep, like their ancestors were beaten, raped, and stolen
Hidden Roses
We are roses that will never be broken
"If a white man praised white women calling them "superheroes" black women would be mad
We wouldn't be "mad" we would be discouraged it's a slap in our faces
Decades of praising white woman it's like what have they really done for the world
WE created the foundation of a new world and our ideas were stolen and made in their image
Hidden Roses
Grown on thorns, or sprouted through cement with no water just sun, hopes, & dreams
The hope of being picked and given the opportunity to properly grow
Removing those thorns placed upon us to thrive in our passion
Roses have a heavenly smell that can't shake a scent that draws light towards us
Creating our foundation once we are removed from the stem
Hidden Roses

- *Momo, 12th Grade Concrete Rose Project Student*

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Driving toward Desert Rose High School, I turn two intersections from the neighborhood of my childhood home. The vacant dirt fields and abandoned buildings that I see have remained undeveloped and abandoned since before I can remember. Stopped at a red light, I watch as a group of youth exit the gates of *The Rose Gardens*, a low-income apartment community adjacent from the high school where many students lived. As the youth walk past my stalled white Honda and reach the other end of the intersection, I notice something that continues to trouble me: an iron wired fence that linked the high school to a massive cemetery. As the rain began to break through the clouded sky, I drove past the students. I begin to imagine what the students who walk along this path must feel as they walk alongside the fence:

tombstones visible,

each day

confronting death just to get an education.

I park my car in the lot for faculty and staff, just in front of the main entrance. Attempting to gather my bag filled with markers, pens, colored paper, snacks, and all of the materials for our *Concrete Rose Project* (*CRP*) group session later that afternoon, I hear a soft voice calling my name. I turned and noticed the same group of youth I had just watched moments earlier. Among the group was E. Lovely, a twelfth-grade student of the *CRP*. She wore her favorite "Boyz 'N the Hood" sweatshirt, underneath the image of Ice Cube and Cuba Gooding Jr. were the words "Once Upon a Time in South Central LA . . . It Ain't No Fairytale."

Besides this being one of my favorite movies, I always smiled when she wore the hoodie because it captured her old-soul spirit. E. Lovely's family moved to Desert Rose Country from South Central, Los Angeles when she was 13 years old. Like many Black families in the Desert

Rose community, including my own, her family moved in search of safe and affordable housing. With headphones in both of her ears, her face glaring down at her iPhone screen (as always), she walks away from her group of friends toward the trunk of my car. “Hey, Ms. Jamelia, we’re meeting today, right?” I jokingly responded, “Girl, I been watching you with your head in your phone since you crossed the street . . . you didn’t see my group text saying we're meeting?” We laugh and hug one another before we walk toward the front entrance of the school.

Glancing over my shoulder, I notice the sheriff patrol car parked in its usual place: directly underneath the Desert Rose High School banner sign with a United States flag attached to its post waving melodically against the high winds and slow rain. For the past year that I conducted bi-weekly group sessions at Desert Rose High, I counted two days where the sheriff’s vehicle had not been parked there at the beginning of the school day. On both of those days, the sheriff’s car was parked there by the time the lunch bell rang. I often saw the campus deputy standing beside the school principal in the cafeteria pod during lunch or patrolling the hallways. I turned to E. Lovely, who walked past the sheriff’s vehicle with such casual indifference. This was *normal* for her. I ask, “How do you feel about the police being at your school so often?” E. Lovely pauses and reflects for a moment as she glances back at the vehicle. She responds,

> I never really thought about it. I know they say we’re the most ghetto school out here, but it’s like “Dang, are we that bad we got to have a whole cop here on campus with his car parked right there?” I don’t understand... I understand it does be some stuff that happens here, but I don’t know. I don’t know everything that is going on. I don’t know if somebody had a weapon or something, because unless they inform us with the emails and tell us over the speakers. I know I don't know everything. F*rom what I do know, it’s just like this is unnecessary.*

What was significant about E. Lovely’s response was her immediate linkage between the sheriff’s vehicle and the messages she regularly encountered from community members and educators that framed DRHS’s predominantly Black student body as bad, ghetto, and violent.

The repetitive nature of these messages presents important scripts of race, gender, class, and place. These controlling narratives provided a "generalized ideology of domination" (Collins, 2000) that naturalized how the school was regarded as physically unsafe and in need of constant police surveillance. Writing about systemic violence in what he coins the "iconic ghetto" high school, Elijah Anderson (2017) states that the omnipresent sheriff vehicle and the armed sheriff officer patrolling the hallways are convenient social control mechanisms and deliberate symbols that communicate to students "what awaits them if they act up once inside or on the grounds of the school" (p. 67).

Though often walking past the vehicle without much explicit thought to it, E. Lovely's comments indicate that she recognized the symbolism inherent in the vehicle's presence. In her sensemaking, the police vehicle evoked a narrative that portrayed her high school as a potential crime scene. The wagon symbolized that some kind of unlawful conduct must be "going on" that warranted police involvement: a student in possession of a weapon or some other imminent threat of violence. While she was, and could not, be aware of everything happening inside and outside of her school, that information that she did know, gathered through the daily student grapevine, suggested to her, that the sheriff's vehicle, parked atop the curve just outside the entrance of her high school gate—day in and day out—was *unnecessary*. It was in this context that I understood the significance of ideology manufactured in the *Cultural Domain of Power* (Collins, 2000) and how fundamental the controlling narratives applied to Desert Rose High School students have been to the culture of discipline and punishment for Black girls of the *Concrete Rose Project* (Collins, 2000; Rios, 2011; Wun, 2016).

Black Girls in the School/Prison Nexus

E. Lovely's narrative points to a fundamental reality about schooling for Black girls across the nation, especially in structurally poor communities. For far too many Black girls, the U.S. public school system functions as a primary site through which anti-Black punishments, policing, and criminalization are commonplace everyday experiences. To the extent that there is ample evidence highlighting the linkages between school discipline practices and the larger carceral state, where Black girls' incarceration rates mirror their school suspension rates, scholars have framed these inequitable patterns through the school/prison nexus phenomenon (Annamma, 2018; Morris, 2016; Sojoyner, 2013). Erica Meiners (2010) defines the school/prison nexus as an "interlocking set of structural and individual relationships in which youth, primarily of color, are funneled from schools and neighborhoods into under- or unemployment and prisons" (p. 32). She argues that interrogations of the intimate nexus between schools and prisons should foreground systemic and historical analyses of schools as part and parcel of broader historical and sociopolitical racial processes that create "public enemies" out of Black youth (p. 32). Michael Dumas and ross (2016) further contend that racialized school discipline is one example of the dehumanization of young Black bodies in education. Through their theorization of BlackCrit (Dumas & ross, 2016), these scholars emphasize that anti-Blackness reinforces the ideas and school structures that maintain the disproportionate impact of punishment on Black bodies.

While extant literature highlights the nature of the racialized-gendered discipline gap and its connections to prison rates specifically among Black girls, these analyses often neglect to interrogate gendered anti-Blackness (misogynoir) as a more extensive structural condition that perpetuates the infrastructure of discipline disproportionately and reinforces the school/prison

nexus for Black girls (Dumas, 2014, 2016; Dumas & ross, 2016). In recent years, a small but growing body of research has explored the intersections of anti-Blackness, school discipline, and Black girls' educational experiences (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Coles & Powell, 2019; Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Hines & Young, 2020; Shange, 2019; Wun, 2016, 2018). Connie Wun's (2016) research is one of the first that applied Saidiya Hartman's the *afterlife of slavery* to explore the role of anti-Blackness and the ongoing conditions of captivity in shaping Black girls' discipline and punishment experiences. Her work extends much of the current school discipline discourse by elaborating on the centrality of anti-Blackness in school disciplinary systems that renders Black girls perpetually susceptible to removal and exclusion. While important, there is a need to further champion this work, and more specifically, analyze how other systems of domination, including sexism, classism, and geography, impact Black girls' experiences of anti-Blackness in school (Bailey, 2018; Lindsey, 2018).

In response, this exploratory research examined the unique ways Black girls who live and attend school in a neighborhood characterized by racialized poverty are positioned within an anti-Black context and victimized by intersecting and layered forms of violence and punishment. The site of this study, Desert Rose High, has one of the highest suspension, expulsion, and arrest rates for Black girls in Southern California (CDE, 2018). The severe discipline inequities at DRHS afforded an intrinsic case (Stake, 1995) to explore the contours of Black girls' criminalization and the school/prison nexus phenomenon. By purposefully examining Black girls' collective and individual engagements in the *Concrete Rose Project*, co-created counter space for Black girls, this study provides an in-depth examination of how Black girls who face exclusionary punishments understand the role of misogynoir, class, and place in shaping their experiences within the school/prison nexus. Considering the intersectional nature of the analysis,

and the explicit focus on Black girls' social and geographic locations, this dissertation expands the small but growing body of *Black Girl Cartography* scholarship that interrogates "how Black Girlhood is informed, reformed, or stifled by the geopolitical space of school" (Butler, 2018).

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the inquiry:

1. How do Black girls describe and understand their experiences with discipline and punishment in relation to the intersections of race, gender, class, and space/place?
2. How are Black girls and their punishment experiences positioned within the sociocultural and geopolitical context of Desert Rose High?
3. How can Black girls' engagement in the *Concrete Rose Project* foster new theoretical considerations about the power domains that drive the relationship between race, gender, poverty, space/place, and the school/prison nexus?

Significance of the Study

While a proliferation of research elucidates the nature of Black girls' discipline experiences, several queries are missing within this body of scholarship that the present study seeks to address. First, educational research analyses often center on the racial and gender dimensions of Black girls' identities and school experiences. However, this focus on Black girls as racialized and gendered beings often implicitly renders their social class and geographic locations uncharted (Butler, 2018; Morris, 2007, Morris, 2016). Studies examining the experiences of low-income Black girls in urban communities, for example, have found that these girls confront specific layers of marginalization, rooted in the prevailing consciousness that frames poor Black girls and their Black femininity enactments as violent, threatening, and inferior. This interplay is captured in Nikki Jones (2009) ethnography of the social worlds of Black girls in the inner city. She finds these girls navigate a liminal space of prescribed acceptable Black femininity: between "good" and "ghetto." She describes the "ghetto" stereotype

as a scarlet letter that marks these young Black girls as outsiders in the school setting, which subjects them to negative evaluations and subsequent mistreatment by their educators.

Second, much of the research on racial-gender disparities in school discipline data has narrowed in on the institutional policies that reproduce inequities for Black girls and their effects (Blake et al., 2011; Murphy & Perry, 2017). While this research advances necessary insights, the dominant discourse on school discipline disparities obscures a systemic analysis of the intersectional power relations implicated in reproducing these inequities (Collins, 2000; Wun, 2016). Specifically, these studies often lack a theoretical articulation of how Black girls are positioned within and by the structural conditions of anti-Black racism, sexism, and classism in ways that make them more susceptible to dehumanizing treatment and punishment. Third, while research has paid particular attention to zero-tolerance policies and traditional discipline (i.e., suspensions, classroom removals, and office referrals), significantly less work has explored the informal and social punishments Black girls often encounter (Rios, 2011; Wun, 2016).

Providing an explicit focus on the voices and lived truths of Black girls who live in urban marginality, this study works to fill the lacunae that exist in school discipline literature and Black girlhood studies associated with the school/prison nexus phenomenon. Guided by data gathered from a 12-month multi-method critical ethnographic case study, this dissertation highlights how Black girls conceptualize zero tolerance policies and discipline practices as an "attack" on their intersectional identities. This work builds on the school discipline research by expanding upon the myriad forms of violence and punishment Black girls endure in school spaces that often fall under the purview of the institutional protocol, including social marginalization and extra-legal force by school security and police.

Assumptions

This research is designed with the following assumptions: Interlocking structures of oppressions shape black girls' school experiences and discipline outcomes (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989; Murphy et al., 2013); Black girls experience oppression along the lines of race, gender, class, sexuality, age, and geography (Butler, 2018; Collins, 2000; Davis, 1991; McKittrick, 2006); Black girls embody multiple consciousnesses and distinct wisdom concerning the oppression they face in society and the school system (Collins, 2000; Du Bois, 1903; King, 1988); in schools, just as in society, Black girls confront dehumanizing stereotypes and deficit ideas about their academic potential, which shapes their interactions with educators (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Morris, 2007); and Black girls who live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and racial segregation navigate specific challenges and images in school informed by the intersection of their social and geographic locations (Jones, 2009; Morris, 2016; Yosso, 2005). By operationalizing the Matrix of Domination theory, I assume that these controlling images provide the interpretive climate and justify Black girls' disproportionate punishment (Collins, 2000). Additionally, using the Black Feminist methodological concept of "cultural selves" assumes that, as a Black woman with similar schooling and girlhood socialization experiences, I have unique knowledge of "local norms, symbols, artifacts, and forms of speech" that enable me to construct the stories of these Black girls and provide invaluable wisdom throughout the data collection, interpretation, and analysis process (Evans-Winters, 2019, p. 104). Accordingly, the subsequent section provides an overview of the guiding frameworks and theoretical underpinnings characteristic of Black Feminist research, and concludes by elucidating my positionality in this work.

Brief Introduction to Intersectionality

The permanence of discipline disproportionality facing Black girls is rooted in Black girls and women's subjugation throughout the U.S. history of colonialism, imperialism, and chattel slavery. Such patterns necessitate a multifaceted lens that moves beyond siloed thinking about race, class, and gender toward understanding the multiple spectrums of identity and systems of domination as they intersect with one another and produce inequitable outcomes for Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Thus, in this section, I relay a brief synopsis of intersectional theory as conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and many other Black Feminist Scholars (Collins, 1990, 2000; Davis, 2008; hooks, 1984; Richie, 2008).

Black girls occupy a distinct location at the crux of structural inequality, as the only group of girls in the United States with ancestral links to chattel slavery. The critical scholarship of Black Feminist intellectuals—including Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Angela Davis, and the women of the Combahee Collective—articulated the need for analyzing how multiple interlocking systems of power simultaneously shape the experiences of Black girls and women in society, particularly experiences that relate to oppression, domination, and discrimination (Davis, 2008; hooks, 1984; King, 1988). At once, Black girls and women face oppression rendered by their Blackness and femaleness, positioning them socially and structurally vulnerable within systems of racism, patriarchy, and capitalism. As a frame to combat Black women's erasure within feminist, antiracist, and legal discourses, Crenshaw introduced intersectionality into the field of critical race and legal studies. Central to the intersectionality concept is the assertion that single-axis frameworks, which treat race and gender as mutually exclusive, elide the challenges many Black women face at the intersection of multiple marginalized social identities (Combahee River Collective, 1977; Truth, 1851).

According to Crenshaw (1989), the centrality of race and gender factor into Black women's experiences of discrimination in ways that often "do not fit neatly within the legal categories of either 'racism' or 'sexism'—but as a combination of both racism and sexism" (p. 150). To illustrate the concept, Crenshaw offers the analogy of a traffic intersection:

> Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or racial discrimination. (p. 149)

Furthermore, Crenshaw (1991) argues, these forms of discrimination are not intentionally produced, but rather, they are frequently the "consequence of intersecting oppressions where one level of oppression interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment" (p. 1249). Crenshaw's theorization of intersectionality is not merely a matter of naming markers of identity and diversity but instead intends to extend social justice and human rights to Black girls and women. Thus, intersectionality offers a valuable prism to identify and respond to the contentious interaction between systems of power and Black girls' multiple social locations and how these complex interactions shape their experiences of oppression and marginalization in school.

Black Girlhood Oppression

While intersectionality and other Black Feminist theories provide an invaluable framework for understanding the subordinated position of Black girls in the United States, there is a need for specific theorizations of intersectional oppression that extend beyond the experiences of adult Black women. As Smith (2019) writes:

> The goal here is not to eliminate Black Feminism as a theoretical lens for Black girlhood; without its contributions and the necessary language of intersectionality and the exploration of blackness interlocked with gender, class, sexuality, and age, we would lose many narratives of Black women's and girls' various experiences with oppression in this world. (p. 8)

However, as Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) reminds us, Black girls "are not free from injustice and inequality and, as they negotiate state structures and agencies that are often hostile to their well-being, Black girls experience politics at an early age" (p. 3). The intersections of race, gender, class, and age oppression sprouts unique assaults on Black girls' bodies and livelihoods that are often overlooked outside the field of Black Girlhood studies. Therefore, employing Black Feminist theories to analyze Black girls' lived experiences must account for their complex and multifaceted identities, which determine the distinct ways they experience oppression.

As an analytic framework, Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018) imagines new epistemological and methodological approaches for contextualizing how "Black girls unpack their relationships between [interlocking systems of] race, gender, class, and geographic" oppression (p. 36). Within Black Girlhood Studies, Black girl cartographers consider how and where Black girls are mapped within the geopolitical space of school. By operationalizing Black Girl Cartography and centering the often-marginalized voices of Black girls who live and attend school in an urban community, this study brings attention to the racialized, gendered, classed, and spatialized operation of power that circumscribe the lived experiences of Black girls in these spaces and also shape how these youth experience and name oppression. In so doing, this dissertation expands upon the project of Black Feminist Thought and contributes to the emerging body of theoretical scholarship about Black Girls' knowledge and practices by positioning youth participants in the *Concrete Rose Projec*t as contributors of their own intellectual and activist tradition.

Matrix of Domination Theory

This study employs the Matrix of Domination as a theoretical framework to systematically analyze the ways power and oppression reinforce Black girls' subordination in school. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) describes the Matrix of Domination as the organizing system of Black female oppression and resistance. In her analysis, Collins theorizes that social institutions, such as schools, organize intersectional oppression around four domains: structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal (See Figure 1).

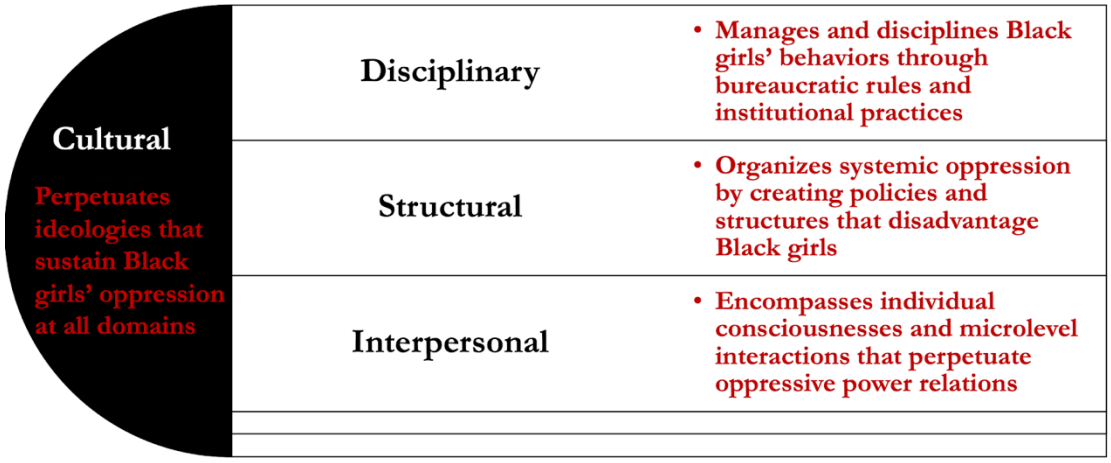

Figure 1. Matrix of Domination Theory (Collins, 2000).

The structural domain reveals how racism becomes institutionalized and "set up" by developing policies and structures that disproportionately impact Black girls and women. The disciplinary domain manages power through the rules and regulations in ways that maintain the racial-gender hierarchy. In the interpersonal domain, power shapes race relations at the micro-level through everyday interactions and discriminatory treatment. The cultural domain is where racist- sexist stereotypes and ideas are reproduced for the sociopolitical purpose of justifying systemic violence and oppression. According to Collins, the Cultural Domain is the most significant and central to all power arrangements because the production of ideas and

representations provides the glue that links and sustains oppression as domains. Collins's theory offers critical theoretical and methodological tools through which the collateral effects of misogynoir and anti-Blackness can be explored in the U.S. public school system. As Collins notes, moreover, processes of domination are inherently spatial matters because the institutionalized racism that Black girls and women "encounter relies heavily on racial segregation and accompanying discriminatory practices" designed to deny them the rights and privileges of U.S. citizenship (p. 23).

This study employed the Matrix of Domination as a theoretical framework to explore how purportedly race and gender-neutral policies and practices disproportionately impact Black girls at Desert Rose High. In doing so, I define each domain as it relates to discipline. Specifically, I investigate the inner-workings of cultural power (e.g., beliefs and stereotypes), structural power (e.g., policies), interpersonal power (e.g., teacher-student relationships), and disciplinary power (e.g., behavioral management practices) as they manifest in the everyday schooling and disciplinary experiences of *Concrete Rose Project* students. Foregrounding such an analysis, I argue, enables one to identify the institutionalized nature of misogynoir more precisely, which renders Black girls susceptible to punishment and criminalization.

Positionality

Before concluding this chapter, I offer the reader some background about me, my relevant experiences with respect to the subject, and the framing, of this dissertation topic.

This dissertation centers on the lives of Black girls in *my hood*. I decided to study the hyper-punishment of Black girls at DRHS upon learning youth in my community face one of the highest suspension, expulsion, arrest, and non-graduation completion rates in California—a statistic I was disheartened to learn, yet not surprised. When my family first moved to Desert Rose County, we learned that many of the schools in our neighborhood and school attendance zone were considered "failing schools." I experienced first-hand the negative messages and stereotypes that Black girls of the *Concrete Rose Project* routinely encounter. After hearing countless stories that framed DRHS as an "out of control," bad, and "ghetto" school, plagued by academic underperformance and random violence, my parents enrolled me at a high school nearly thirty minutes away, which was technically considered outside of my zoning area. Therefore, my lived experiences as a Black girl who attended school in the district and came of age in this neighborhood context, alongside my academic training and epistemological groundings in Black Feminism, inform this research.

Personal Connection to Black Feminism

My self-identification as a Black Feminist developed over the course of my scholar-activist trajectory. As an undergraduate, serving as the Black Student Union President and Founder of the Task Force Against Police Brutality, I could not overlook the racialized and gendered dimensions of state-sanctioned violence that were absent from mainstream media and social justice discourses. I organized a fundraiser for Meagan Hockaday, a Black mother who police had killed in front of her own children. At the event, Meagan's sister tearfully stated, "the hardest thing about losing a sister to police murder is convincing the world: Black women's lives matter." I was enraged by the lack of media coverage and justice that Meagan received. As I wrote my honors-thesis, reading Beth Richie's "Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and

America's Prison-Nation" had changed my world. I grew frustrated as I related the silence surrounding Meagan's murder to the absence of Black girls/women from discourses on state-violence, including the over-policing of Black girls in schools. This frustration led me to pursue research as a way to generate more specialized knowledge about the subordination of Black girls in the school/prison nexus. My commitment to Black girlhood scholarship stems from my belief that Black girls and women cannot wait for "trickle-down social justice" to improve our material conditions; liberation for all Black people cannot be fully realized until the specificity of Black girls' subjugation is addressed.

With respect to the current study, my ties to the community of study shaped my knowledge of Black girls' cultural norms and lived realities, which was essential in my ability to conduct this research. As a Black Feminist scholar who was culturally socialized in a similar neighborhood context as the *CRP* students, I follow Venus Evans-Winters's (2019) concept of cultural selves, which argues that our knowledge of "local norms, symbols, artifacts, and forms of speech" (p. 104) grants us cultural insider status that gives us invaluable wisdom throughout the research process. For Black girls, navigating schools in distressed neighborhoods present a uniquely raced, gendered, and classed dilemma. I know well that for Black girls in ghettoized settings, "school buildings or row houses, neighborhood street corners or porch stoops, do not come with a special girls-only pass to live beyond the reach of violence" (Jones, 2009, p. 5). These multiply marginalized youth are expected to persevere despite anti-Black racism, sexism, and poverty while simultaneously negotiating under-resourced schools and teachers ill-equipped to handle their intersectional realities.

My operationalization of cultural selves recognizes the Black Feminist researcher's inherent subjectivity and accounts for the possibility of this perceived bias by assuming the

disposition of an "outsider within" (Collins, 1986). At the same time, cultural selves position Black women's lived experiences, cultural knowledge, and values as strengths in the data collection and analytic process. In doing so, cultural selves honor the consciousness Black women gain from experiencing oppression in U.S. society as an invaluable analytic lens that affords perceptive wisdom when researching with Black women and girls (Collins, 1986; Evans-Winters, 2019). My extensive personal knowledge of Black girls' culture and language practices enabled me to facilitate a sense of trust, formulate culturally congruent methods and appropriate questions, and cultivate a safe space where Black girls felt emboldened to share their lived truths.

Thus, my experiential knowledge and groundings in Black Feminist epistemology offer a paradigmatic advantage when researching the uniquely marginalized state of Black girls who live in ghettoized neighborhoods. I was cognizant of the multiple sociocultural and geopolitical locations I share with the Black girls in this study, making it nearly impossible to *socially distance* myself from the painful stories they entrusted me with. I wrote this dissertation intending to uphold the rigorous standards of academia while also maintaining my commitment to honoring Black girls' humanity, something that had all too often been refused of them.

Dissertation Overview

The following chapters center the lived truths of 13 Black girls to understand how these students interpret the ubiquitous nature of gendered anti-Black racism in their everyday schooling experiences. In Chapter 2, I provide a brief synopsis of the literature related to the nature of Black girls' experiences in the school/prison nexus. In Chapter 3, I present the methodological approach used for the study, including descriptions of my Black Feminist-Womanist research design (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015) and *homegirling* as a methodological

disruption honoring Black girls' humanity in qualitative research inquiries (Brown, 2013). In Chapters 4 and 5, I represent the data in thematic form, with a section devoted to each theme and assertion emerging from the data. First, in Chapter 4, I provide an in-depth discussion of the sociocultural context of DRHS and explore how *CRP* students describe the "pedagogy of urban struggle" that frame their school and communities as "bad," "ghetto," and violent places. In Chapter 5, I reveal how Black girls describe and construct knowledge about their experiences of punishment and misogynoir violence. This chapter demonstrates how Black girls discern the underlying role of the "ghetto Black girl" stereotype in structuring their disproportionate punishment and mistreatment. Throughout both chapters, I advance the argument that ideology routinely justified educational neglect, criminalization, and enactments of violence against Black girls at DRHS.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL/PRISON NEXUS LITERATURE

The following chapter offers a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that guide this study and a review of the empirical research on the nature of Black girls' experiences within the school/prison nexus. To demonstrate the complexity of Black girls' school punishment experiences, I use the Matrix of Domination theory as a framework for organizing the literature. The chapter begins by examining the specific ideologies that led to the rise of zero-tolerance cultural norms in school. Next, I highlight literature on the policies that structure Black girls' susceptibility to punitive disciplinary practices and punishment. Then, I relay relevant empirical investigations exploring the impact of interpersonal relationships on Black girls' discipline outcomes. Finally, I discuss the outlier literature, highlighting the "unaccounted" forms of policing and punishment Black girls often encounter that fall under the purview of institutional discipline procedures.

Ideological Justification of Black Girls' Criminalization

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) theorizes that social institutions manufacture racist and sexist controlling narratives in the *Cultural Domain of Power* to routinize and legitimate Black girls' and women's oppression in society. Considering the extensive body of literature that attribute discipline disparities to racial-gender biases and dehumanizing stereotypes, ideology is central to understanding the hyper-punishment of Black girls (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Jones, 2009; Morris, 2007, 2016; Murphy et al., 2013; Neal-Jackson, 2020). The following section provides a brief genealogy of the discourses and controlling narratives that led to the build-up of zero-tolerance and other punitive policies in urban schools. I argue these narratives influence the perceptions and resulting mistreatment of Black girls in school, in general, and specifically concerning disciplinary practices.

From Super Predators to Zero-Tolerance

Since the days of chattel slavery, those in positions of power have produced and circulated images portraying Black girls as intellectually inferior and socially deviant. For centuries, these controlling stereotypes have functioned as powerful ideological apparatuses, rendering Black girls' status as children illegible; their bodies susceptible to wanton violence and punishment (Collins, 2000; Harris-Perry, 2011; Hartman, 2007). Critical race scholars assert that Black girls' suffering in education is a result of the *afterlife of slavery* where "the Black is constructed as always already problem—as nonhuman; inherently uneducable, or at very least, unworthy of education" (Dumas, 2016, p. 16). These scholars further contend that racial-gender discipline inequity is a particular site of anti-Black racism, perpetuated through anti-Black ideologies and discourses (Dumas, 2016; Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Shange, 2019; Wun, 2016).

By the 1990s, exaggerated narratives and representations depicting Black youth as thugs and violent criminals saturated popular media, influencing the development of punitive social policies that targeted Black girls *and* Black boys (Dumas & ross, 2016; Giroux, 2003; Hines, 2017). Criminologist John DiLulio sparked panic in 1995 when he coined the racially coded term "youth super-predator" (Rios, 2011). Despite the declining youth crime rates, these racialized discourses led to intensified policing and harsher sentencing of Black youth for non-violent behaviors, such as marijuana possession, in efforts to "deter" more serious criminal offenses.

Undoubtedly, Black children's publicized maligning perpetuated their dehumanization in schools, catalyzing a wave of punitive policies that deprived them of educational opportunities (Heitzeg, 2014; Payne & Welch, 2010). Farmer (2010) asserts racialized ideology, language, and practices that promote Black youth criminality have material consequences that contribute to

the prisonization of urban schools and, ultimately, perpetuate the school/prison nexus (p. 232). Skiba (2002) and others (Ann & Payne, 2010; Neal-Jackson, 2020) testify to the detrimental effects of racialized controlling narratives in school, asserting that teachers who internalize threatening and criminal stereotypes about Black youth are more likely to overreact to relatively minor challenges to authority, which can be rooted in culturally-based misunderstandings of social interactions. These findings suggest that Black youth's common typification as criminals influences the perceptions of teachers and school administrators, which can determine punitive disciplinary responses. This assertion is supported by the literature that attributes Black girls and Black boys' overrepresentation in exclusionary discipline outcomes to subjective offenses rooted in racist and sexist biases (Blake et al., 2017; Gregory et al., 2010; Hines et al., 2018; Skiba et al. 2004). This body of literature widely suggests that teachers of poor Black children have a fixation on behavioral management and control (Noguera, 2003) and punish Black youth for subjective behaviors that challenge their power and authority such as disrespect, excessive noise, and insubordination (Blake et al., 2011; Morris, 2012).

A common but erroneous interpretation of discipline disparities holds that student suspensions and expulsions stem from the students themselves, from their immersion in a culture of poverty, their lack of motivation for achievement, their disinterest in education, and limited linguistic and intellectual skills (Yosso, 2005). Yet researchers have countered these claims that economically disadvantaged students are penalized more severely for the same behaviors and offenses as students of affluent backgrounds (Skiba et al., 2002). Even still, socio-economic status (SES) has virtually no effect on racial differences in disciplinary outcomes (Skiba et al., 2002). The permanence of Black youth's overrepresentation in school discipline, regardless of

other variables such as SES and gender, reinforces that anti-Black racial biases are inherent in the discipline system.

To summarize, in the present section, I briefly reviewed ideologies contributing to the criminalization of Black girls *and* boys to demonstrate how their portrayal in dominant discourses drives their over-representation in the school/prison nexus. I emphasize this in such a way because often, Black girls are eclipsed by Black boys in narratives concerning the criminalization of "Black youth" and "Black children" as an aggregate group (Skiba, 2002). Despite cultural assumptions to treat girls with gentility, Blackness disqualifies Black girls from the protections and presumptions of innocence commonly extended to white girls (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Epstein et al., 2017; Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Wun, 2018). Thus, this assumption obscures the fact that Black girls are not exempt from socially constructed notions of "Black youth criminality" and suffer from many of the same criminalizing and anti-Black ideologies as Black boys (Crenshaw, 2015; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016). At the same time, Black girls experience a subset of more gender-specific anti-Black ideologies, which I relay in the next section to demonstrate how these ideas influence teachers' and adminstrators' evaluations of Black girls' behaviors.

Denigration of Black Girl Femininity

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) defines oppression as an "unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society" (p. 4). Thus, she argues that the intersections of racism, sexism, and other oppressions that reinforced the U.S. history of chattel slavery have structured all subsequent relationships that Black girls and women have within social institutions, including schools. In her discussion of gendered racism and American politics, Melissa Harris-Perry (2011) asserts

that stereotypes and controlling images forged to rationalize chattel slavery—including the hyper-sexual Jezebel, the overaggressive Sapphire, and the uneducated Mammy—continue to provide ideological justifications for Black women's social, political, and economic marginalization. Detailing the pervasive negative images of Black womanhood, Harris-Perry argues these "mythical" representations force Black women to navigate a "crooked room" that disqualifies them from the rights and privileges of full citizens.

In schools, just as in society, Black girls are subject to "myths" and stereotypes because of the enduring legacy of U.S. slavery out of which emerged a controlling narrative that framed Black girls as genderless, sexually promiscuous, uneducable, nonchildren, unworthy of protection, and property (Collins, 2000). Black girls are overwhelmingly viewed through the Sapphire (angry Black woman) stereotype, which frames them as "loud" and "angry." Scholars have identified related conceptions that dominate thinking about Black girls in schools and influence teachers' perceptions of their behaviors (Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Morris, 2016; Neal-Jackson, 2020). Racially loaded words such as "talking back," "insubordinate," "disrespectful," and "uncontrollable"—which were similarly applied to Black girls and women throughout slavery to justify their dehumanizing conditions—are frequently used to characterize Black girls' behaviors in disciplinary reports (George, 2015; Neal-Jackson, 2020; Watson, 2016; Wun, 2016).

School discipline has been used as an instrument to reform and groom Black girls' enactments of femininity. A vast body of studies shows Black girls are at higher risk than girls from other racial/ethnic backgrounds to experience exclusionary discipline outcomes for behaviors that are subjective in their interpretation and considered to violate hegemonic gender norms (George, 2015; Jones, 2010; Morris, 2007, 2016; Wun, 2016). Morris and Perry (2017) used an intersectional lens to examine interactions between race and gender on office referrals in

a large urban school district and found that Black girls were disciplined primarily for "disruptive behavior, dress code violations, disobedience, and aggressive behavior" (p. 144). These scholars' findings revealed a crucial intersectional inequality in which "Black girls' behavior was perceived as misbehavior far more often compared to other girls" (p. 144). Decades of research studies buttress these findings suggesting that the offenses incurred most often by Black girls are influenced mainly by school officials' racist, sexist, and classist interpretations of their behaviors (Blake et al., 2011; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2007).

Classroom-level empirical research studies further contextualize these findings by offering critical insight into the everyday interactions that reinforce Black girls' pushout. Morris's (2007) study illustrates how racist and sexist stereotypes about Black femininity govern teacher-student interactions in the classroom, stemming from perceptions of Black girls' embodied femininity as defective, course, "loud, and not ladylike" (p. 12). Paradoxically, Fordham's (1993) ethnography finds that high-achieving Black girls navigate schools by intentionally resisting dominant stereotypes such as "loudness" and adopting racelessness. Black girls described how they code switched and socialized to silence and invisibility in their classrooms as a strategy to minimize their relationship to the stigma ascribed to Blackness. These disheartening findings suggest that Black girls perceived racelessness as a way to succeed academically and thus constricted the ways they perform their femininity in efforts to avoid negative attention from their educators. One explanation that unpacks this logic is Collins's (2005) assertion that "all women engage an ideology that deems middle-class, heterosexual, white femininity as normative" (p. 193). When teachers and school administrators punish Black girls for subjective interpretations of behaviors considered "inadequately feminine," it evokes a

prevailing consciousness that accepts Black femininity as an inferior quality (Hines, 2018; Wun, 2014).

Nikki Jones (2009) ethnographic study on Black girls in the inner city demonstrates how their experiences of violence were often compounded by the racialized and classed hierarchy of femininity. She found that Black girls navigate a liminal realm of prescribed acceptable femininity, governed by two opposing stereotypes: being perceived as "good" and being perceived as "ghetto." These dichotomized constructions of Black girlhood shape Black girls' interactions in schools and society. Good Black girls, who exhibit qualities such as passivity and soft-spoken-ness and present a physical demeanor (e.g., hairstyle and dress) that does not significantly deviate from white, middle-class mainstream femininity are evaluated more positively by educators and are less likely to be subjected to correction. On the other end, Black girls who are deemed in violation of hegemonic femininity laws are labeled "ghetto," which renders them an outcast in school spaces and makes them more susceptible to punitive punishments and mistreatment by educators. These findings attest to the ways Black girls' disciplinary experiences and marginalization in schools are often deeply rooted in cultural discontinuity. When these girls speak or engage in ways that are culturally unfamiliar to their educators or other staff, their behavior and interactions are often misinterpreted and unjustifiably problematized.

Furthering the discussion, Epstein et al. (2017) argue that dominant projections of Black girls perpetuate a phenomenon called adultification, which causes them to be perceived by adults as less innocent and more adult-like than white girls. The adultifcation of Black girls is deeply embedded in the anti-Black logics and ideologies of chattel slavery that frame Black girls' childhood as a "paradigmatic impossibility" (Wilderson, 2010). These notions of Black girls as

being overly mature subjects them to the discretionary authority of adults and often leads to more severe punishments in school and the court system. Instead of attempting to understand the underlying circumstances of Black girls' behaviors or granting them the benefit of the doubt that they are acting like teenagers, educators and law enforcement punish them harshly because they do not recognize their childhood or humanity (Epstein et al., 2017; Joseph, 2019; Love, 2018).

In summary, these studies show that stereotypes about Black girls' dispositions, their physicality, and their mannerisms (cultural) help sustain differential enforcement of discipline policies (structural and disciplinary) and disparate treatment of Black girls by teachers, counselors, police officers, and other adults working with youth (interpersonal). Next, I discuss the educational policies and practices perpetuating Black girls' entrapment in the school/prison nexus.

Policies and Practices that Criminalize Black Girls

Collins (2000) theorizes that structural parameters, such as policies, organize power relations, and authorize the techniques and practices used to oppress Black girls and women. Furthering Foucault's ideas with a critical interrogation of race and gender, Collins asserts the central task of social institutions and bureaucratic organizations is to control and organize Black girls' and women's behavior toward the goal of creating a quiet, orderly, and docile population. Considering this lens in schools' context, I argue the power of authority figures is organized and routinized through disciplinary policies that delineate behavioral expectations for Black girls. Examining these discipline policies provides important insights as they further our understanding of the mechanisms and structures that reinforce Black girls' disproportionate removal.

Zero-Tolerance and the Refusal of Black Girl Humanity

Nowhere is the dehumanization of Black girls more evident than in the U.S. school disciplinary system. The erasure of Black girls' innocence and need for protection shapes the present-day ways these youth are punished through suspensions, arrests, and incarcerations. A mounting body of research reveals how zero-tolerance policies and practices are often enacted in racialized and gendered ways that disenfranchise Black girls and facilitate their push out into the prison system (Lindsay, 2018; Morris, 2016; Neal-Jackson, 2020). These processes are illuminated by studies that show Black girls are disproportionately suspended, expelled, and arrested even though they do not engage in misbehavior at higher rates than their same-gender peers (Annamma et al., 2019; Crenshaw et al., 2015; Wun 2016). National data show that Black girls are suspended over five times as often as white girls and twice as often as white boys (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Despite comprising only 17 percent of the female student population, Black girls represent 31 percent of all girls referred to law enforcement and 43 percent of all female school-based arrests (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Moreover, Black girls are the fastest growing portion of the youth prison system and ultimately receive harsher sentences (Aldridge, 2018). The distinct experiences and outcomes faced by Black girls when their oppressed identities converge have long-term adverse effects that impede their educational success and push them out of schools and on paths to incarceration, physical and economic insecurity (Morris, 2016; Wun, 2016). These school-to-prison data trends reveal how identity categories such as race, gender, and class "overlap to create inequality on multiple levels" (Crenshaw et al., 2015), attesting to Black girls' susceptibility to the school/prison nexus.

Because schools were designed to perpetuate an anti-Black agenda of culturally assimilating Black children from their very creation (Dumas 2016; Woodson, 1933), Black girls are particularly vulnerable to punitive school policies due to the "enduring incompatibility of blackness and hegemonic white bourgeois norms of femininity" (Shange, 2019, p. 5). Research shows that zero-tolerance policies exacerbate racial-gender discipline disparities, and Black girls disproportionately receive harsh punishments for offenses that are not objectively defined (Nolan, 2011; Skiba, 2014). The enforcement of zero-tolerance policies has particularly egregious effects on Black girls in urban schools. In particular, studies examining the impact of zero-tolerance have found that Black girls are disproportionately disciplined compared to their peers and subject to more severe penalties (Blake et al., 2011; Mendez & Knopf, 2003; Morris, 2007). Further, zero-tolerance policies' stringent nature contributes to a prison-like school culture where schools' emphasis on punishment, surveillance, and control compromises the quality of students' learning experiences (Meiners, 2013; Morris, 2012; Soyjoyner, 2013; Wun, 2016). Nolan (2011) illustrates how zero-tolerance normalizes prison cultural norms in urban schools such as lockdowns, hall-sweeps, and armed police. Such mechanisms misconstrue schools' core purpose, which should be to educate and enrich rather than to surveil and punish. These findings demonstrate the ineffective nature of zero-tolerance policies and how they promote racially hostile, exclusionary, and carceral-like schooling conditions.

Policing Black Girls' Bodies

The negative constructions and stereotypes of Black femininity feed into how schools regulate Black girls' bodies and their gender performance (Evans-Winters 2017). School policies routinely target Black girls by criminalizing their choice of clothing and natural hairstyles (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Hines & Young, 2020). For example, in 2017, in

Massachusetts, 15-year-old twins Deanna and Mya Cook received an out-of-school suspension for wearing their hair in braids (NWLC, 2017). Similarly, a private Christian school in Florida requested 17-year-old Jenesis Johnson to either cut her afro or disenroll from school the following year. Findings from Carter-Andrews et al. (2019) study evidenced the double standards of appropriate behaviors and dress code due to the white-normative constructions of femininity. Educators' predispositions about Black girls' bodies subject them to hypersexualization and promote an unsafe learning environment. The over focus on dress code and under focus on toxic masculinity and consent conveys inappropriate messages that implicitly suggest Black girls invite sexual advances based on their clothing choices. Dress-code policies contribute to gendered and sexualized identities by enforcing ideas about feminine behavior that establish whiteness and heterosexuality as the baseline of normalcy and appropriateness. Such punishments negatively affect Black girls and cause them to internalize harmful messages that shape how they view themselves and their bodies (Raby, 2010). This dissertation's findings further underscore school authorities' discretionary power in dress code enforcement and the fundamental philosophical difference between what these policies purport to accomplish and the actual policy outcome.

Interpersonal Domain of Power

In the interpersonal domain, power functions and shapes Black girls' everyday interactions and relationships. Collins's theorization reveals how this domain accounts for how people's consciousness and subjectivities perpetuate Black girls' and women's subordination.

Racially Hostile Teacher-Student Relationships

In schools, racist and sexist biases are operationalized through daily practices and shape the ways educators treat Black girls, which perpetuates oppressive power struggles. Likewise,

empirical studies have also highlighted the effect of interpersonal relationships on Black girls' discipline experiences. Wun's (2016) case study features interviews with Black girls, who describe their classroom experiences to be akin to the experiences of incarcerated people: "perpetually watched, criminalized, and punished." The study finds that educators often penalize Black girls for eliciting anger without considering the intersectional violence and structural conditions that rightfully cause these girls to be angry. Often, Black girls who are most vulnerable to punishment navigate complex lives and structural conditions including poverty, parental incarceration, and foster care that they do not have the luxury to leave outside of the classroom (Evans-Winters, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Parks et al., 2016; Wun, 2018). These challenging circumstances can create emotional stress for Black girls that affect their behavior and how they engage in the classroom. Yet, Black girls often express that their teachers are not aware of their experiences outside of school and lack sensitivity or care for them, which causes their social-emotional needs to be neglected (Harris, 2020).

Parks et al.'s (2016) case study analyzes the mental health impact of Black girls' punitive interactions with educators. In one particular case, a Black girl described symptoms akin to post-traumatic stress syndrome after being targeted in the classroom, which caused her attendance to decline. Monique Morris's (2016) exploration shows how racist and sexist biases lead to severe punitive consequences and strained student-teacher relationships for Black girls which decreased their motivation to attend school and perpetuated their "pushout" into the prison system. Across both of these studies, Black girls frequently missed learning opportunities because their teachers sent them out of class for seemingly trivial and subjective infractions such as speaking loudly, being tardy, or talking back. Black girls' perceptions of unfavorable school conditions and unfair treatment led them to feel targeted, unsupported, and misunderstood, which often caused

girls to disengage entirely. These findings show how the individual level behaviors and actions of educators can create a stressful, socially toxic classroom environment for Black girls that compromises their learning experiences.

Murphy and colleagues (2013) extend this body of literature by employing the Matrix of Domination theory to explore the narratives of persistently disciplined Black girls in middle school. These students articulated incidents where they chose not to comply with specific teachers as a deliberate act of resistance against interpersonal power and unfair treatment by teachers who denied their request for social and academic support or "punished students without listening to their explanations" (p. 605). At the same time, Black girls reported fewer discipline issues with teachers who invested time by explaining curriculum, nurturing interpersonal relationships, and supporting these girls in navigating social and emotional challenges. These Black girls understood and valued their education as an essential component of their lives and future successes yet described their schools as hostile environments "in which they were dominated by often discriminatory discipline practices, teachers' culturally biased judgments of their behavior, and interpersonal conflicts with both educators and their peers" (p. 603). In this dissertation, I extend the analysis of Murphy et al. (2013) beyond middle school-aged girls' experiences to be more attendant to the intersectionality of race, gender, class, age, and place in the disproportionate criminalization of Black high school girls.

Outliers: Unaccounted Forms of Punishment

While the literature on Black girls and the school/prison nexus has paid particular attention to traditional punitive mechanisms, such as suspensions, classroom removals, and arrests, these framings obscure the complexity of Black girls' experiences of violence and punishment in the social context of anti-Black racism. The scholarship of Connie Wun (2016)

exposes how the structural condition of anti-Blackness "characteristically positions Black girls within a social order where their lives are illegible and inconsequential" (p. 748) and renders them perpetually susceptible to anti-Black punishment. Wun's research with Black girls in a suburban high school provides a critical analysis of anti-Black racism and discipline in educational spaces where Black girls were formally disciplined for mundane behaviors such as "getting up to throw away the trash," and minor infractions like "talking back." In addition to the standard types of punishment that characterized the girls' encounters with policy-oriented school discipline, Black girls in this study state that they were also subjected to "unaccounted forms of policing and surveillance" and social forms of punishment that negatively affected their relationships with the schooling process. For example, one Black girl described an encounter in which her advanced placement (AP) chemistry teacher accused her of plagiarizing her assignment off of an Asian student and referred her to the office so that administrators could verify her handwriting (Wun, 2016). This student's narrative provides a unique account of how Black girls, particularly those who perform well academically, name and experience demeaning school punishments that target their identities as "smart" Black girls, reinforcing the construction of intelligence as white property (Carter Andrews, 2009). The pervasive and ubiquitous nature of these prescriptions has adverse effects on Black girls' academic worlds because adults who hold low expectations for these students are ultimately less committed to providing them high-quality learning experiences.

Though studies about Black youth criminalization often focus on the harrowing experiences Black boys have with police officers, evidence from Wun's (2016) study uncovers another disturbing reality under addressed in the literature: in schools, just as in society, Black girls are often targets of police brutality. The over-reliance on police, coupled with culturally

insensitive school officials' pervasiveness, subject Black girls to brutality, criminalization, and trauma in their learning environments. In recent years, videos documented by #SayHerName have shown Black girls as young as six years old being placed in handcuffs and physically thrown across classrooms by school police (Lindsay-Dennis, 2018; Love, 2018). These recurring narratives of police violence against Black girls on school grounds reveal how schools function as extensions of the carceral state where extra-legal force and state violence are commonplace, everyday experiences (Harris, 2020). Dehumanizing stereotypes naturalize the ways state punishment and violence against Black girls' bodies have been deemed proper treatment (Lindsey, 2018). Smith's (2016) conceptualization of *neo-capital punishment*, which extends Foucault's theorization of "governmentality," further contributes to this discussion by accounting for the ways Black girls are perpetually regarded as outside of the societal norm and thus deemed "ungovernable," which makes their bodies targets of severe discipline and state violence.

Whether in the confines of school or sleeping on the sofa at their grandmother's home, Black girls are perpetually susceptible to state violence and murder by police. The quotidian nature of these violent encounters and pervasiveness of repressive conditions in urban schools attest to Saidiya Hartman's (2007) insistence that we analyze Black girls' experiences as a lingering effect of life in bondage, "the afterlife of slavery":

> . . . Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and political arithmetic entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery. (p. 6)

Hartman's analysis helps us apprehend how the longue durée of chattel slavery position Black girls' lives as illegible and inconsequential, rendering them unworthy of education (Dumas, 2016) and subjecting them to ongoing conditions of captivity in schools (Wun, 2016).

Therefore, this qualitative study is significant in that it explores the ways Black girls are positioned within an anti-Black context and are victimized by intersecting and layered forms of violence from the state and public-school system. This dissertation explores Black girls' harrowing experiences in school due to the punitive cultural norms and sheds light on how these youth discern the influence of gendered anti-Black racism in shaping their encounters. Building on Connie Wun's scholarship (2016), I expand on the contours of policing and punishment Black girls' endure by expanding traditional definitions of "school discipline" to include the myriad forms of violence and mistreatment that are not registered as institutionally sanctioned practices (e.g., misrecognition, police intimidation, extra-legal force, and more). Doing so sheds necessary light on how schools perpetuate misogynoir violence against Black girls in ways that threaten their learning and livelihood (Butler, 2018).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This research explored the structural and institutional factors that influence Black girls' disproportionate punishment and mistreatment. In order to do so, I designed the study to address the following three research questions:

1. How do Black girls describe and understand their experiences with discipline and punishment in relation to the intersections of race, gender, class, and space/place?

2. How are Black girls and their punishment experiences positioned within the sociocultural and geopolitical context of Desert Rose High?

3. How can Black girls' engagement in the *Concrete Rose Project* foster new theoretical considerations about the power domains that drive the relationship between race, gender, poverty, space/place, and the school/prison nexus?

Employing a a multi-method, ethnographic, critical case study approach, guided by Black Feminist epistemology and Matrix of Domination theory, I sought to center and honor the lived truths of Black girls while simultaneously grounding the analysis within the geopolitical and sociocultural context.

Black Feminist Epistemology

Methodologically and analytically, this research was informed by principles of Black Feminist Thought. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) describes Black Feminist Thought as a *critical social theory* that emerged in resistance to the suppression of Black women's knowledge and the "political context that challenged its very right to exist" (p. 3). At the core of BFT is the epistemological commitment to disrupt white-centric, patriarchal knowledge paradigms that elevate the worldviews of white men as universal truths and diminish Black women's ideas. Black Feminists scholars embody a distinct consciousness about the oppression encountered by Black girls and women in society that emanates from our lived experiences and struggles at the intersections of race, gender, and class oppression. Black Feminist Thought resists essentialized

notions of Black womanhood. Collins set forth four epistemological tenets of Black Feminist Thought, which offer critical *methodological guidance* that inform this study's methodological approach: (a) lived experiences as a criterion of meaning; (b) the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims; (c) the ethic of caring; and (d) the ethics of personal accountability. By animating the core tenets of Black Feminism, the present study served as a conduit for the realization of justice for Black girls.

Black Feminists center and honor Black girls' and women's ways of knowing the world as the most crucial component of knowledge production and the construction of theory. Guided by BFT perspectives, methodologically, I aimed to center Black girls' voices and, while offering individual reports from the girls, I followed the BFT underlying assumption that being Black and female in the United States produces a specialized knowledge that clarifies a *collective standpoint* of and for Black girls and women.

Designing Group Sessions: The Concrete Rose Project

The focal participants of this study met after school, bi-weekly during a group session which we called the *Concrete Rose Project* (*CRP*). *CRP* was developed under the theoretical guidance of Black Feminist Though in that it was an intellectual-activist project that was (a) developed in pursuit of justice for Black girls and (b) firmly grounded in Black girl knowledge, an ethic of care, and consciousness. Within our *CRP* gatherings, Black girls affirmed and empowered one another as they engaged in intimate discussions relating to their experiences with punitive mistreatment and oppression in their daily schooling experiences. These girls shared personal anecdotes and stories as a way to build sisterhood and community with one another and as a way to exert agency within the very same school spaces that suppressed and silenced them. *CRP* was more than a research project; it was our homeplace (hooks, 1984). bell

hooks describe homeplace as a safe space, typically created and sustained by Black women where Black people provide care and nurturance for one another. Homeplaces offer Black women sources of empowerment, affirmation, and restoration from many of the "wounds inflicted by racist domination" (p. 384). In this sense, homeplaces function as critical sites of resistance for Black women in white supremacist societies where we can "restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world" (xx). Bettina Love (2019) calls for the creation of homeplaces in school spaces where students' cultural wealth, their hopes, and their dreams truly matter (p. 68). *CRP* animated the principles of homeplaces on the grounds that it provided a physical and emotional space where Black girls could come together to learn, share, nurture, heal, and empower one another.

Role of the Researcher

The marrying of qualitative research and Black Feminism open possibilities for Black women scholars to engage unilaterally, in a humanizing manner that emboldened Black girls' embodied knowledge and wisdom. Black Feminism research requires the studies to be intended *for* Black girls, rather than simply *about* Black girls. By animating an ethos of Black Feminism, this dissertation embodied a political commitment to empowering Black girls in naming their oppression as a practice of resistance, healing, and self-recovery (hooks, 1993). At the crux of this work was my belief that through narrating their truths, Black girls offer the wisdom needed to expose and dismantle oppressive school structures that perpetuate violence against them. As the researcher, my central role then was to facilitate these girls through the process of creating knowledge by fostering an environment conducive for their voices to be heard. This was accomplished through the use of both humanizing and culturally congruent methods (Paris &

Winn, 2014) which empowered girls to critically reflect, self-define, and convey their stories

Building Rapport and Trust: Homegirling and Safe Spaces

Black Feminist scholars who conduct research with Black girls acknowledge how our lives overlap at multiple intersections, despite our age differences. The dynamic and interactions I shared with *CRP* students were best characterized by a concept Ruth Nicole Brown (2013) coins as *homegirling.* Homegirling is a methodological disruption that embodies the essence of nurturing social relationships and exchanges shared between Black women scholars and Black girls based on our intersecting identities and lived experiences. Therefore, the process of homegirling "necessitates that Black women get in touch with their inner girl in order to build a community heavily rooted in identity politics" (Austin, 2018). Homegirling allowed me to do away with imbalanced power dynamics and engage with the girls in ways that felt non-hierarchical. Fostering such a dynamic required me to cultivate a safe space where girls genuinely felt respected and valued (Collins, 2000). The conditions for a safe research environment involved co-developing the following community agreements:

The *Concrete Rose Project* Community Guidelines

Communication: One Diva, One Mic, One Voice

Commitment: Remember that your opinion, story, and voice matters. We are building a community here and your participation and full commitment protects the integrity of this community. Please attend all sessions so that your voice can be heard, and our community can continue to grow together. Let Jamelia know if you need to miss.

Empowerment: We are here to encourage, affirm, and lift one another up. Ultimately, our mission in this space is to make schools better for girls like us.

Knowledge*:* Remember that your personal experiences are the most valuable form of expertise. Sharing your story produces new forms of knowledge.

Trust: What is said in the room stays in the room.

Understanding one another: Listen with empathy, disagree gracefully, but respect one another's point of view

Figure 2. The Concrete Rose Project Community Guidelines.

The collaborative process of developing community guidelines with the *CRP* students set the tone for inclusivity and collective ownership in our meetings. These moments were significant in establishing *CRP* as a counter space for Black Girlhood and as a site of epistemic agency (McKittrick, 2006). Most importantly, these moments transformed our group into what students often described as a "sisterhood."

Getting To Know the Girls[1]*: Concrete Rose Project* Student Profiles

My aim, in this study, was to select a representative sample of students who could speak to diverse aspects of school climate and discipline culture for Black girls. To find the girls, asked the school principal to help me identify participants based on the following criteria: (a) self-identify as African American/ Black and Female, (b) currently enrolled in ninth through

[1] I will discuss my recruitment process, in more detail, later in this chapter. However, I wanted to center the girls in this narrative. As such, I share, in this section, information about how I identified the girls. Later, I will describe the recruitment of other participants.

twelfth grade, and (c) experienced exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspensions, on campus detentions) on more than one occasion. Working with two staff members, the principal identified a list of 16 Black girls who fit these criteria; all of these students were invited to attend the research orientation where I provided an in-depth explanation of the study. I gave participants over two weeks to review the consent documents and ask questions (if needed) prior to the study officially beginning. Of the 16 students identified by the principal and school staff, 13 girls returned the consent documents and enrolled in the study. I then scanned, uploaded, and stored these documents on a secured, password-encrypted drive and destroyed the physical copies immediately. I compensated all participants for their time and commitment to the study.

I met with students individually to discuss the study and invited them to a group informational session. At that session, each participant received letters for parental consent and child assent during the meeting. Participants completed demographic surveys which asked them questions related to their personal backgrounds, discipline experiences, and perceptions of the school climate. Once formed, *CRP* represented Black girls from a diverse range of grade levels and academic backgrounds at the high school. Our group consisted of five students in their senior year, six students in their junior year, one student in her sophomore year, and one student in her freshman year. Though not a recruitment criterion, the girls were enrolled in a mixture of both regular-track and honors courses. All participants self-identified as Black or African American girls, heterosexual, and low-income. The following bios provides an overview of the *CRP* participants' self-definitions and school discipline experiences.

Momo is a twelfth-grade honors student who self-identifies as a low-income African American girl. She lived in Desert Rose County for eight years. While at Desert Rose High, Momo experienced being kicked out of class, sent to detention, and suspended on multiple

occasions. In the future, she aspires to "grow independently as a woman, study child psychology, and anything else that can make [her] grow as a person." Momo loves poetry.

Ma'Kiya is a twelfth-grade regular-track student who self-identified as a low-income Black girl. She moved to Desert Rose County in the fifth grade. While at Desert Rose High, Ma'Kiya experienced being kicked out of class, sent to detention, and suspended; she was also arrested and physically assaulted by school security. Ma'Kiya aspires to "be successful and take [her] craft very far." Ma'Kiya is an artist and dreams of someday owning a boutique.

Marie is an eleventh-grade honors student who self-identified as a low-income African American girl. She moved to Desert Rose County in the sixth grade. While at Desert Rose High, she experienced being kicked out of class, sent to detention, referred to the office, and suspended; she was also questioned by the police and arrested. Marie aspires to "attend an HBCU and become a pediatrician." Marie is a lip gloss entrepreneur and describes herself as a "math genius."

Teiara is a twelfth-grade regular-track student who self-identified as a low-income Black girl. She had lived in Desert Rose County for seven years. While at Desert Rose High, she experienced being kicked out of class, sent to detention, referred to the office, and suspended. Teiara aspires to "be a successful pediatrician who is truly happy." Teiara is a foster youth; she is motivated by her desire to provide a better life for her future children.

E. Lovely is a twelfth-grade honors student who self-identified as a low-income, Black girl. She had lived in Desert Rose County for five years. While at Desert Rose High, E. Lovely experienced being kicked out of class, sent to detention, and suspended. E. Lovely aspires to "graduate on time, and to become a registered nurse." E. Lovely is an artist and dreams that someday she will be a multi-billionaire.

Reigan is a twelfth-grade honors student who self-identified as a middle-class Black girl. She was born and raised in Desert Rose County. While at Desert Rose High, Reigan experienced being kicked out of class, sent to detention, and suspended. Reigan aspires to become a nurse attorney. Reigan is involved with multiple campus organizations and is the president of the "Black Girl Success Club" at DRHS.

Jade is a ninth-grade regular-track student who self-identified as a low-income Black girl. She had lived in Desert Rose County for one year. While at Desert Rose High, Jade experienced being kicked out of class, referred to the office, suspended, and referred to the juvenile court. Jade aspires to own a business. Jade is a foster youth; she always smiles even when she is upset.

Kya is an eleventh-grade regular-track student who self-identified as a low-income Black girl. She had lived in Desert Rose County her "whole life." While at Desert Rose High, Kya experienced being kicked out of class, sent to detention, suspended, referred to the juvenile court, and searched by the police. Kya aspires to own a beauty salon and taught herself how to braid hair. She is a cheerleader and also plays basketball.

Tee Tee is an eleventh-grade regular-track student who self-identified as a low-income African American girl. She lived in Desert Rose County her "whole life." While at Desert Rose High, Tee Tee experienced being kicked out of class, sent to detention, suspended, and referred to the office. Tee Tee aspires to be a lawyer. She is a member of the "Black Girl Success Club" and loves to learn about Black Women's contributions to society.

DeJanae is a twelfth-grade honors student who self-identified as a low-income Black girl. She had lived in Desert Rose County for twelve years. While at Desert Rose High, DeJanae experienced being kicked out of class, sent to detention, referred to the office,

suspended, referred to the court, searched and questioned, and arrested by the police while at gunpoint. DeJanae aspires to be an actress, lawyer, and CEO. She was recently admitted to the California State University.

Ashley is an eleventh-grade honors student who self-identified as a "poor" Black girl. She had lived in Desert Rose County for twelve years. While at Desert Rose High, Ashley experienced being kicked out of class and suspended. Ashley aspires to be a psychotherapist. She was recently admitted to a competitive summer bridge program at an Ivy League university.

Amberlee is a tenth-grade regular-track student who self-identified as a low-income Black girl. She had lived in Desert Rose County since preschool. While at Desert Rose High School, Amberlee experienced being kicked out of class, suspended, and searched by the security. She aspires to become "a stylist or a defensive coordinator for the NFL." Amberlee is motivated to be a positive role model for her younger siblings.

Liyah is an eleventh-grade honors-track student who self-identified as a low-income Black-Creole girl. She had lived in Desert Rose County for eleven years. While at Desert Rose High School, Liyah experienced being kicked out of class, sent to detention, and suspended. She aspires to "succeed and attend an HBCU to study criminal psychology." Liyah caretakes for her younger her younger siblings while maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

A Black Feminist Critical Case Study Approach

To elucidate answers to the stated research questions, I operationalized a critical case study qualitative approach guided by Black Feminist Epistemology and Matrix of Domination theory. The case for the study was "Black girls with discipline records"—Desert Rose High School provided a bounded system to explore the phenomenon and the specific units of analysis were the purposeful sample of Black girls and school staff.

Case study research inquiry is aimed at gaining a deep understanding that unfolds naturally from the data, unearthing the complex and the interconnected details that inform the case. Within case study research, I drew upon specific aspects of Yin, Merriam, and Stake's approaches. First, I use Yin's (2002) definition of a case, which describes "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (p. 13). Secondly, I employ Merriam's (1998) perspectives on the influence of epistemology, in particular the assertion that the primary interest of qualitative researchers is to understand the ways people produce knowledge about their lived experiences. Merriam challenges the notion that knowledge production is objective; rather knowledge is constructed based on how "individuals interact with their social worlds" (p. 6). Such a perspective is reminiscent of Black Feminisms emphasis on Black women's embodied knowledge and multiple consciousness (Collins, 2000; King, 1988).

For 12 months, I visited Desert Rose High School to conduct this research and explore the phenomenon of Black girls' experiences in the school/prison nexus. I followed what Stake (1995) defines as an intrinsic case study rationale, which is "undertaken when the researcher is interested in the case itself." The inequitable discipline inequities facing Black girls at DRHS afforded me with an intrinsic case to explore the school/prison nexus phenomenon as it concerns this particular group of students. My study relied on both the guiding tenets of Black Feminism, Matrix of Domination Theory, and qualitative methodology that mutually informed one another, to explore how Black girls make meaning of education experiences within a high-poverty neighborhood context. . To challenge research as a site of marginalization, both the framework

and methodological approach called for centering Black girls voices and meaning making to be central to understanding the school/prison phenomena.

Data Collection Methods: Methodological Pluralism

Katsiaficas, Futch, Fine, and Sirin (2011) describe methodological pluralism as a "strategy of data collection and analysis to document how change and discontinuity, braided with a desire for narrative coherence and consistency, shape the stories young people tell about themselves, over time and space" (p. 120). In order to contextualize the nuanced dimensions of the students' narratives, I utilized methodological pluralism which in this study combined qualitative methods including group sessions (Johnson, 2015), education journey mapping (Annamma, 2014), semi-structured interviews (which also included a snowball sample of staff), participant observations, content analysis of artifacts, and extensive field notes. Engaging methodological pluralism provided the versatility of methodological and theoretical tools needed to understand the nuances and intricacies of Black girls' encounters with punitive punishment and other forms of violence in school.

In this study I conducted semi-structured interviews, engaged in group conversations, and collected ethnographic data in the school building and on and near the school grounds. I also used creative-based methods such as poetry, art, and journal reflections which produced artifacts for analysis. Utilizing creative methods and multiple sources of data is encouraged by Black Feminist scholars as an invaluable technique to empower marginalized voices while simultaneously increasing the reliability of data. Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) highlight the affordances of engaging dialogic and creative methods with Black girls and women who share narratives concerning violence noting how such an approach offers "multiple strategies to assist the informant in uncovering and confronting unarticulated meanings or

subjugated knowledge instinctively hidden for survival and political purposes" (p. 209). Throughout the entirety of data collection, I transcribed and coded the data, jotting down relevant themes, questions, or quotes that informed data collection and analysis in subsequent phases (see Figure 3).

Research Question	**Data Source**
How do Black girls describe and understand their experiences with discipline and punishment in relation to the intersections of race, gender, class, and space/place? How can Black girls' engagement in the *Concrete Rose Project* foster new theoretical considerations about the power domains that drive the relationship between race, gender, poverty, space/place, and the school/prison nexus?	● Semi-Structured Interviews with Black Girls ● *Concrete Rose Project* Group Conversations ● Artifacts ● Research Journaling ● Participant Observations and Fieldnotes
How are Black girls and their punishment experiences positioned within the sociocultural and geopolitical context of Desert Rose High?	● Semi-Structured Interviews with Black Girls ● *Concrete Rose Project* Group Conversations ● Artifacts ● Research Journaling ● Semi-Structured Interviews with Staff ● Participant Observations and Fieldnotes

Figure 3. Methods of Data Collection.

Sista Circles: *Concrete Rose Project* Group Conversation

The sense of community and sisterhood employed in the *Concrete Rose Project* mirrored the framework of sister circles (Henry, 1998; Gaston, Porter, & Thomas, 2007; Neal-Barnett et al., 2011). Sista circle is a kitchen table style dialogic approach that features congenial conversations in which life experiences are shared between Black girls and women about common issues (Johnson, 2015). Black women scholars facilitate sista circles for use with Black adolescent girls to offer a supportive and culturally relevant approach to examine experiences and social inequities impacting their daily lives. These group conversations provide an

affirmative space for gaining adolescents' perspectives on particular issues, because it creates an environment that stimulates a desire to discuss the issues being addressed. As King and Mitchell (1995) assert, "group conversations offer a way of apprehending or becoming more critically aware of the collective Black Experience through reflexive examination of their own reality" (p.3). Sista circles are distinct from focus groups in that the motive of these methodological spaces is rooted in a yearning for building community among Black girls and women. While the facilitator may rely on a protocol, the conversations are less formal and allow participants to freely engage in dialogue among themselves and with facilitators. The researcher is not simply invested in participants for data collection purposes; rather, the researcher seeks to foster a sisterhood that provides participants affirmation, support, and empowerment. Johnson offers the following three distinguishing features which I relate to the dynamics of *CRP*.

Communication Dynamics

Sista circles are characterized by natural and informal social interactions among Black women. Within these spaces, it is very common for Black English Vernacular (BEV) and other cultural verbal/non-verbal styles of communication to be used to convey expression or meaning. Interpreting these methods of communication requires cultural intuition (Bernal, 1998) on the part of the researcher as the significance of the interaction might otherwise be missed. Additionally, the informal setting of sista circles also influences the nature of communication dynamics. For example, all of our *CRP* sessions began with an informal conversation over a dinner meal that I brought each meeting to figuratively *break bread* with the girls. During this time, girls often shared stories about their school days or talked about homework assignments or upcoming exams. Additionally, girls shared their enthusiasm about important events they looked forward to such as prom, graduation, and even going to college. These unstructured

conversations often revealed important themes that were critical to understanding their schooling experience

Centrality of Empowerment

The second distinguishing feature of sista circles is the emphasis on empowerment. Collins (2000) describes the possibilities of safe spaces where Black women can "speak freely" about their experiences as a prime location for empowerment and a "necessary condition for Black women's resistance" (p. 100). Johnson defines empowerment in the context of sista circles as "the process of stimulating Black women to access their personal or collective power to strengthen one another." (p. 48). *CRP* sessions often began with check-ins where girls described a "rose" or (highlight in their lives), a "thorn" (challenge they could use support with navigating), and a "bud"(something they looked forward to). During these check-ins and throughout the remainder of our *CRP* conversations, it was quite common for girls to interject with a verbal affirmation such as "*Yasss*!" or non-verbal expressions such as snapping or head nodding. These expressions were often a way to convey support and demonstrate compassion during a moment of hardship. By the standards of Euro-centric academic English, though, these dialectic exchanges may seem inconsequential. However, these non-verbal communications embody significant cultural meaning to many Black girls and women (Evans-Winters, 2019). Furthermore, these cultural expressions were significant attributes in the context of *CRP* as they contributed to the sisterly-dynamic that made *CRP* much more than a research project.

Researcher as participant. One final distinguishing feature of the sista circle methodology concerns the researcher's involved engagement in the conversations. Sista circles disrupt the positivist notion that researchers must be casual observers and merely facilitate dialogue. Rather, sista circle methodology values reciprocity and requires the researcher to

actively engage in dialogue when necessary. Sista circles view the contributions of the researcher's personal experiences as a way of offering both wisdom and empowerment (Collins, 2009; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Evans-Winters, 2019).

Semi Structured Interviews with *CRP* Students

Semi-structured interviews provided one source of primary data for this study namely because of its ability to facilitate participants' in-depth reflections and explore the experiences and sentiments they deem significant (Merriam, 2009). Thus, semi-structured interviews with the *CRP* students allowed me to better understand how they describe and interpret their schooling experiences as they relate to their triply oppressed identities. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. After completing the initial interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews with each participant to ask clarifying questions, validate transcripts, and contextualize field observations. Follow-up interviews varied from 20 to 40 minutes. Although a question protocol served as a guide, I conducted the interviews in a dialogic manner that established a safe place for the participants to address the topics most pertinent to their experiences. Further, I welcomed girls to speak in natural voice and use language that was most comfortable for them.

I developed the semi-structured interview protocols for *CRP* and staff participants with the Matrix of Domination theory in mind. The questions generally focused on participants' understanding of (a) racialized-gendered schooling experience, (b) educators' perceptions of Black girls (Cultural Domain), (c) discipline and punishment (Disciplinary and Structural), (d) student-teacher relationships (Interpersonal), and (e) resistance. Sample questions for the first category include "Can you describe an incident at school (classroom, office, outdoor area) where you felt you were treated differently than other students?" In the second category, I asked

questions such as “How do you believe teachers/administrators view Black girls at your School? Why do you believe this? Do you think these educators/administrators’ perceptions affect Black girls’ experiences in school?” The third category included the following questions: “What kinds of things do Black girls get in trouble for? Do other girls get in trouble for these things?” In the fourth category, I asked participants, “Tell me about the relationship you have with your favorite/ least favorite teacher. How does your relationship with these teachers shape your experiences in their class?” Most importantly, in the final category, I asked questions such as: “What motivates you to persist in school, in spite of these experiences?”

This protocol also included questions that probed at *CRP* students’ intersectional identities (Bowleg, 2008). I would often follow up with questions such as “How do you think being a Black girl influenced what you just told me? ”and since many participants self-identified as “poor,” I asked students how being a “low-income Black girl” or a “Black girl at Desert Rose High” shaped their experiences. Following the completion of data collection, I provided a copy of the interview transcript for each participant for their member checking and approval.

Artifacts

To triangulate data and address the research questions, I conducted content analysis of the study's artifacts. These included journal entries, art, poems, word association, and educational journey maps (Annamma, 2014). Few et al. (2003) suggest that the use of artifacts and non-traditional data sources empower Black girls as informants and the gatekeepers of their narratives. Producing artifacts such as journal entries, poetry, and art gives power to Black girls in the data collection process by allowing them to control “the extent of access to sensitive areas in her life” and can “speak volumes for an informant who is struggling to find her voice (her power of authorship) within her own story” (p. 211). I engage artifacts with the intent of

prioritizing the voices, self-definitions, creativity, and epistemologies of the *CRP* students. I analyzed these data sources alongside transcripts from group conversations where students presented their artifacts in order to honor the ways students attributed meaning to their creations (Saldana, 2009).

Semi-Structured Interviews with Staff

I also conducted semi-structured interviews, as a purposive sample, with four teachers, three counselors, and three administrators from Desert High School. These participants served as a source of secondary data for this study. I selected these participants based on their involvement with the discipline process. In Appendix A, I provide an overview of the staff participants' backgrounds. My conversations with staff centered on their relationships and interactions with chronically disciplined Black girls as well as their general perceptions of these students. Counselors provided important insights about the discipline process because they were each assigned a caseload of students who experienced high rates of discipline. I interviewed the school principal to gain a deeper understanding of the school context as well as her perceptions of the root causes of Black girls' discipline overrepresentation. Through including these conversations in the research design, I sought to gain a more holistic understanding of the sociocultural context and culture of discipline that situate Black girls' experiences at DRHS. With the consent of the participants, I audio recorded and transcribed each interview. No participants declined recording.

Participant Observation

I conducted participant observations shadowing each *CRP* student for a full school day. The purpose of participant observations was to understand each girl's daily schooling experiences. Additionally, I asked each student to identify their favorite and least favorite

teachers. I conducted observations of their experiences in these classrooms, documenting any punitive interactions they have with teachers and classroom rules in my field notes. I also conducted informal follow-up conversations with students and teachers.

Recruitment Technique

Earlier, I described my approach to recruiting the student participants for this study. Here, I describe my recruitment approach with the adults in the school. I employed purposive sampling, which is a form of non-probability sampling where the researcher selects participants based on their knowledge about the phenomenon under study. Maxwell (2009) recommends using a purposeful sample approach for recruitment because it provides greater confidence than random sampling which allows the researcher to gain insight that more accurately captures how the phenomenon was experienced by the entire population (p. 253). Given this study's smaller sample size, I used the purposive sampling technique because it allowed me to systematically select participants who could provide experiential knowledge about the phenomenon. In using this approach, I was able to exclusively select teachers, staff, and school leaders based on their involvement with the disciplinary process.

Data Management

I audio recorded and transcribed all interviews and group sessions using Rev.com services. I reviewed each transcription along with the original audio file for quality assurance. This also allowed me to capture the discourse practices, tone of voice, and emotion of the interviewee. There were approximately 25 hours of group session data; 35 hours of interview data between students and staff; approximately 70 written artifacts (including drawings, poems, journal entries); and 70 hours of field and participant observations including detailed field notes. I scanned and stored artifacts in a password-protected drive. I coded transcripts and artifacts

using AtlasTi, a qualitative analysis software that facilitates both the coding and code management process.

Black Girlhood Participatory Data Analysis

Black Feminism centers on the intellectual contributions of Black women and girls who are not traditionally regarded as "intellectuals" based on the criteria of academia. Thus, this study centered Black girls as knowledge holders and as experts on the phenomenon of school punishment. I valued the *CRP* students as co-researchers of the project and shared stakeholders. Therefore, it was imperative to ensure that I centered their voices and insights throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Likewise, I solicited participants' insights and analytic interpretations using a method that I coin as Black Girlhood Participatory Data Analysis (BGPDA) (Harris, 2020). I define BGPDA as an analytic method rooted in humanizing research (Paris and Winn, 2013) and the tradition of Black Feminism which honors the lived experience as a criterion of meaning. Rather than positioning Black girls as passive objects of the research analysis, BGPDA locates them as knowledge holders who are invaluable experts in pursuits of just and liberatory schools spaces.

The purpose of the BGPDA session (n= 1) was to engage the girls in the co-production of both knowledge and a Black girlhood intellectual and activist tradition that (a) centralized on Black girls' epistemic agency to name and speak back against oppression as a praxis of resistance, (b) placed Black girls at the locus of analysis, and (c) validated their understandings about their lived realities and schooling experiences as a criterion of meaning (Collins, 2000). My approach to employing a BGPDA framing was to, first conduct a preliminary analysis of the transcripts and field notes. Then, I prompted students to review artifacts and facilitated a group

conversation using notes from the preliminary analysis of transcripts of earlier sessions as an entry point.

For instance, during our final *CRP* session I brought in some of their own excerpts and quotes that highlighted some of the preliminary thematic findings. Employing BGPDA, I engaged students in in-depth discussions regarding the transcripts and themes to illuminate how these students interpreted the significance and identified patterns across data sources. One activity engaged the *CRP* students in a gallery walk where they examined artifacts including education journey maps and a word association worksheet. A salient theme that students identified were the ways students used similar words to describe the court system as they did to describe school suspensions, including the ways the two systems are "unfair" and disproportionately impact Black people. Soliciting feedback and insights from the *CRP*—namely, member checking and triangulating the study's findings—enabled me to ensure trustworthiness, reliability, and validity in my interpretations of Black girls' experiences.
As I transcribed the data from these sessions, I constructed initial codes, categories, and sub-categories (Merriam, 2009). The *CRP* students' insights guided the first phase of data analysis in which I developed analytic memos including my reflections on the conversations, artifacts, and transcripts. This process consisted of jotting down recurring themes and significant quotes that informed the subsequent coding phases. The second phase of data analysis was an iterative, non-linear, and emergent process (Srivastava, 2005) progressively leading to refined and more specialized codes. I used "In Vivo" coding to preserve participants' verbatim language as it appeared in transcripts and field notes (Saldaña, 2013). I use this technique to allow participants to speak for themselves and name their own experiences, as they are the experts and knowledge holders in this study. Next, codes were developed deductively using focused thematic coding.

This allowed me to begin drawing connections between coding themes and relevant literature / theory which were elaborated inductively from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I drew from Matrix of Domination Theory *to* refine and collapse data into more specialized categories and subcategories. The coding list included categories such as "stereotypes," "teacher-student relationships," "formal punishment," "informal punishment," and "resistance" (Collins, 2000). I used these codes to create matrices which illuminate the dialogic relationship between power, oppression, and resistance as they manifest throughout Black girls' schooling experiences.

Conclusion

This critical case study used Black Feminist Storytelling, qualitative interviews, and ethnographic research to explore the lived truths of thirteen Black girls with exclusionary discipline records at Desert Rose High School. The girls' narratives provide an in-depth examination of how Black girls who face exclusionary punishments live and interpret the school/prison nexus phenomenon. By centering the girls' voices and engagement in the Concrete Rose Project, this inquiry illuminates the violence and hyper-punishment these youth endure in educational spaces that contribute to their marginalization and pushout (Morris, 2016). In so doing, this study offers practice and policy implications that prompts educators to think critically about their ideas, policies, and practices as they interact with Black girls. Additionally, this study offers avenues for further research toward the expansion of Black Girl Cartography studies (Butler, 2018).

CHAPTER FOUR: BETWEEN GOOD AND GHETTO: THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF CRIMINALIZATION

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the context in which DRHS was embedded. Specifically, I highlight the unique ways Black girls are positioned within a context that, referring to similar communities, Elijah Anderson (2017) has described as an iconic ghetto (Anderson, 2017). In these contexts, Black people, and the subject of this dissertation, Black high school girls, are subjected to a pedagogy of urban struggle that imbues them and the spaces they occupy with deficit ideas, stereotypes, and assumed pathologies (Anderson, 2012). Findings in this chapter reveal how students and staff unpack this image and the ways residents marked Desert Rose High as the "most bad and ghetto high school in the district."

As the Matrix of Domination theory posits, controlling narratives and stereotypes are manufactured continuously within the Cultural Domain of Power and provide an ideological apparatus to justify social inequality and oppression (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Thus, the Cultural Domain of Power is regarded as the most fundamental aspect of any power arrangement because it provides the glue that links and reinforces oppression across all other domains (Collins, 2009, p. 53). The stigma surrounding DRHS, I argue, was one of the most marginalizing and powerful stereotypes *Concrete Rose Project* students encountered because it institutionalized an anti-Black and classist script that naturalized the ways the community regarded DRHS as physically unsafe and in need of surveillance. The student narratives presented in this chapter demonstrate how the iconic ghetto image provided an interpretative climate for structural processes and policies that sustain criminalization and educational inequities in the school setting. Moreover, being associated with the Black ghetto reinforced tainted perceptions of Black girls as individuals and their communities, negatively influencing their treatment by school staff (Anderson, 2012; Jones, 2009).

Community Context

I conducted my critical case study in one high school, Desert Rose High School (DRHS), located in Desert Rose County (DRC), an urban city in Southern California. Widely known for its vast desert ecosystem, Desert Rose County is home to approximately 150,000 residents consisting of 40% Hispanic or Latinx, 31% white, 24% Black, and 4% Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The median household income is approximately $36,000, which is starkly below the state average of $73,000 (City-Data, 2012). In 2017, about 30% of families in DRC were living below the poverty line. With its many empty deserts and high poverty rates, it does not surprise me that the community is home to a sizable maximum-security prison that cages over 3,000 incarcerated people—a number that exceeds its maximum capacity by 1,000 people. Angela Davis (2008) theorizes that the expansion of the prison-industrial complex is a geographic solution for economically depressed areas and "turns the men, women, and children who live in these damaged communities into perfect candidates for prison" (p. 31). As a result, the prisonization of Desert Rose County has evolved many of its neighborhoods and schools into feeder sites for the prison system (Meiners, 2013). These processes are a collateral effect of anti-Black racism and racial segregation embedded within the community's geographic history.

Geographic History of Desert Rose High

Ghettoized neighborhoods are produced and sustained through "the design of school district boundaries, zoning regulations, policing strategies, the location of highways and transit systems, and a host of tax subsidies [that] do disastrous work by making places synonymous with races" (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 6). Desert Rose County's geographic history foreshadows the racialized spaces and stigmatization Black girls at DRHS navigate in the present day. The scripts that marked DRHS as the "most ghetto and bad school in the district" encompassed decades of

discriminatory housing practices and zoning policies that relegated Black youth to substandard and underfunded schools (Carter et al., 2017; Dumas, 2014; Lewis, 2003; Lipman, 2008; Lipsitz, 2011), positioning the issue as tightly coupled to race, class, and place.

Desert Rose County was never intended to be a place for Black people. Historically regarded as a white enclave, banks and individual sellers alike excluded Black residents from purchasing homes in the Desert Rose County until the late 1970s. In the early 1980s and 1990s, though, Black and Brown migration patterns increased in response to the rising costs of living in Southern California. Census data reflects this dramatic shift in the racial composition where the Black population nearly tripled during this period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The significant increase in the number of Black families moving into traditionally white neighborhoods, among other forms of resistance and rejection by their new neighbors, led some white residents to organize themselves into a local Ku Klux Klan (KKK) chapter. This chapter of the KKK terrorized Black families, including Black children who were on their route to school throughout the 1990s. Mr. Jones, a Black educator in this study and an alumnus of the high school district in the 1990s, shared his memories of this history:

> You would never know that a little *Black girl got killed down the street from here* by a white supremacist, like a walking distance away. Some things are different, and some things are the same. I don't see a lot of the overt white supremacists like I used to. I mean, we used to be around and see people with boots on and the red suspenders [common clothing items worn by skinheads]. And we don't see a whole lot of that kind of stuff anymore. But hey, man, some of that sentiment is there, and it's here as well, amongst some of the staff. I'm starting to see dense populations of Black people in certain areas. And Latinos as well. Well, they pretty much spread out. But again, on the east side in Desert Rose, it's a much deeper and denser concentration of it, and you start to see less and less white folks in some of those areas.

In recollecting the event and Black Desert Rose County citizens' experiences, Mr. Jones spoke about the silence surrounding the local history of anti-Black violence and white

supremacist terrorism. He felt this history had lingering effects evidenced by the anti-Blackness among staff members and the ongoing segregation patterns in the district that privileged white residents to better quality educational resources and facilities. During this time, the neighborhood and school area experienced mass white abandonment as white families fled into other community areas, and the district opened three new schools. For nearly two decades, the sheriff's department and local homeowners association acted as self-appointed protectors of the racial purity of white enclaves by targeting Section 8 households (most of which were led by single mothers) in efforts to severely restrict the expansion of the Black population (Ocen, 2013). These historical processes' residual effects are best captured when examining the trends in racial student demographics at DRHS over the past three decades.

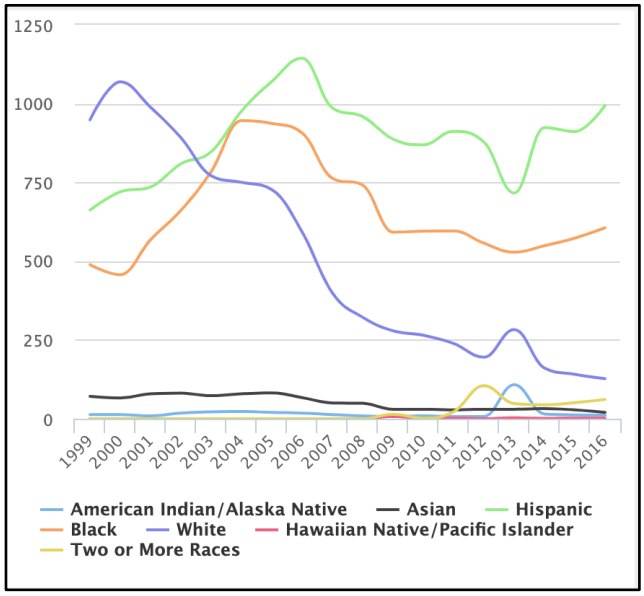

Figure 4. Desert Rose High School Enrollment Data (1999–2016).

Tracing the school and community population data reveals that the large-scale abandonment of Desert Rose High by white student populations occurred in tandem with the expansion of the school's Black and Brown student populations. For example, between the years

2000 and 2006, the white student population declined from 1,070 students to 399 students. During this same decade, the Black student population increased from 450 students to 910, while the Latinx student population increased from 720 students to 1150 students. Today, Desert Rose High is a hyper-segregation site as discriminatory housing practices targeting Section 8 voucher holders persist, and zoning policies continue to perpetuate the color line set forth nearly six decades ago (Du Bois, 1903).

Desert Rose High School

With a population of over 1,700 students, Desert Rose High School is one of the smallest traditional public high schools in the district where it is located. The school population is mostly concentrated with regard to race/ethnicity and socio-economic status. During the 2018–2019 academic year, 32% identified as Black/African American, 60% identified as Latinx, 4% as white, and 82% were considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. Although many of the students and residents in the neighborhood are Black, the entire leadership team and most of the teaching faculty are white (CDE, 2019).

At the time of the study, Black girls at DRHS were suspended at a rate of 19%, which was one of the highest suspension rates among high school girls in California (CDE, 2019). Black girls made up 31% of the total female student enrollment at DRHS yet accounted for 60% of girls' total suspensions. Of these suspended Black girls, 42.9 % received multiple suspensions (CDE, 2019). Overall, Black girls at DRHS missed more than 500 days of school due to out-of-school suspension. This number exceeded all other student groups, except for their Black male counterparts (OCR, 2015).

The Failure of Discipline Reform

In recent years, DRHS experienced significant leadership turnover, and several districts and state-mandated reform initiatives to reduce racial disparities in school discipline. Among these initiatives, Dr. Richardson, the school principal of eight years, described Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS) as a significant component.

> With OCD . . . you're a bad kid; you get sent out of class; you go there. It's just a punishment room, a holding cell. I think, most importantly, you have this room [PBIS Center] and this concept of not just having a punitive traditional detention room. We have counselors with a curriculum. If a kid comes in and they have a particular issue, we have six or seven different groups. We're helping them, "Hey, what was your decision? What could you have done better? Do you understand how that might be wrong in this environment? How can you make it right?"

In the excerpt, Dr. Richardson described the distinction between the PBIS center and the school's on-campus detention center, which she referred to as a "holding cell." Comparatively, she felt the PBIS center was far less punitive than the OCD room, which the security officers managed. The PBIS structure included a staff of six guidance counselors who met with students to discuss their actions and behaviors. Additionally, the PBIS program included a mentoring component in which counselors met each month with a group of chronically disciplined students to discuss topics that emphasized "personal responsibility," respect, and "making better choices." In the classrooms, teachers were also expected to implement PBIS by providing incentive cards to reward "good behavior."

In the absence of clear and specific parameters regarding behaviors that constitute a referral to the PBIS center or OCD, both spaces were commonly used by the staff as a form of exclusionary punishment, especially for Black girls perceived to challenge authority. For instance, while conducting interviews in the PBIS Center, multiple teachers called the room to notify staff they were sending over a disruptive or defiant student. On one occasion, a teacher

requested a counselor or security escort for a Black girl who refused to throw away her food. While Dr. Richardson believed PBIS offered a proactive approach to addressing problematic behaviors, she also described teachers' ability to refer students to the space in response to perceived misbehavior as a "beneficial resource in the classroom." Moreover, she contended there were "certain behaviors that warrant suspensions and expulsions for the good of the learning environment," such as interpersonal violence, and consequently, she punished students "more harshly for fighting than drug possession." Interviews with PBIS staff further contextualized the program's role in the discipline structure at DRHS. Mr. Ty, a white man who was the PBIS director, explained the reasons teachers commonly referred Black girls to the PBIS Center:

> I'm a little uncomfortable just targeting Black girls, but I would say strong-will, opinionated if I had to. That leads to some teachers not responding well to that. I think the stereotype is a little more teacher-centered and students more, I don't want to say, submissive, but a lot of respect for the teacher. That means quiet. I think there's a lot of vibrancy and energy that emerges in volume and almost flamboyant, but they're almost theatrical, I would say.

Like many white staff members I spoke to, Mr. Ty started the statement by expressing his "discomfort" with talking explicitly about Black girls. Yet he evoked many stereotypical images as he described the personality traits that educators penalized Black girls for, including being "strong-willed" and "theatrical." Though Mr. Ty insisted the PBIS center was developed to be a non-punitive alternative, he acknowledged that the space was frequently misused, especially when managing Black girls who are considered in opposition to the status quo of classroom dynamics.

Interestingly, in the months I spent observing classrooms at Desert Rose High, I never observed a teacher using PBIS incentive cards, nor were these practices discussed in my interviews with staff who were not affiliated with PBIS. This was with the exception of Ms.

George, who expressed opposition to PBIS over traditional punitive discipline because "giving students incentives for behaving how they should seems ridiculous." In my conversations with the *CRP* students, they often situated the PBIS room alongside other punitive disciplinary structures. Marie shared the following common punishments Black girls experience:

> **Jamelia:** Yeah? What kinds of things are Black girls more likely to get in trouble for, that other girls wouldn't get in trouble for?
>
> **Marie:** Fighting, talking back, being disrespectful, getting sent out of class, getting sent to OCD, getting sent to the PBIS center. We get suspended for everything here. We get suspended for cussing . . . our mouth. We get suspended for our pencil, falling to the ground. We get suspended for everything. If you breathe the wrong way, we're getting suspended.

Marie described being referred to the "PBIS" center as an "in-school suspension." Her personal experiences of how this space was used by teachers starkly contrasted with the staff's intended purpose (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). The misappropriated use of PBIS as an exclusionary practice, coupled with many staff members' refusal to reward students for demonstrating positive behavior, severely limited the impact of PBIS and failed to redress inequitable discipline patterns among Black girls. Since implementing these initiatives, the DRHS' suspension rates for Black girls declined from 22% in 2015–2016 to 19.1% in 2018–2019. While these numbers show some improvement, Black girls remain overrepresented among the population of suspended girls, and their suspension rates continue to outnumber the district (6%), county (1.2%), and state (2.0 %) suspension rates for all girls (CDE, 2018).

As I alluded to at the start of the chapter, Black girls at DRHS encountered a pedagogy of urban struggle that imbued them and their learning spaces with deficit ideas and stereotypes. Though there was a myriad of stereotypes that could be discussed as tangentially influential to the perceptions and the resulting treatment of Black girls (which I discuss in Chapter 5), in the next sections, I describe two critical pedagogies that impacted *CRP* students social and academic

experiences: (a) the stigmatizing beliefs residents maintained about DRHS, and (b) the master narratives and assumed pathologies staff internalized about the lives of Black girls in ghettoized communities. In both contexts, I argue that the ghetto stigma reveals important scripts of race, class, and place that provide an interpretive climate for legitimizing a carceral continuum in urban schools.

The following sections turn to data including ethnographic field notes, interviews and group conversations with the *Concrete Rose Project* students (primary data), and semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of the school staff (secondary data). Data was analyzed with a particular focus on understanding the representations, ideas, and stories used to construct Black girls and their learning spaces. While this chapter centers primarily on Black girls' understanding of the ghetto school stigma, conversations with staff provided necessary contextual background about the sociopolitical context of DRHS and the deficit scripts surrounding Black girls, their families, and their communities. Thus, I analyzed each of the data sources mentioned earlier to answer the study's research questions and triangulate findings.

The First Pedagogy: The Ghetto School Stigma

I open this section with an ethnographic vignette from a field observation. On this day in the field, I was seated in the main office at Desert Rose High when I witnessed an exchange between three Black mothers, all of which had Black daughters enrolled at the school. As was typical, the mothers expressed some of their frustrations about the quality of their daughters' schooling experiences at DRHS. The following vignette demonstrates the controlling narratives and stigma surrounding DRHS that led parents and residents to regard the school as a "ghetto" and "dangerous" place.

Field Note

Mid-afternoon on a weekday, a few moments after the lunch bell rang, I sat in the administrative office, completing field notes as I awaited my next interview. There were four black chairs lined up against the wall. A large glass security door separated the school from the "visitors" waiting area. It had recently been installed as a part of the school's response to the rising mass shootings in high schools across the nation, but mostly in white suburban communities (Triplett et al., 2014). Students were required to present their identification cards to be granted access to the school. For parents, entering the campus required them to be registered as an authorized visitor and present valid state identification.

Beside me sat three Black mothers who were waiting to speak with school administrators about their daughters. After waiting in the office for several moments, the office secretary denied entry to one of the mothers because she forgot her identification card at home. I learned that she was waiting to file an incident report with the head campus security officer and disenroll her daughter, who had recently been suspended after security used surveillance footage to identify her in a fight with another student. Frustrated, the mother sat beside me shaking her head as she began to vent out loud:

> This school is so ghetto. The security is full of shit . . . it's like a prison yard here. Nothing but fights... they always got something going on. My daughter will not be coming back here. And I'm doing everything I can to make sure that my youngest don't gotta come here when she finishes middle school . . . . I pray my daughter won't have to come here.

To my right, the mother understood her frustration and responded, confirming her assessment of the school security.

> Yeah, my daughter told me about the security up here . . . this school is full of shit. They got me up here . . . said they are referring my daughter to special education because apparently . . . she's a handful.

These mothers' assessments of the school security reflected stories they likely heard about the regular use of excessive force when "de-escalating fights" among students and other intimidating techniques widely used by law enforcement. Within seconds, the office secretary receives a call from a teacher who informs her of a "large group of Black students" gathered near the parking lot. From my interviews and conversations with *CRP* students, I learned an informal rule that governed discipline and surveillance practices at Desert Rose High: teachers, administrators, and staff nearly always read the sites where "groups of Black students gathered" as sites of suspicion and violence.

After hanging up the phone, the office secretary paged the head security officer on her walkie-talkie to notify them about the students gathered. Within seconds, I watched as the school's campus deputy and security rushed out of their offices into the central campus pod. In pairs, the security file into multiple golf carts. I had never visited a school campus as small as Desert Rose High, with as many golf carts as they owned, a symbol of the ideological linkage between schools and prisons that prioritize punishment over quality education (Meiners, 2013). The mother to my left once again shook her head, "See, that's that shit I'm talking about. This school is like a prison!"

Between the security glass, the constant visibility of a parked sheriff's vehicle, the surveillance cameras perched in every corner, and the ten campus security guards roaming with their golf carts, it was apparent that the mother's statement that "Desert Rose High" resembled a "prison yard" was rooted in more than sheer frustration. Her story resembled the vivid scripts I heard about Desert Rose High from people within my community throughout the decade-long span in which I had lived and attended school there. The school's investment in criminalization technologies and social control produced the image to the outsider looking in that trouble was

always "going on." This institution constructed the Black student body as a perpetual suspect and Desert Rose High as an undesirable place where Black parents hoped and *prayed,* they would not have to send their children.

Before beginning the discussion of findings, I should acknowledge how my positionality as a cultural insider impacted how I came to understand the significance of the vignette that opens this section. From my years of living in the community, I knew that a decades-long stigma surrounded DRHS that marked it with the stereotypical image of the iconic ghetto (Anderson, 2017). Elijah Anderson (2017) defines the iconic ghetto as the places where Black people are believed to occupy based on symbolic markers of racialized poverty, including high crime rates, violence, and over-policing. I drew upon this concept during the data collection and analysis phases. There was a prevailing consciousness among the residents that regarded DRHS as an unsafe, bad, and "ghetto" school. The substandard physical conditions, the recurring narratives of unruly "student fights," and academic underperformance coupled with police omnipresence led many parents to believe that sending their children to DRHS would set them up for failure, or worse, subject them to danger. The narratives presented throughout the following section unpack these ideas further.

"They Say We're Just Ghetto Kids Who Fight"

One of the most pervasive forms of marginalization that the Black girls of the *Concrete Rose Project* endured was a dominant narrative that cast DRHS as the "most ghetto school in the district." Many students identified this stereotype as rooted in an exaggerated and racialized narrative about the prevalence of fights among Black students. Tee Tee, an eleventh-grade student, captured this sentiment when she described the reputation: "Oh, they say, 'Our school is *bad*' and 'We're just *ghetto kids who fight*' and 'That school's *ratchet*' . . . stuff like that." Tee

Tee attended school in Desert Rose County throughout her kindergarten to high school years. Over the years, Tee Tee remembered hearing stories about the fights that happened at Desert Rose High. Tee Tee felt these stories misrepresented DRHS and portrayed it as unsafe, which deterred many parents from enrolling their students. In her earlier years of schooling, Tee Tee recalled stories about DRHS that often followed with a warning to her parents "not to send their children there because the school is bad and ghetto." The dominant narrative of pervasive student violence, which led many parents to view her school as dangerous, in no way affected her sense of safety. In fact, in an introductory survey on school climate and culture, Tee Tee reported "feeling *physically safe* in classrooms and other school spaces (e.g., hallways, bathrooms)."

From Tee Tee's perspective, the number of fights at DRHS was no different from other high schools in the district. However, she observed disparities in the ways the community reacted to violence and fights when they happened in the majority white and wealthier schools of the district:

> Like they say, Mountain Valley High School [a majority white school within the district] is a nice school, and it's not a lot of fighting there and stuff like that. But every high school there's fighting and stuff like that. So, they just think our school, cause its more Black people going here that is more ghetto . . . but that's not right.

Tee Tee critiqued the ghetto school stigma's insidious nature as a racialized script related to the Black student population. Beyond her belief that this narrative perpetuated a tainted perception of her school, Tee Tee protested the narrative because she felt it was "not right" for the community to cast her school as "ghetto and bad" because there were higher concentrations of Black students enrolled relative to other schools in the district. Several *CRP* students shared Tee Tee's sentiments. The students adamantly rejected their school's reputation because they understood it as a racialized artifact that negatively portrayed Black students. For instance, when

I asked Kya, an eleventh-grade student, about her school's reputation, she quickly listed "dirty, ratchet . . . and dirty." Kya attended Mountain Valley High School for a semester as a part of their independent studies credit recovery program. Based on her experiences at both high schools, Kya described the differences she noticed between the schools in the district: "Um, the other schools are cleaner, but I don't know about the ratchetness." As a follow-up, I asked her why she believed people considered her school 'more ratchet' than other schools in the district, to which she immediately responded:

> **Kya:** Um, probably cause a lot of Black people go here. But I think, um, it's not as bad as how it was in the years before . . . when I first started going here.
>
> **Jamelia:** What changed?
>
> **Kya:** Think that it's been less fights.

In their own words, Tee Tee and Kya both interrogate the "ghetto" and "bad" school narratives as a racist script that conveys anti-Black sentiments even without using racial terms. The marking of Desert Rose High School as a "more bad" place was a covert way to mark the low-income Black students who lived and learned in this area of the community as ghetto and bad. Their understandings of the school stigma relate to the work of Anderson (2017), who writes about the interrelationship between racial segregation, ideology, and educational inequity. Anderson argues that once "Blacks settle into what had been white areas," the local government typically responds by withholding resources and services, which reproduces racial inequities and "depresses the quality of life." He further contends that high schools within low-income, hyper-segregated Black communities are deeply stigmatized and marked as "Black spaces deemed unworthy of the investment of public resources" based on their association with Blackness and the image of the "iconic ghetto." These symbolic and material processes render the "Black Space" a less desirable place where "Black people are seen to belong, and whites are not"

(Anderson, 2015, p. 61). The symbolic construction of DRHS as a "Black Space" justified the school's divestment by the district, which reinforced its status as an inferior school.

School Choice and a Public Pedagogy of Undesirability

Similar to the *CRP* students, educators, counselors, and the school principal cited the negative connotation associated with DRHS in the community. Dr. Lawrence, a Black woman who was a guidance counselor in this study, cited some of the scripts she commonly heard from educators in the district and parents (regardless of race) as they made school choice decisions:

> Um, so a lot of people don't want to come to DRHS. I've heard, I've only been here a year, but in the year that I've been here … I hear people are like, "Oh, you work at DRHS?" And I'm like yeah . . . I love it! But the negative connotation that's associated with DRHS. I wish we could change it because it's really not a bad school. You can do a school that's 5 to 10 miles away from here, and they also got their problems. I've had two sets of parents that came to tour the school, and one said, "Can you convince me to bring my child to DRHS?" I said okay well "Why do I need to convince you to come next year? Because I've heard that they fight every day and it's not safe. So my response to the parents was, no, they do not fight every day. But I went to a country club school as a child myself, and we have fights too. People talk about the negative connotation, low test scores, the kids here fight all the time, don't try in school, their behavior issues, and there are problems.

In this excerpt, Dr. Lawrence describes how parents often hesitate to send their students to DRHS based on the dominant narrative, which she suggests is often interconnected with narratives of violence, behavioral challenges, and academic underperformance. For example, with respect to student outcomes, after six consecutive years of failing to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) on statewide achievement exams, DRHS was subject to a series of academic sanctions. Based on these evaluations, schools classified as underperforming were subject to several penalties, including significant federal funding cuts and increased state monitoring. Additionally, the sanction required the high school district to provide parents with detailed report cards on their AYP performance. Students enrolled in schools that fell below the statewide AYP for two consecutive years were granted school choice vouchers, allowing them to

transfer to better performing schools. Between the narratives of regular fights and "academic failure," parents expressed reluctance enrolling their students at DRHS or disenrolled them altogether. I can remember parents throughout my neighborhood, including my own, who appealed to transfer their students into schools in other district zoning areas in response to receiving these letters. The state-sanctioned funding cuts and school choice vouchers further perpetuated the stigmatization, abandonment, and disinvestment DRHS faced by the community.

Dr. Lawrence's linking the "low test scores," daily fights, and the perception that students "don't try in school" reveals the subtle ideology of anti-Blackness that she seemed to hold, and, I believe, reflects the subtle and not so subtle ideology of anti-Blackness in the community that provided a system of ideas for constructing DRHS students as academically inferior, non-deserving, and hyper-violent. The ghetto school stigma encompassed subtle and explicit anti-Black messages that "enact(ed) a public pedagogy about who belongs where and about what makes certain spaces desirable" (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 15).

CRP students understood how these ideas and illusions were reproduced and sustained by hegemonic power structures, including the local media. During our Black Girlhood Participatory Data Analysis (BGPDA) Session (Harris, 2020), the girls engaged in a discussion about what they felt contributed to the school's negative reputation:

> **Jamelia:** So I've been looking at some themes from our conversations, and one thing that keeps coming up is that people describe the reputation of DRHS as a ghetto and bad school. Why do y'all think DRHS is considered bad and ghetto?
>
> **Momo:** It's like I'm fighting the fights. The fights give us a big publicity stunt.
>
> **Reigan:** I think . . . I have this debate all the time. Okay. I'm going to tell you. I'm going to break it down. Every year we get a new class, the freshmen.
>
> **Kya:** They get worse and worse and worse. [crosstalk 00:50:35]

> **Reigan:** I hated when I heard that I was coming to Desert Rose High School. I wanted to cry. I wanted to go to Mountain Valley [school in an affluent white neighborhood] so badly because of its reputation. But then coming here and being here for four years, it's not bad. And the only reason that it is so many fights now is that the underclassmen, just like me, came hearing what the school's reputation is, and then they try to be that reputation. They try to add to it. They'd be like, "Oh, since there's fights every day, I'm going to go fight, I'm going to go beat this girl up," and then boom. It just makes it worse and worse as it progresses.
>
> **DeJanae:** Yeah, the drama, especially our young Black girls. All they want to do is cause drama and to start fights. Because that's all that's been happening with our freshmen here, that's why Black girls are seen as being ghetto, loud. But also, I can't blame the school for seeing us that way. It's just the way they [Black girls] portray themselves. That's just how they look at us, though.

During that week, I brought in excerpts, highlighting some of the preliminary thematic findings and engaging them in discussions about their analytic interpretations. When Momo opened up the discussion, she described the fights at DRHS as a *big publicity stunt* that perpetuated the "bad" and "ghetto school stigma. Through her statement, Momo draws attention to the "publicity" that physical fights among students attract within the community. Later in the conversation, I learned Momo's use of the words "publicity stunt" encompassed a literal meaning: it alluded to the local newspaper, which she and other *CRP* students felt biasedly reported stories of physical fights at DRHS, specifically when the fights involved Black students.

Reigan, Kya, and DeJanae agreed with Momo's assertion that student fights negatively portrayed their school in the community. Though these students collectively refused the "bad/ghetto school" label, they acknowledged that the narrative about "many fights" was accurate to a certain extent. The girls, who were mostly "upperclassmen" (eleventh and twelfth grade), went on to describe the prevalence of physical fights among ninth-grade Black girls as a "self-perpetuating stereotype," a sentiment that almost mirrored a statement made by Dr. Lawrence in an interview. Of note, Dr. Lawrence was the Black Female Success Club's advisor; several *CRP* students were members of this organization. Dr. Lawrence often reminded these

students that being a Black girl at DRHS meant their actions were "under a scope," a colloquialism for a more familiar idiom "under a microscope," that is, being closely scrutinized and surveilled, for how they behaved and how non-Black adults judged their behavior. Her "scope" analogy also meant that Black girls' misbehaviors could cast negative light onto Black girls and women as a collective, an idea deeply embedded in Black middle-class respectability politics (Cooper, 2017). From Reigan's perspective, underclassmen who heard stories about the DRHS stigma more readily engaged in fights over "petty drama and boys" as a way to live up to their school's image of being a place where "students fight every day." DeJanae echoed Reigan's sentiments asserting that fights and drama among ninth-grade Black girls perpetuated the reductive ghetto school stereotype that cast a negative light on Black girls as a whole student group.

Reigan and DeJanae's statement in the above excerpt were both examples of how girls frequently responded to their school stigma. Like Momo, many of these students share the positionality of being high performing Black girls who have experienced being suspended on one or more occasions for fighting—a phenomenon often treated as antithetical in the literature (Jones, 2009). Each of the girls understood that their school's reputation generalized the character of all Black girls at DRHS. Their school's reputation reinforced a conventional narrative about the academic failures of Black girls at DRHS that attributed persistent underperformance to these students' "apathy" toward education due to their consumption with random violence. This deficit and racialized narrative misrepresented Black girls as anti-intellectual and hyper-aggressive, thereby disparaging their intellectual prowess, academic potential, and fervor for education. Thus, the girls attempted to extricate themselves from this

trope by distinguishing themselves from students who engaged in stereotypical “ghetto girl” behaviors (Jones, 2009).

Nevertheless, several students agreed with Reigan's assertion over the 15-minute discussion, attributing the bad school reputation to fights among “Black girl freshman students” and their involvement in “petty drama.” Marie, who watched back and forth wearing an annoyed expression on her face, interjected with a comment that prompted her peers to reflect on the institutionalized nature of the “bad and ghetto” school stigma:

> [Sighs] What does that reputation have to do with the [entire] school if it’s a small group of students fighting?

Marie’s statement challenged the group to refrain from blaming individual “Black girl freshman students” for behaving in ways they felt subscribed to the “ghetto” stigma. Though I did not speak very often during the *CRP* group conversations, on several occasions, I contributed, redirecting students away from reciting harmful ideologies about Black girls that they had likely heard from adults. At this moment, I shared additional data as an effort to push forward Marie's inquiry about the institutionalization of the “ghetto school” stigma. For instance, during my data analysis, I discovered that several students understood the seemingly impenetrable ghetto and bad school stigma as an artifact of local history. This stigma transcended beyond the *CRP* students’ present-day experiences. It marked multiple generations of students who were zoned to attend DRHS as "bad and "ghetto" people. In the months since these interactions, I shared with students several abbreviated excerpts capturing this theme, including a statement from Ashley, who discussed this phenomenon during an interview when she explained the stigmatization she faced in her community as a DRHS student:

> When they say DRHS is ghetto, they have a bad reputation, and if you tell anybody you go to DRHS, they be like [grits teeth]. I mean, the thing is you’re getting that idea that DRHS is weird because of something that happened back in the day. That’s how people

> are thinking like it was that back in the day. They'll be like, "Oh, you go over there [emphasis]?" Because I feel like, not I feel like, but my mom told me like back in the day this was a really bad school. And my teacher even said that. He explained to us and stuff. Because the school was known for fighting and doing all types of stuff in that nature, it wasn't like an actual high school. People wouldn't want to go here. You wouldn't want to be known to go to DRHS or whatever. But if you go to any other school, Mountain Valley High [majority white school in the district], for example, that school is way worse than this school. They have fights every single day. I know personally because I've been up there myself and my friends go there. I'll be like, "Where you finna go?" Just for example, for drama or whatever, I was there before the bell rung. The bell rung, my friends, came out, I was like, "Hey, where you finna go?" A fight, a fight, a fight. And that was every single day.

Ashley's explanation about the stigmatization that she faced as a DRHS student was a commonly expressed sentiment among *CRP* students. These students often mentioned the historical narratives about DRHS that led Desert Rose County residents to disregard it as "an actual school" and mark the school with undesirable characteristics that caused students not to "want to be known to go to DRHS." Drawing snippets from Ashley's words and other data on the local history, I reminded students that the school reputation imbued historical ideals and illusions about the students who lived and learned in their neighborhood decades before them. I sought to engage the girls in critically interrogating how these scripts became ingrained within the geographic history and culture of Desert Rose High:

> **Jamelia:** But y'all are always saying the school reputation is from "back in the day" . . . so why do you think it still exists if it's no longer how the school is? Some of y'all have shared that this was the reputation even when your parents were in school . . . . I heard a counselor say it's been known as the "bad school" since the 1990s. So Marie's point is right . . . it's not just about the students who are currently here getting in fights . . . . What do y'all think made this a "bad school" from the 1990s til now?
>
> **Marie:** Once you already have your reputation, it's hard to get rid of it. Especially because, with a lot of fights from DRHS . . . it's like we always got a whole bunch of deputies and stuff. I think it gets more involved in the community. We had that one fight where they pepper-sprayed everybody when we had that, and it was on Desert Rose Press [local newspaper] and Facebook. So, it's like every time DRHS does something, it always gets brought up . . .
>
> **E. Lovely:** [interjects] *in public*, yeah.

Teiara: Mountain Valley High don't.

Together, Marie, E. Lovely, and Teiara called attention to the biased coverage of the local newspaper. They particularly pointed to how the newspaper propagated controlling images that portrayed DRHS as violent and out of control. As the girls observed, no other district schools experienced the degree of sensationalized media coverage that DRHS endured. When Black students fought at DRHS, the media coverage conjured a spectacle of Blackness (or as Momo earlier described, a "publicity stunt") that justified the relentless dehumanization faced by Black students. The girls' understanding of how these hegemonic ideas justified the involvement of "deputies" who "pepper-sprayed everybody" including "innocent students" was disturbing, yet emblematic of the ways the Cultural Domain of Power functions to routinize systemic violence against Black bodies to such an extent that its everyday nature fosters acceptance (Collins, 1998). Her use of publicity stunt, in this theoretical context, speaks to the ways the media commonly propagates stories about Black on Black violence or "violent #BlackLivesMatter" protests to deflect attention away from state violence and other inequities disproportionately affecting the lives of Black people (Cullors & Bandele, 2018). To quote the words of Ma'Kiya, these images propagate a subtle message that "DRHS doesn't know how to control their students," which provides further justification for police intervention and state violence. While these practices would be considered excessive for children, they have deemed a necessity to manage the Black students at DRHS who are seen by "the public" as "ghetto" and "violent" thugs. As Subini Annamma (2018) writes, labeling marginalized students perpetuates a *pedagogy of pathologization* that "produces targets for the prison nation to feed jails" (p. 14).

The Second Pedagogy: Pathologies of Poor Black Girls

The ghetto is a site of many social pathologies about the unique challenges faced by Black families who live in socio-economic deprivation (Anderson, 2017). At DRHS, these pathologies naturalized the deficit frames through which educators and school leaders constructed Black girls, their communities, and their family structures. In particular, several staff members suggested the school reputation was a response to Black students' violence, particularly Black girls, whose lives "mirrored" the structural conditions that plagued their families and community. Interestingly, while staff held these views, they often admitted to having had minimal interactions and experiences with Black girls and their families. This practice of generalizing Black girls' lives outside of school perpetuated *master-narratives* through which staff conveyed generalized knowledge about the issues and struggles they assumed Black girls who live in ghettoized communities negotiate. According to Montecinos (1995), the use of *master narratives* to represent Black and Brown people provides a limited perspective of what it means to be a part of these groups and, in doing so, "essentializes and wipes out the complexities and richness of a groups cultural life" (p. 293). Through these master narratives, staff attempted to explain the school's specific behavioral challenges, which they believed perpetuated the exorbitant discipline rates. These statements collectively illustrate how staff often propagate single stories that essentialize violence in poor Black girls' lives in ways that are more constructed than real and simultaneously create an interpretative climate for punitive social control.

Dr. Lawrence shared the following when describing the multiply marginalized student population DRHS served:

> Um, I don't know a lot about the community because I just moved here, and I actually don't live here. But a lot of parents don't want to send their kids to DRHS. We have

> 35% African American… The other 55% are Hispanic I believe. A lot of homeless students and foster students. Um . . . they're first-generation because their parents did not go to college. Some of them are working-class. We often notice a lot of our students have, um, juvenile detention records. Some of them have been locked up. Some of them are still locked up so we have, uh, a lot of gang-affiliated students. Um, they tag a lot in our buildings. Um. We have a lot of fights sometimes, but we have great security that's in place, and *they're always on top of it.*

Dr. Lawrence explained how the student demographics related to some of the specific behavioral challenges at Desert Rose High that she felt might have contributed to the school's negative connotation, such as graffiti and gangs. However, she also acknowledged these challenges were no different from the "problems" that happened at her previous schools "in the country club." Through this statement, Dr. Lawrence critiques the race-class dimensions of how violence is constructed in ghettoized schools. From her positionality, as a Black woman of middle-class background who attended affluent schools from K-12 and taught in Tier One schools throughout her career, Dr. Lawrence saw no difference in the patterns of violence.

Though a well-meaning educator, what stood out to me was how Dr. Lawrence immediately responded to the open-ended question I posed—"How would you describe the community you serve?"—by reflecting on deficit aspects and challenges of the student population even when she admitted she "didn't know much about the community." I was also troubled by her almost conflated way of relating formerly incarcerated students, gang-affiliated students, "student fights," and the need for "good security who are always on top of it." Her deliberate way of conveying this statement suggested that she had likely recited similar scripts on more than one occasion, possibly to ease the concern of parents who thought of DRHS as a "school that couldn't control their students" (Ma'Kiya, student interview).

Nevertheless, as Dr. Lawrence reasons, these conditions and challenges were standard features, particularly in schools similarly positioned along the axes of race, class, and place. The

combination of racial and economic segregation tends to produce neighborhoods where high crime rates, poverty, violence, gang activity, and over-policing are concentrated in low-income communities of color (Anderson, 1999; Jones, 2009). As such, students who live in places impacted by these structural conditions seek involvement with gangs for various reasons, and undeniably their gang affiliations can make their way into the school setting (Anderson, 2017; Rios, 2011). These challenges were in no way anomalous for Dr. Lawrence, who worked as a teacher in urban schools for 14 years before joining the DRHS staff. Yet, the negative connotation associated with DRHS was incommensurable to how the DRC community viewed and valued other high schools in the district.

The reputation at DRHS seemed to have a detrimental impact on several of the educators I spoke with. Similar to Dr. Lawrence, many staff attributed the school's reputation to perceived problems within the structure of poor Black families and communities. While their comments about the school reputation reflected the student body broadly, several staff explicitly directed their comments towards the challenges posed by Black girls. Ms. George was representative of several educators who employed master narrative rhetoric when explaining the negative school reputation. In particular, she linked the reputation to fights among students, which she believed was a byproduct of pervasive violence and negligence in their community and home environments. She stated:

> Knowing very little, granted this is March, I've been teaching in this school since August. So, I have very little reference to this school prior. A lot of what I heard from before and everything is that DRHS is dangerous, there's a lot of fights. You almost want to say anybody that works here almost needs hazard pay or whatnot because of the difficulties of the students. Because of the large population of foster youth in the Desert Rose County, most of them come to DRHS. So, you get a lot of this difficult home life, and as children, they don't know how to properly ask for love, so they act out.

Ms. George, a self-identified white woman, taught for eight years before joining the teaching team at DRHS in 2019. In the excerpt, Ms. George began her response by first acknowledging her unfamiliarity with the school community because she did not live in the community. However, Ms. George proceeded for ten minutes by describing the difficulties of students' home lives, including an overtly gendered anti-Black assumption that Black girls who fought "witnessed their mothers beaten by their fathers and learned violence was the answer." After several moments in our conversation where I noticed Ms. George described intimate knowledge about her students' lives in a tone of unwavering certainty, I asked her whether she ever met with her students' parents. In her response, she argued that meeting with parents would not mitigate students' behavior challenges because, in her view, their parents condoned violent and disrespectful behavior toward teachers. This culture of uncontrollable violence and disrespect of authority figures, she reasoned, warranted "staff receiving hazard pay."

Most disturbing was her way of relating the school's "larger population of foster youth" and her belief that these students were "incapable of asking for love" to the school's disciplinary challenges. The notion that youth are "incapable of asking for love" relies on a "pedagogy of pathologization" (Annamma, 2018) that constructs youth as beyond the reach of their educators and their efforts to cultivate meaningful relationships. For Ms. George, the impossibility of loving students who were "incapable of asking for love" permitted her to stop trying to foster a positive climate and culture because she believed the problem lay within students and their dysfunctional home lives rather than her own cultural ignorance. Moreover, the pathology of youth "incapable of asking for love" draws parallels to the media-constructed image of "youth super-predators," which emerged during the 1990s in response to the so-called rise of youth crime (Rios, 2011). This racially coded image portrayed Black youth as heartless, hyper-

criminal, impulsive, and sociopathic. The youth-super predator image sparked a widespread public fear that catalyzed a wave of criminalizing educational policies and intensified policing efforts targeting low-income, Black youth (Farmer, 2010; Rios, 2011). This historical context further explicates the racialized, pernicious consequences of the white imagination in the education landscape. Specifically, her statement elucidates how white educators and policymakers construct and operationalize harmful ideas about poor Black youth to justify zero-tolerance policies.

In interviews, I also found that many staff employed master narrative rhetoric when explaining their interpretations of Black girls' racial-gender discipline disparities at DRHS. This included the school principal, Dr. Richardson, who explained what she believed to be the root cause of these persistent inequities:

> I think that our girls, especially our Black girls, see a lot of violence and a lot of neglect. That leads you to sort of like, fights in the park or whatever. And then oftentimes there is a lot of like homelessness or, um, you know, slipping back and forth and the transiency kind of going. I don't come from this type of home with this type of background in all of these structures. But that name-calling on social media and fighting came from something that happened to them. So, it's just, [Black] girls are always a little bit, for lack of a better they're messier it's trickier.

Dr. Richardson, who self-identified as a white woman, had been the principal of DRHS for the past seven years and taught in the district for 22 years before transitioning into leadership. Through her comments, Dr. Richardson demonstrated an in-depth consideration of the structural conditions that may have led to individual-level behavioral challenges among Black girls, such as witnessing and experiencing "a lot of violence" and "a lot of neglect." She imagined that some young women experienced pressures emerging from sexual and physical abuse, along with homelessness and transiency that negatively impacted their behavior, leading them to perpetrate violence against others. Dr. Richardson pathologized Black girls, labeling them as "messier" and

"trickier" based on her assumption that "something happened to them." She assumed that the "types of homes" and "structures" Black girls negotiate led them to engage in more violent and punishable behaviors. While the struggles she described were likely true for many DRHS students, it is essential to emphasize the structural conditions Black girls negotiate do not constitute a rationale for their overrepresentation among girls suspended.

Even while acknowledging how situational factors impact Black girls' social-emotional well-being and behaviors in school (Evans-Winters, 2005), she described these conditions as a source of aggressive behavior inherent to Black girls who navigate these structures. This, she believed, justified her school's egregious suspension and expulsion rates, which led her to "suspend more harshly for fights" and invest in discipline mechanisms as opposed to establishing institutional supports that address these students' (perceived) social-emotional needs and mitigate interpersonal conflict through non-punitive and inclusionary means (Morris, 2019; Winn, 2018).

Having heard multiple *CRP* students describe their hostile interactions with Ms. George, I was particularly interested in how Ms. George interpreted the inequitable suspension rates for Black girls. She explained:

> A lot of the issues, a lot of lack of respect for authority that I see. I can say something 16 times, and it doesn't matter how many times I've said it since August, I'm still ignored, I'm still just disregarded. I notice more attitude here, particularly from the Black students—particularly the (Black) girls. And yes, you get the flippant, and I almost want to say cheerleader, attitude. The flipping of the hair, "I don't have to listen to you," "I'm the cheerleader, I'm big man on campus" type thing, and so it gets very frustrating with that. So what I've seen, I would say yes, we do have probably more than our fair share of fights here at DRHS because, for whatever reason, these kids think violence is the source and the way to solve an issue. So that is very difficult. I think we are trying. I see a lot of apathy, I think, from a lot of the students at DRHS.

Sitting face to face with Ms. George as she painted this stereotypical caricature depicting Black girls in my community as *miniature angry Black women* was perhaps the most viscerally

violent experience I endured throughout this research process. I share her statement to shed light on the dehumanizing ideologies that drive Black girls' criminalization in school (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Ms. George often spoke about the detrimental effects of Black girls' home lives with an authoritative arrogance, even when her logic was unfounded. Ms. George explained that students' "lack of respect for authority" and their "apathy" made it difficult for staff to "build the climate, and build the culture that makes them feel safe, and makes them feel welcome." In advancing this line of argument, the teacher relayed a demoralizing assessment of Black girls that represented a divergence from white normative femininity. In the absence of "respect" and morality, Ms. George's statement—"they think violence is the source and the way to solve an issue so that is very difficult"—suggested that the school's punitive climate toward Black girls was inevitable. Ms. George's anti-Black sentiments and her everyday social interactions with Black girls suggested a vast divide between her views (likely the views of other teachers) and how Black girls felt about the school climate and the teachers' constant pathologizing and deficit constructions, which made the girls feel like "the school didn't want Black students there" (Ashley, Group Session # 4).

The analysis of teachers' narratives revealed how Black girls and their communities were often constructed as the locus of blame for the school's negative reputation. Much like the way DRC residents imagined DRHS students to consist of pejorative traits, the staff often perpetuated this social pathology. Staff believed these narratives were rooted in an intersecting web of problematic structural conditions that made students hyper-violent and academically apathetic (Yosso, 2005). Ultimately, the staff made assumptions about Black girls' home lives and challenges suggesting these conditions perpetuated the negative reputation. Many staff believed these students reenacted the lack of love, nurturance, and violence they experienced at home.

These ideas were referenced to frame the behavioral challenges of Black girls and were directly linked to Black girls involved with the child welfare system. Interestingly, rather than drawing on these preconceived notions about Black girls' lives as a baseline for developing specific supports and resources that would have allowed them to intervene and facilitate these students' social and academic success, they instead used these narratives as an interpretative climate and justifications for punishment and exclusion.

Conclusion

In the almost twenty years that I lived in Desert Rose County, I could not understand the depth of the prevailing consciousness that Desert Rose High was an inferior and "bad." It is important here to note that white residents were not the only ones who held and upheld the DRHS stigma; Black parents, teachers within the district, and many of the *CRP* students at some point believed this narrative, too. To echo an earlier statement by Dr. Lawrence, the challenges DRHS faced were no different from any school in our community, even those "in the country club." Nevertheless, this stigma marked multiple generations of Black students as youth whom teachers needed "hazard pay," "security who were always on it," and armed law enforcement to teach. These controlling ideas reified DRHS position in our community as an undesirable and dangerous school in which most qualified teachers did not want to teach, and parents feared sending their kids—the iconic ghetto (Anderson, 2017). The stories throughout this section illustrate how "sensationalized depictions of ghetto life" enact "a public pedagogy . . . [that] has disastrous consequences" (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 14). These very same ideas manifested themselves in the everyday institutional culture and operations at DRHS, which created a punitive climate for *CRP* students, characterized by multiple forms of policing, violence, and punishment. I explore these narratives in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE "ATTACK" ON BLACK GIRLS IN GHETTOIZED SCHOOLS

In Chapter 4, I provided an overview of Desert Rose High's sociocultural context and interrogated the unique ways Black girls are positioned within a high-poverty, ghettoized neighborhood. As the Matrix of Domination theory posits, controlling narratives and images are constantly manufactured within the Cultural Domain of Power and provide an ideological justification for systemic violence (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Thus, in Chapter 4, I argued that the "iconic ghetto" stigma (Anderson, 2017) subjected Black girls in this study to a pedagogy of urban struggle that imbued them and the spaces they occupy with assumed pathologies and stereotypes. By framing the conditions of life in the ghetto as a social pathology, school staff and residents created an interpretive climate that naturalized the ways DRHS was deemed physically unsafe and in need of maximum security.

This chapter continues to build on these theoretical framings and arguments to explore how the *Concrete Rose Project* (*CRP*) students describe the operation of power and ideas that reinforce the school/prison nexus at DRHS. Drawing from data collected during ethnographic observations, individual interviews, and *CRP* group storytelling sessions, the chapter highlights participants' understanding of the encounter of gendered anti-Black racism in formal and informal punishments (Rios, 2011; Wun, 2016). Their reflections on Desert Rose High School, a high school where Black girls are suspended, arrested, and expelled at one of the highest rates in California (19.1%; CDE, 2018), bring to light how Black girls who face exclusionary punishments discern the underlying role of dehumanizing stereotypes and ideology in their discipline records and everyday marginalization.

Multiple Consciousness: Black, Girl, Poor, and Ghetto

In his book *The Souls of Black Folk,* W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) posits the concept of "double consciousness" to describe the peculiar sensation Black people experience of developing

a racial sense of self that is mutually constructed through the eyes of a racist white society. Black Feminist scholars have complicated Du Bois's notion of "twoness" and "duality" as a frame that neglects to capture how the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and age oppression shape the multiple consciousness that Black women and Black girls exhibit (Brown, 2009; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1990, 1997; Davis, 1981; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 1984, 1990; King, 1988; Smith, 2019). Nikki Jones (2009) and Monique Morris (2016) further argue that the geographic context of the "ghetto" is also among the sociopolitical locations that inform Black girls' multiple consciousness and how their identities are positioned in school and by society.

Throughout this study, the *CRP* participants conveyed an astute awareness of the marginalization and oppression they face as Black girls from the ghetto (King, 1988; Wing, 2003). Paramount to their experiences was a prevailing stigma that regarded poor Black girls as deviant and inadequately feminine (Blake et al., 2015; Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010; Cox, 2015; Esposito & Edwards, 2018; Richie, 2012). During interviews, I asked students to describe their response to the question, "How do educators and other staff perceive Black girls at Desert Rose High?" These students consistently identified "bad," "fighters," and "ghetto" as the most pervasive stereotypes Black girls encountered at DRHS. During my preliminary data analysis, I discovered that many of the stereotypes students described (e.g., pervasive violence, bad, and "ghetto") were also mentioned when they discussed the reputation of their school and community (as discussed in Chapter 4). Significantly, none of my interview questions included the word "bad" or "ghetto." This was so often the case that I began to explicitly ask students about meaning(s) that they attribute to the word "ghetto."

> **Jamelia:** What does ghetto mean to you?
>
> **Ashley:** Well, I mean for me, yeah, I'm loud sometimes. I'm not saying just because your loud, your ghetto. I'm not saying that. But to teachers, ghetto means you're loud.

Teiara: Disrespectful. If you got on hoop earrings that are big.

E. Lovely: Then you come to school with colored braids . . . anything really.

Ashley: If you don't use proper grammar.

Teiara: I don't know where they just got this concept of ghetto. They probably still think we're ghetto just because of the way we look. What we wearing and stuff like that. That's just how it is.

E. Lovely: If you got that energy . . . . Like Mrs. Morrison [Black woman educator] . . . I know a lot of people consider her ghetto because she just really come forward real strong.

Teiara: It kind of seems like ghetto is . . . I remember I learned something, ghetto was actually a city or something where they would put all these [Jewish] people in there, and that's what they called it. I wonder if some upper-class people just feel like because we're a lower class, I'm not saying we're all lower, but you know, we're not as wealthy, we are ghetto. I wonder because you know how it looks and stuff. We don't live in a nice big giant-house . . . . Some people do.

Ashley: I don't, *I'm poor*.

While Ashley began her statement acknowledging the ambiguous nature of "ghetto," she and her peers immediately unpacked the term based on how they believed teachers viewed them. Each girl took turns naming qualities of the stereotypical ghetto Black girl image, including improper grammar, disrespectful, loud voices, and hairstyles and adornments that deviate far from white-centric beauty standards (Blake et al., 2015; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Jones, 2010). Without prompt, Teiara redirected the conversation. She highlighted what she learned about the historical connotation of "ghetto" and how this term once described the legally enforced resident areas for Jewish communities that isolated them during World War II. In her analysis, Teiara drew a connection between this historical context and the contemporary connotations of "ghetto" that captured the significance of racial domination, segregation, place, and poverty (Lipsitz, 2006, 2011). When she states, "I wonder because you know how it looks and stuff . . . we don't live in a nice big giant house," she is naming the symbolic markers of racialized poverty (Anderson, 2017). Teiara reveals how the "upper class and wealthy"

perpetuate a status hierarchy that underpins the term ghetto. She unearths how the "upper class" leverage their power to determine who and what should be regarded as ghetto. What was significant about Teiara's statement, "I'm not saying we're lower," was the way she spoke back against the ghetto image and how this stereotype positioned poor Black girls as inferior because of where they live. The sentiments shared throughout this conversation suggested that the majority white school staff at DRHS maintained racist and sexist stereotypes and deficit thinking about the lives of poor Black girls that were "felt" and experienced by the *CRP* students in ways that reproduced a racially hostile climate (Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Joseph et al., 2016; McArthur, 2018).

This conversation provides a compelling frame that demonstrates the *CRP* students' understanding of the intersectional power relations of racism, sexism, classism, and place and how these forces maintain and reproduce gendered-anti-Black ideology. These ideas, I argue, provided a frame for interpreting the behavior of *CRP* students and revealed important scripts of misogynoir (Bailey, 2018) that justify the disproportionate mistreatment and criminalization of Black girls at Desert Rose High School.

Hyper-Punishment and Everyday Misogynoir Against "Ghetto" Black Girls

When reflecting on how being a Black girl impacted their experiences at DRHS, the "ghetto Black girl" was regarded by *CRP* students as an image that shaped their educators' perceptions of their academic potential and evaluations of their behavior. This seemingly impenetrable stereotype about Black girls was embedded in the institutional culture of DRHS and subjected them to dehumanizing learning conditions. In the sections that follow, I highlight how students made sense of racist-sexist stereotypes and their relationship to the various formal

and informal punishments (Wun, 2016) that constituted the school/prison nexus for Black girls at Desert Rose High.

Policing Black girls Tone and Emotional Expressions

Much literature on school discipline has described the disproportionate infractions Black girls incur for subjective behaviors such as "talking back," "having an attitude," and "being disrespectful" (Blake et al., 2011; Morris, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2017; Neal-Jackson, 2020). Scholars have also noted that adults often punish Black girls because their embodied femininity deviates from white notions of appropriate feminine behavior promoted in school (Jones, 2009; Morris, 2007). Indeed, this study found that consequences for being perceived as "disrespectful," loud, and "having attitude" were disproportionately borne by Black girls. Many *CRP* students described the intersections of race, gender, class, age, and space/place as factors that influenced how adults problematized their tone and demeanor.

Disrespectful Black girls: The "Evolution" of Misogynoir. When I asked Reigan, a twelfth-grade honors student, why she believed Black girls were disciplined at higher rates than other girls, she referred to punishments for disrespect as a form of covert racism that "only attacked Black girls." She explained, "Racism has evolved . . . they're not going to say, "Oh it's because you're a Black girl." They're going to say, "Oh, it's because you were disrespecting the teacher." Reigan's statement reveals her understanding that institutional racism is embedded in the school discipline system (Collins, 2000). As she contends, the subjective parameters of discipline policy imbue adults with *disciplinary power* (Collins, 2000) to punish Black girls for infractions that rely on their interpretations—such as "disrespecting the teacher." Like Reigan, many students in this study perceived "disrespect" as a category that maintained racial-gender

biases in the discipline system. Amberlee, a ninth-grade student, described an incident where her teacher kicked her out of class for "being disrespectful" when she felt insulted by him:

> **Amberlee:** He was telling us that if we don't listen to him, we're going to be bums on the street.
>
> **Jamelia**: He said you're going to be bums on the street?
>
> **Amberlee:** Yeah, and we're going to be asking him if we could wash his car windows for some change. And I was like, how do you know that? And I kept asking him, and he got mad and sent me out to OCD (on-campus detention).
>
> **Jamelia:** Why did he say that?
>
> **Amberlee:** He says it to us all the time. He says it to the class; he'll be like, see that's why y'all are going to do nothing with y'all lives. Y'all are going to be bums. Y'all are going to be living out on the street with no job, this and that.

Even though Amberlee was defending herself against her teacher's degrading comments, she was subjected to on-campus detention (OCD) based on his evaluation that her questioning his statement was "disrespectful." Labeling her behavior as disrespectful encompassed racist and sexist connotations related to the adultification of Black girls (Epstein et al., 2017). This punishment suggested that beyond perceiving Amberlee's actions as typical teenage behavior, the teacher felt his authority and power was being threatened (Joseph et al., 2016). Amberlee's encounter resembled Morris's (2016) findings that "Black girls interpreted their attitude, not as a stagnant expression of anger or dissatisfaction. Rather, it lived along a continuum of responses to disrespectful or degrading triggers in their lives, many of which were present in their learning environments" (p. 86). Amberlee shared many of the sentiments that other *CRP* students expressed throughout my observations and interviews. These themes included feeling mistreated and belittled, unfairly targeted for discipline, negatively labeled, and continuously disrespected by their educators and other staff.

Tee Tee, an eleventh-grade student, explained how being "picked on" by her teacher during freshman year made her transition into high school "rough":

> **Tee Tee:** I felt like Ms. Ross didn't like me 'cause of the color of my skin. She picked on me.
>
> **Jamelia:** Tell me about a time where you felt like Ms. Ross picked on you because of your skin color. Is there a specific story?
>
> **Tee Tee:** Yeah, like we used to do computers, and it'd be like a Mexican girl beside me, a white girl, and there's me, and if we're all talking on the computer, she'll just call me out. She wouldn't tell them to go outside or be quiet or just going to call their mom. She'll just say it to me.

Although Tee Tee did not receive a formal punishment for talking, being chastised and sent outside when non-Black students who were also off-task did not face similar consequences, was an *informal punishment* that negatively affected her (Wun, 2016). Tee Tee described another common informal punitive practice used by her teacher, which she believed was influenced by misogynoir:

> **Tee Tee:** I got kicked out of class because, like my teacher would move our seat. So, like I'll sit by my friend, and we're both African American girls and when we talk she moves our seat. Then when other races like Mexican and white . . . . They'll talk, she won't move they seat. So, I said something, I told her that it was because we're African American that she moved our seat, but not theirs. And she got mad. She kicked me out of class.
>
> **Jamelia:** And so, you told me that you felt like it was because you're a Black girl why, why did you feel that way?
>
> **Tee Tee:** Cause she didn't say nothing to them. I was the only one sitting there and then my skin color and her skin color. So, she felt like it wasn't them talking. It was me, the Black girl, in my opinion.

Tee Tee's experience with Ms. Ross provides an example of the racialized differential treatment that Black girls commonly described as punishments that contributed to their perceptions of unfairness (Diamond & Lewis, 2015). When Tee Tee called out her teacher for biasedly moving Black girls' seats, her righteous indignation was characterized as a disciplinary problem. Her

refusal to passively accept unfair instructions from a teacher she believed discriminated against Black girls reflected a common experience described by *CRP* students. When Black girls exerted their agency to defend themselves against unfair punishments, their actions were nearly always punishable (Koonce, 2012; Neal-Jackson, 2020; Watson, 2016; Wun, 2016).

Those "Loud" Black girls. In addition to the perception that Black girls were disrespectful and challenged authority, the *CRP* students often faced reprimands for their "loudness." Interestingly, while the girls mentioned non-Black students talking "just as loud as them," most acknowledged that sometimes they and other Black girls talked "loud" (Linton & McLean, 2017). Rather than being ashamed of their volume and how adults stereotype them as "ghetto Black girls" because of it, many girls embraced the characterization of being loud and challenged their teacher's impulse to punish their "loudness" as a problem.

Jade, a ninth-grade student, explained how being a Black girl, shaped the discipline infractions she commonly experienced for being perceived as "too loud":

> **Jade:** Teachers expect us just to come loud... they say I am a loud and ghetto person.
>
> **Jamelia:** Who called you loud and ghetto?
>
> **Jade:** My teachers have all my teachers have. Except for Mrs. Morrison [a Black woman educator] because she talks . . . . Mrs. Morrison talks loudly, too; that's why I can get away with that in my class.
>
> **Jamelia**: How does that make you feel when you're being called ghetto?
>
> **Jade**: It made me mad and uncomfortable.
>
> **Jade**: I'm not ghetto, I'm just, I don't know I've always been a loud person. I talk like that at home too, but at home, it's different. You are supposed to feel comfortable... but I still don't because I can't yell and do all the stuff I want to do.

Jade makes a comparison between how she is treated across two different classroom contexts. In Mrs. Morrison's classroom, a Black woman educator, Jade feels affirmed and "comfortable to

talk like (she) would at home." Meanwhile, Jade believes that her non-Black teachers think she talks too loudly, which subjects her to the ghetto Black girl stereotype. Jade insists she is not ghetto; instead, she is merely speaking in a familiar language that she would use at home. For Jade, her non-Black educators' communication expectations did not match the tone and language she was culturally socialized to speak in (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lindsay-Dennis, 2010; Yosso, 2005).

Like many of the students I talked to, Jade often felt the punishments they faced at the classroom level were caused by *cultural dissonance* between Black girls and their educators (Ladson-Billings, 2000). This dissonance contributed to their teacher's deficit evaluations, which subjected Black girls to subtle and not-so-subtle messages about the undesirable qualities of Black femininity, and more specifically, Black girlhood (Brown, 2013). Jade's teachers' expectations illustrate how Black girls are often positioned as subversive to the hegemonic gender norms reinforced in systems of schooling (Horvat & Antonio, 1999; Morris, 2007; Murphy et al., 2013).

Teiara and Ashley explicitly illustrated this phenomenon during a *CRP* group session. These young Black girls critiqued teachers' admonishments for their volume because they "embraced" loudness as their way of communicating at home:

> **Teiara:** And I want to say another thing about us being loud and stuff, how that's portrayed ghetto and stuff like that. I wanted to speak about that because, in my household, I grew up in a home, we just be loud. That's how our family is. I don't know.
>
> **Ashley:** Yeah, me too! That's how we communicate!
>
> **Teiara:** So, you know how that kind of passes down. We be loud sometimes. I could be talking low, sometimes, but when I'm with my friends, I'ma be loud. That's just how it goes. My family, we just loud. Sometimes people think that we're raising our voice. Sometimes, or screaming or whatever. But sometimes that's just how I talk. Sometimes that's how some other people really just talk. I feel like a lot of people don't know that.

> **Ashley:** They don't get that. They just want to like, "Oh, you're so loud. You're so loud." That's the way I talk. I have people tell me that too. "You're so loud; you're so loud. You need to be quiet. You need to lower your voice or get out." I'm like, do you hear them over there?
>
> **Teiara**: Yeah, sometimes it's not intentionally, it's just us.

Teiara and Ashley echoed Jade's sentiments that "loudness" directly resulted from the cultural socialization practices they adapted from their families. While these students embraced the volume of their voices, they felt teachers labeled them as ghetto simply for talking loudly. This stereotype was significantly degrading for the *CRP* students, as low-income Black girls, because "ghetto is commonly used to categorize a person or behavior as ignorant, stupid, or otherwise morally deficient" (Jones, 2010, p. 9). These young women adamantly resisted the ghetto stereotype because they understood how this image positioned their "loudness" as a symbol of intellectual inferiority (Carter Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Collins, 2000). Their comments demonstrate the extent to which the lack of cultural synchronization, including differences in communication patterns, create a punitive and deficit-oriented learning environment for Black girls (Morris, 2007; Yosso, 2005).

No "Bad Days" for Black girls. The structural conditions and intersectional violence that Black girls in economically disenfranchised communities navigate outside of school can profoundly influence their experiences and behaviors in school (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winters, 2005; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2018). In this study, each of the 13 girls shared complex stories of their experiences with navigating structural violence, including poverty, death, homelessness, incarceration, foster care, and abuse. More often than not, these experiences positioned the *CRP* students vulnerable to punishment and further violence, revealing how the zero-tolerance culture failed to provide support for Black girls with the greatest needs while

serving to punish them (Morris, 2016; Noguera, 2003; Sharma, 2010; Simkins et al., 2004; Wun, 2018).

Teiera described a situation during her freshman year of high school that disrupted her educational trajectory.

> I walked to school, and I was late . . . so I made it really to my second-period class. It was the end of it, so the security guard was like, "Oh, they want you to go to the office, you're going home," but I'm like, "I just got here." I know that didn't make sense, my mom doesn't have a car, so I know she's not fixing just to pick me up that quick after I just got to the school. But she wasn't there, though. I already knew they were going to take us probably, but I wasn't sure. So, I just went to the office. Then I see my little sister and the social worker, and she was like, "Oh, we came to surprise you." I'm like, "That's not funny to me, why would you say that?" Because this is nothing good, this is not good to be taken away from our family.

Navigating the emotional trauma caused by her separation from her mother and being placed in various homes that felt physically unsafe caused Teiera's grades to decline significantly after her first year in placement. Teiera recalled missing school because she feared leaving her younger sister with "strange men." These experiences, she explained, led her to be depressed, which affected her engagement in school. When asked how she thought being a Black girl affected her experiences in class, Teiera expressed that teachers often monitored her emotional expressions and accused her of having an attitude when she had a bad day:

> You know how, when you just have bad days or something, and you wish to be left alone, and you try to tell the teacher you want to be left alone, but they just keep picking at you? I just feel like my teacher picks on me, and it's not just me, it's other Black girls in there too who feel the same way. One day we had a paper I had to do in my art class, and I admit I was not doing my work. I tried to tell my teacher that I was having a bad day and would do the assignment later . . . and she kept picking at me, asking why I'm not doing my work. She kept asking me, and I tried to tell her nicely. She wanted to make it seem like I had an attitude, but I didn't. She knocked points off of my grade for participation and sent me to OCD (On-Campus Detention) because she felt like I was disrespectful.

According to Teiara, her teacher's response to her visible disengagement was hardly about demonstrating care and concern for her emotional well-being. Instead of providing her with

resources, the teacher incessantly harassed her and subjected her to multiple punishments because she considered her request for "space to calm down" as disrespectful. Her teacher's failure to understand her socioemotional needs fostered a hostile classroom atmosphere, which led Teiara to avoid communicating with her teacher, even when she needed support. As a Black girl who transitioned between five foster care placements during her high school years, Teiera hoped that if teachers understood Black girls' experiences outside of school, they would "be more understanding that sometimes [we] have bad days and want to be left alone."

Like Teiara, each of the *Concrete Rose Project* students shared intimate details about socio-contextual factors outside of school that affect their discipline experiences. Their narratives fit within a noticeable pattern in US public school systems where Black girls who navigate multiple, intersecting forms of violence outside of school are disproportionately "pushed out" and neglected (Morris, 2016; Wun, 2018).

Everyday Misogynoir and Anti-Black Aggressions by Teachers

Throughout conversations with several *CRP* contributors, stories about their hostile interactions with non-Black and white educators surfaced. Three students specifically mentioned their experiences with Ms. George, a white woman who taught for nine years in majority white and Native American schools before joining the Desert Rose High staff in 2019. While shadowing Ashley and Liyah, two honors students enrolled in Ms. George's Forensics class, I observed these interactions firsthand.

Fieldnote (12/17/ 2019): Shadowing Ashley and Liyah

> *8:48 AM* Shortly after the bell for snack rang, Ashley and I walk to Ms. George's classroom. As we walk through the hallways, Ashley tells me multiple stories about her negative experiences at the school—including her teacher, Ms. George, who she says is always complaining about wishing to transfer to another school. Ms. George stood at the doorway, rushing students in the classroom ("Hurry up or I'm closing the door.") The expression on her face as she glances past the students—not once making eye contact or

> greeting any of them—could only be described as a look of utter disgust. My first impression: she is disgusted by Black children. The bell rang at 8:40 AM. Ms. George turns on an episode of *Dateline* as she continues to work on her computer. The class had been watching the episode since the day before. A Black boy raises his hand, and after several moments of Ms. George not acknowledging him, he calls her attention, "Ms. George, we already watched this part. I wrote the time down; we're supposed to be at 39: 50, not this time." Ms. George cuts her eyes and releases a sigh out loud as she retorts, "I don't care if you already watched it. I'm not about to stand here rewinding the whole video." The student pulls his phone out, joining the rest of the classroom, all disengaged and not paying attention to the film. I observed that only five of the thirty-five students in the classroom were watching the show.
>
> *9:30 AM* A Latino student approaches Ms. George's desk to ask a question about an assignment. Ashley chimes in, reminding the student about the instructions. Ms. George looks over in Ashley's direction, "I wasn't speaking to you [aggressive tone]. This is what happens when you jump into a conversation that has absolutely nothing to do with you." Ms. George turns back to the student; her aggressive and condescending tone quickly shifts to a regular and almost affirming manner as she speaks with this student. I observed the difference in her tone when she talked to Latino students versus how she talked to Black students on multiple occasions.
>
> *9:50 AM* Ashley approaches Ms. George's desk and asks to submit a late assignment. Compared to Ashley's usually playful and "goofy" demeanor, her voice sounded so quiet as if she was hesitant to speak. Ms. George sighs loudly, "Who's responsible for submitting assignments when they're not here?" Ms. George tells Ashley that she needs to stay after school to make up points. Ashley walks back to her desk quietly; her face appears to be frustrated. She pulls out her phone and continues to scroll through for the remainder of the class.

As a follow-up to my observation, I scheduled an interview with Ms. George. When I asked Ms. George about her perceptions of Ashley and Liyah, she shared:

> They can be very loud. They are, I would say, easily distracted by their cell phones. They both have amazing potential, but for some reason, they're not accessing it, they're not tapping into it. They're both highly capable. They have the ability; they have the capability. I see, especially with Ashley, the attitude. Her being a cheerleader as well since she became a cheerleader, that attitude even picked up more. And of course, it could be my distaste of cheerleaders. Liyah, I sense that something is going on with her at home. Not sure. But again, with the flippant attitude.

Ms. George's response paints a stereotypical image of Black girls: loud, academically apathetic, and flippant. Her lack of knowledge and deficit assumptions about Ashley and Liyah was evidenced throughout her statement. Ashley and Liyah were both 4.0 students; Ashley was even

accepted to an Ivy League University for a summer bridge program. Liyah managed to balance caretaking for her two young siblings, working a job while commuting nearly an hour to get to school, and continued to maintain a 4.0 GPA. Ms. George clarifies how her disdain for Ashley and Liyah prevented her ability to see their humanity fully. Her failure to recognize these students as assets rather than problems maintained a hostile environment that negatively impacted their engagement. Ms. George's everyday social interactions with Black girls implied that she had no idea how Black girls felt about her classroom climate and how her condescending and aggressive tone made them feel like "she had animosity towards Black students." In an interview with Ashley, when I asked her how she felt about the interactions I observed while shadowing her in Ms. George's class, she shared:

> **Jamelia:** Cause that day I just kind of saw that after class. You asked her . . .
>
> **Ashley:** [*interjects*] a simple question, and then here she goes with the whole attitude. I just had to turn in an assignment, and that was it. As soon as I was walking into her class, I was going to knock on the door, and she was walking out. I was like, oh can I turn this? And she was like [sighs loudly and in a hostile tone], and she was like hurry up.

Ashley and Liyah both conveyed a precise understanding of how Ms. George viewed them based on these regular encounters. They described how Ms. George was always "always having an attitude for no reason." These encounters coupled with their observations that she deducted Black students' points based on their "behaviors" and targeted them for punishments led Ashley and Liyah to identify Ms. George as anti-Black. When I asked Ashley how she felt being a Black girl impacted her experience in Ms. George's class, she responded:

> **Ashley:** I think she's got something against me because I'm Black, some type of animosity, or whatever. I don't know exactly what her problem is, but I feel like it's because I am Black. Well, obviously, to me, that's what I feel like it is because there's no other reason. She is deducting points from my grade because she says I got an attitude or whatever. So, I go to tutoring for extra credit cuz I know she likes to do stupid stuff like that.

> **Jamelia:** Wow. My last question to you, how, what, what are some things that you'd do in that class that helped you kind of get through?
>
> **Ashley:** Honestly, I just be trying to ignore her. I know like sometimes that's not always the best thing to do, but I just ignore her. You can't just have a whole argument with her because she's an old teacher. She could tell you to get out of the class any minute. I was just like, hm, okay, and move along with it. But she'd be like, [aggressive tone] "Get off your phone!" I put the phone down and stuff. But regardless of what I do, it's like, she's still going to get an attitude with me. Even if I do turn in all my work... I ask one simple question: it doesn't even have to be like nothing too advanced, and she'd still get an attitude. So I just really tried to ignore her and try not to ask her that many questions. So that's what my best thing is.

For Ashley, the everyday mistreatment and constant disrespect she endured from Ms. George made her forensics classroom a hostile geopolitical space (Butler, 2018). To navigate what she perceived to be an unpredictable and racially exclusive learning environment, Ashley empowered herself in the only way she knew how to: by ignoring her teacher. Ashley acknowledged this approach was not the best option for her. Given the classroom's imbalanced power dynamics that enabled Ms. George to subjectively remove students based on her racial animosity towards Black students, Ashley navigated to the best of her ability, which often meant neglecting her own academic support needs.

The lack of cultural competency among the school's majority white teaching and administrative staff led to many interactions where students were subject to anti-Black aggressions. E. Lovely and Ashley described multiple hostile exchanges with a white teacher which they attributed to her social and economic privilege:

> **E. Lovely:** I have this friend, her name Kimmy, right? She's Black. She's taking care of her siblings because her mom and dad work in LA. Most of the time they're out there, she has to get everybody up, anything with breakfast or whatever, make her sister go to school, and have her little brother go here. She's taking care of the family. We were in the same period, and then she told our teacher. She made a whole announcement in front of the class, talking about, "I understand things happen, and you can be late, but you still got to get here on time." What are you talking about? She picked up every possible thing that could happen for people to be late. So if you know all of these things, knowing that we're going to be late, then you take two steps back talking about we still need to

> figure something out. That made no sense to me. That was just weird. A lot of people dropped out of her class after that. Her class, first period, is very small now.
>
> **Ashley:** She always has an attitude. I understand people are ghetto, but she overreacts. We're not always loud. *She acts that way because she already told us at the beginning of the school year. She was like, "Well, I'm not used to . . ." She had said it when she was calling out names. It was the first week of school.* You know everybody has different names. We have different names than white people. white people like Jimmy, Jackie, stuff like that. I'm just honest. Then, you know, we got Markeisha, Darnesha. She wants to talk about some, and she was like, she said her name like way, way wrong. She didn't even get mine. She like, didn't even get mad she was like, "That's not my name. It's like this." She was like, "Okay, well, I didn't grow up this. *I grew up with Jennys and Jackies."* Yeah, she said that. I was like, "Okay, so obviously when you came here. You didn't realize that this was a school of people of color. You *thought it would be a regular school with white people and white teachers*, which is wrong." And she said that, and I was like, "Okay. I don't know what you want me to do."

In the above excerpt, E. Lovely shared a story about her friend who took on multiple caretaking responsibilities that made it difficult for her to arrive at school on time (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Their teacher not only dismissed Kimmy's circumstances but also used this moment to make a public announcement—to a class of majority low-income Black students whose parents often did not have cars—reinforcing the imperativeness of timeliness and personal accountability. Ashley contextualized E. Lovely's story with an interaction that further evidenced the teacher's lack of exposure to Black students' cultural identities and realities. In a separate incident, the teacher mispronounced several Black girls' names even after they corrected her pronunciation. Rather than apologizing, she followed with an anti-Black and problematic comment—"I'm not used to these names, I grew up with Jackies and Jennies"—which further exposed her willful ignorance and disinterest in the cultural realities of her students.

Ashley and Teiara both shared they also felt misunderstood and unsupported by many of their non-Black teachers of Color:

> **Ashley:** So, it'll be like Latino people. They don't understand me either. I get that they're people of color too, but we kind of have different struggles. In a way, we have the same struggles, but kind of like different struggles. In class, they don't see the

> struggles that I have. They don't even care about it. They see me like other teachers be *seeing me, as white people see me*. Do you know what I mean? They act the same way too. What's the difference?
>
> **Jamelia:** Do you feel like your teachers generally expect you to succeed here?
>
> **Teiara:** That's what I'm saying, maybe some of them. I'm not going to lie, some people care, but some people just, *I feel like they hate their job* or something, where they just are like that. I feel like those are the teachers that act like that, and those are the teachers that probably don't care to see us succeed."

Even while most of their teachers were Latinx, Ashley and Teiara felt these teachers similarly did not empathize with her experiences or support their success as Black girls. When Ashley states, "other teachers be seeing me, as white people see me, they act the same too," she demonstrates a multiple consciousnesses (King, 1988) about how non-Black educators view and position her in the classroom. Ashley's statement reveals how even teachers of color within systems tainted by white supremacy can perpetuate misogynoir and not understand the lived realities of what it means to be Black, girl, and poor.

The Marginalization of Black Girl Intelligence

The deficit ideas surrounding Black girls at DRHS obscured teachers' perceptions of their academic potential, negatively affecting their commitment to educating them. The *CRP* students described various encounters where they experienced racialized sexism from their teachers, which exacerbated their sense of belonging and marginalized their intellectual prowess. The findings in this theme were best captured by the words of Marie, who described how the "ghetto stereotype" made her feel "unentitled" in her honors courses, specifically as a Black girl born in the ghetto:

> Teachers view me as ghetto and unentitled. It reminds me of Martin Luther King, like when he tried to speak himself or like be himself and speak up, they felt like since he's African American, he can't say what he wants to say, so it was like a lack of freedom of speech. It makes me feel, like I said before, unwanted and worthless. Because why can't

> I speak on what I have to say just because of my skin color or where I was born? That doesn't make sense to me.

Although research widely suggests that teacher expectations significantly impacts students' academic performance and outcomes (Russell, 2005), the *CRP* students often expressed that the academic expectations teachers held for them were congruent with society's deficit framings of Black girls from impoverished communities (Ullucci & Howard, 2015; Yosso, 2005). These young women described the deficit thinking and preconceived notions that Black girls were academically unmotivated or incapable as a stereotype that influenced how educators constructed their academic identities long before they entered the classroom. DeJanae, a twelfth-grade honors student who embraced the self-definition of being "opinionated" and "outspoken," described the following encounter:

> **Jamelia:** Have you ever been kicked out of class before?
>
> **DeJanae:** Mr. Paul. I got kicked out of his class plenty of times because he doesn't let you speak your mind on... Because he's racist. I don't know if Mr. Paul, what it is about him, but if you try to speak your opinion on what he's talking about when it got to do with Donald Trump or something like that, he'll kick you out of the classroom. But how are you going to kick me out of your classroom? I wasn't disrespectful towards you. I didn't do anything. I didn't do anything wrong. But I was just against what he was saying, and he didn't like that I disagreed with him, so I was put out. That was unfair, but whatever.
>
> **Jamelia:** How does it make you feel to be in that class and not say things that you believe?
>
> **Dejanae:** Exactly. It's like, what am I even here for? I've got to get out of your classroom. How are you going to teach a class without letting your students talk? How can we talk back to you and tell you our opinion and then get in trouble because we disagree with what you say? That just doesn't even make sense.

When DeJanae contradicted her conservative teacher's views, she was often silenced and punished with classroom removals for being "disrespectful." The loosely defined parameters of "disrespectful behavior" empowered Mr. Paul to subjectively enforce school discipline policies

based on his definitions and interpretations of DeJanae's actions. This fostered a hostile and unpredictable classroom atmosphere in which DeJanae felt the need to silence herself to avoid punishment. DeJanae's experience of being kicked out of class for challenging her teachers' views is reminiscent of Morris's (2007) study on teacher's perceptions of Black girls. Morris (2007) found that even among Black girls who perform well academically, educators often penalized their manners and behaviors as "overly coarse and assertive," and punish them in efforts to "reform the femininity of Black girls into something more acceptable" (Morris, 2007, p. 22). Other scholars have found that Black girls are condemned in school spaces for engaging in ways that are valorized in their communities as assets and vital navigational capital for surviving in a racist, sexist, and classist society (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Jones, 2010; Yosso, 2005). DeJanae and Reigan both described how Mr. Paul suppressed their voice, and they both felt the need to "tone themselves down" to avoid punitive consequences. When shadowing these students, I observed a sign beside Mr. Paul's desk that said, "Guts, God, and Guns Made America Great, Let's Keep it That Way." This plaque epitomized his conservative values that Reigan and DeJanae both felt fostered an unsafe and unwelcoming learning environment for Black girls. Their experiences illuminate the imbalance of power dynamics in classrooms that diminish Black girls' contributions and deny them access to full citizenship rights and privileges (Cox, 2015; Sparks, 1997). Under these learning conditions, Black girls experienced systematic divestment of educational opportunities and investment in punishment and criminalization.

Black Girls Bodies and the Biased Enforcement of Dress Code

In the introductory survey, I asked students *whether they believed the school's rules were fair for girls of their race/ethnicity group*—each of the 13 students responded, "Strongly

Disagree." As a follow-up, during interviews, I asked students to elaborate on which rules they believed were unfair for Black girls. Consistent with previous research about the nature of Black girls' disciplinary experiences (Crenshaw et al., 2015), each of the 13 *CRP* students felt adults biasedly enforced dress code policies against Black girls.

Hypersexualization. When I asked Regain which rules she felt were biasedly enforced for Black girls, she explained:

> Dress code for sure. It's always dress code. Some of these girls walk around wearing some questionable items that I can't wear. Not even just pants, it's the shirts. It's always the shirts for me. I cannot walk around in a crop top anymore.

Similarly, Amberlee felt that the school dress code policy was not fair because "some [non-Black] girls can walk around with rompers on that be like right here [points to upper thigh] and have their boobs out and stuff. We do it, and they'll come, and they'll give us a shirt to put on." According to several *CRP* students, dress code enforcement was influenced by race, sex, *and* body type. These sentiments are supported by previous research, which finds that curvier Black girls are particularly vulnerable to hyper-sexualization and punishment (NWLC, 2017). However, several *CRP* students who self-identify as having more petite frames shared personal anecdotes of incidents where they felt non-Black girls who had the same body type as them or who were "thicker" were allowed to wear clothing items that they would be punished for. Ashley recalled being sent to OCD for wearing a clothing item that several non-Black girls in her class were also wearing at the time:

> I got kicked out of class for a dress code because I had on tights that day. It was kind of like *everybody was wearing tights during that time*, you know what I mean? And so I had tights on. And I was in math class or whatever, and I had got kicked out of the class. The teacher had stopped the whole lesson, and he was like, "You can't have tights on. You need to go to the office and change." I was like, "What are you talking about? . . . There are other girls that have tights on." He was like, "But, I'm talking to you." I said other girls have tights on. So what are you talking about? Why are you focused on me?

> That's what I mean; they'll be like don't wear a skirt that's longer than your fingertips or don't wear tights. But the thing is when they see the other races that go here, some white girls go here as well as obviously Latinas. When they wear skirts like that or tights or whatever, *the teachers don't say anything to them*.

Less about protecting *all girls* from sexual harassment and abuse, Ashley understood the dress code as a discriminatory policy that disproportionately targeted Black girls for exclusion and caused them to miss necessary instructional time (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). The notion that even "Latinas" who wore tights and short skirts were not punished exposes the specific nature of misogynoir inherent in school systems that perpetuate the nationwide discipline gap between Black girls and all other race/ethnicity groups of girls (Blake et. al, 2011; Dumas & ross, 2016).

Given the school's majority white security, teaching, and leadership staff, these encounters were particularly violent for Black girls because they often occurred under white educators' gaze and authority, specifically white men. Momo shared a story with the group about a white male teacher's reaction to her birthday outfit, which illuminated the paternalistic nature of the dress code process:

> **Momo:** You remember my two-piece, with the tie-dye? I had that one day; it was my birthday. I was walking... you know, I'm thick and all that. The teacher stopped me; he likes, "What are you wearing?" I'm like, um, "I walked past all these security guards, and you're the only one that got something to say." He was like, "No, put a jacket on." I understand the whole distraction thing, but *why is it distracting you from teaching*? It's shoulders; it's not like I'm all assed out. Like you can see everything. I'm covered; it's just my shoulder are showing. So, it makes me mad when I hear the dress code.
>
> **Ashley:** What was wrong with it?
>
> **Momo:** It's a two-piece. It was two, and it was just pants. But nothing was showing. It was mostly shoulders. He's like, "Because I have a daughter, and I wouldn't want her" . . . *I'm not your daughter. I'm not your daughter.* I'm my own person. I bought this outfit. You cannot tell me what to and not to wear. My momma let me come outside in this, you can't tell me nothing, leave me alone, let me be. Let my shoulders be.

> **Ashley:** I feel like... Mr. James, he white. He's like a true... He's like a stereotypical white person, so I feel like when he sees stuff like that, he be like, "that's exotic," or something. You need to cover up. That's too much for his eyes to see. He can't handle all that.

Momo's experience reveals how dress code policies objectified Black girls and subjected them to adultification with regard to the sexualization of their bodies. The notion that Momo's shoulders "distracted" her white male teacher from teaching the class was disturbing, to say the least. Momo was especially unnerved about this incident because her teacher punished her for wearing an outfit that her mother approved. This was significant for many *CRP* students who echoed Momo's sentiments, noting their mother's presence when they got dressed in the morning. These frequent encounters led some girls to internalize negative messages about their bodies. Tee Tee provided important context to the influence that dress code policies have on Black girls body image:

> **Tee Tee:** Black girls get in trouble for the way we dress because we have more shape and courage that, "Oh, it's a dress code. But when Latina girls wear it? They don't say nothing. If a Black girl were, it's like "'Uh-uh,' change out of your clothes" and stuff like that like they make us not have confidence in ourselves because they stopped us from wearing it more than others.
>
> **Jamelia:** Wow. So you feel like other girls don't get picked on when they wear certain things?
>
> **Tee Tee:** Yeah, like crop tops, like this one girl, she was white. She had a crop top on. They never said nothing to her. But the Black girl, she had hers to her stomach and she had to change clothes. They'll make you feel like we don't look right, or we look disgusting, but they're fine.

Tee Tee's comment, "they make you feel like . . . we look disgusting, but they're fine" revealed how the double standards in dress code enforcement propagated a white-centric and patriarchal ideal body type that was particularly harmful to Black girls' self-esteem. Such experiences signify Black girlhoods complexities, illustrating how the confluence of race, gender, and age

uniquely position Black girls to experience multiple forms of gendered violence through school policies (Smith, 2019).

Banning "Gang" Attire. One specific rule that participants took issue with was the ban of wearing "gang-affiliated attire," which prohibited students from wearing head wraps, du rags, and the color red. This was a particularly interesting rule considering the school's spirit color included red. The students discussed their perspectives of this rule extensively and how they felt it targeted Black students, especially Black girls:

> **E. Lovely:** I can't say exactly what's on the dress code list, but I know it's some stuff that only we, as Black people, wear. And I feel like we're targeted like with the durags and the scarves. And you can't wear color affiliated gang stuff, stuff like that.
>
> **Jamelia:** How does that make you feel?
>
> **E. Lovely:** *Attacked*. Talked about. Because we're [being] talked about in meetings and stuff, they have rules aimed at us. Nobody else wears that stuff on here, but *us*.
>
> **Reigan:** [emphasis added] We are in Desert Rose County.
>
> **Momo:** It's a lotta gang claimers, but they shouldn't be trippin' off the color.
>
> **E. Lovely:** So, I'm like, that's crazy, we can't wear anything like . . . . People still wear what they're going to wear, but why would y'all put that on there? That don't make any sense. We can't wear red this, red that. That's our school color. That don't make any sense.

In addition to race, age, and gender, the *CRP* students' narratives demonstrated that class and place were crucial determinants in how their school's dress code policies were implemented and enforced. The students identified racialized discourse in the policy, which they felt were developed in response to Black students and their community. This suggested to students that school officials "must be having meetings about Black students." During an interview with Dr. Hayes, a school counselor who was also an alumnus of the high school in the early 1990s, I

learned this dress code policy related to the "ghetto school" stigma and geographic history discussed in *Chapter 4.* He explained:

> We were the "blood school" and the "fight school," the "school with all the gangs" and whatever else. Um, I guess coming to school here, I didn't see gangs that much. I mean, um, when we moved here like in the early 1990s, I think there's kind of a lot of, um, people from Los Angeles County who were moving over cause housing was affordable. Right. Um, I guess the issues that were going on in Los Angeles that people were trying to escape from the kind of were brought up over here during that time.

The idea that People of Color moved into this traditionally white neighborhood in the 1990s and "brought their issues with them," including their gang affiliations, influenced the ban of "gang attire," which continued to impact how Black students were policed and surveilled in the present day. While *CRP* students acknowledged the ongoing presence of gangs in the neighborhood—they in no way felt the school's ban of red attire, du rags, and head scarfs protected them from violence. For several minutes, the girls began to reflect on whether they could identify a dress code policy that prohibited clothing items specific to white or Latinx students' culture. One of the rules students identified was the ban of studded belts, which they felt white students most commonly wore. The students felt this policy was logical, however, considering the physical harm that studded belts can cause.

The students also felt that the school rule targeted Black girls who embrace specific representations of Black femininity in hip hop culture. These girls were labeled "ghetto" and racially profiled as gang members when they decorated themselves with *hood aesthetics*, including large hoop earrings and paisley bandanas.

> **Jamelia:** How do you think being a Black girl affects how dress code policies are applied here?
>
> **Reigan:** Like I said with the head wraps. I feel like we're the only people who do that. We're the only people who wear head wraps. I've never seen a Hispanic girl come to school with a scarf on her head because her hair is not done, or she ain't feel like doing her edges in the morning—all of a sudden, it's like, dress code.

> **Teiara:** I wanted to say something about the bandanas because you know we can't wear that because of gangs. They're going to think you're gang-affiliated or whatever.
>
> **Ma'Kiya**: I still do, tuh.
>
> **Teiara:** To me, it's just a scarf I wear to lay my hair or whatever. Or just because I'm having a bad day, so they don't, I don't... I feel like they should understand that. I feel like some people should understand. It's not always about gang violence.
>
> **E. Lovely:** It's like you can't just think that. It's about culture, too. Like Aaliyah. The TLC girls they've been wearing stuff like that. That's nothing new. That's just a part of *our culture*.
>
> **Ma'Kiya:** Exactly. I dress however I want. And I have a different style. So one time, personally, a story here, one time I wore a bandana. And the security guard stopped me, "You can't wear that because that means you're affiliated with gangs" like gang banging. And I'm all like, "I don't gang bang so I could wear this if I want to. You're telling me to take this off because of what y'all want to label us?" You know, Black girls, we dress differently honestly.

The images of Black femininity that are popularized in hip-hop culture are a significant socializing influence on teenage Black girls and shape how these youth construct their gender identity (Collins, 2004; Jones, 2010; Love, 2012; Morgan, 1999). The *CRP* students drew on definitions of femininity embedded in popular songs and music videos from artists like Aaliyah, TLC, and Meg the Stallion. By embracing and enacting these oppositional definitions of femininity, girls were subject to adverse treatment by school staff, including being hyper-surveilled and presumed unintelligent. Ma'Kiya, who often wore an orange paisley bandana wrapped around her head, firmly declared her refusal to comply with the school rule. Along with several other *CRP* students, she commonly engaged in a practice of *fugitivity* in which they strategically navigated and avoided school security as an act of resistance to policies they felt unjustly targeted the bodies of Black girls.

The "Prison-Like" Culture of Zero Tolerance

Over two decades of research on school discipline policies and their effects upon low-income students of color have scrutinized the excessive use and overreliance upon "zero tolerance" policies to manage youth behavior and produce school order (Advancement Project, 2011). While studies about zero tolerance policies often focus on the harsh experiences boys of color have with mandated suspensions, expulsions, and arrests (Ferguson, 2001; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Hirschfield, 2008; Mendez & Knopf, 2003; Noguera, 2008; Parker, 2017), evidence from this study shows that girls suffered similar forms of criminalization (Flannery, 2016; Morris, 2012; Wun, 2016). The *Concrete Rose Project* students critiqued the overreliance on zero-tolerance policies and practices, including surveillance cameras, school security, and police.

Presumed Guilty

Students primarily expressed frustration by the lack of due process in zero-tolerance policies that often subjected Black girls to the *presumption of guilt* (Bracy, 2014). Amberlee offered the following explanation as to why she believed the school's discipline rules were unfair for Black girls: "Some races can get a slide on things and Black people we automatically just get in trouble, and we get suspended longer, and our consequences are way worse than the other colors are." These sentiments were echoed by several participants, including Dejanae:

> I know how they look at Black girls just from me hearing them talk is that they look at us as being ghetto, loud . . . . Fights, if you got a fight with a Black girl and a white girl, most likely they going to say that the Black girl started the fight. That's who they're going to say started that fight. That's just how it is here. Even if a Hispanic girl started the fight, they are more likely to blame it on that Black girl because of how they look at Black people.

DeJanae emphasized that the zero-tolerance process for fighting was often prejudicial for Black girls relative to white and Latina girls. She suggested that this occurred because many adults viewed Black girls as "ghetto" and "loud." Based on these stereotypes, she felt Black girls were

more likely to be accused of initiating fights and would be punished without the opportunity to explain what happened (Esposito & Edwards, 2018; Jones, 2010). DeJanae described her own experience with being suspended and referred to the juvenile court for fighting, which further illustrated this point:

> **DeJanae:** I got referred to the court from here at school for my friend. It was an altercation. We were coming from a game, and two cars pulled up while we were in the parking lot. We come out, and they start fighting her. She started fighting. First of all, I was about to go home. I was going to walk home. I told her like, "I'm not fighting or whatever." That's what I told her. Like, "I'm not about to get into that little kid BS because they're sophomores, we seniors." And next thing you know, they came in some cars deep, and they came out, and she started fighting one of them. So then, five more girls came. They start jumping her. As soon as the other girl had came, I jumped in while they were jumping her, and we got suspended for that. We all got suspended for it. And I told them, "I don't care what the video... The video shows me come and help my friend." I said, "She could have been beaten to death if nobody helped her." I said, "Was I supposed to sit there and watch her get jumped?" And they told me, "No, I should have went to call for help." They just don't make stuff make sense to me. I just don't understand most of the stuff. After that, I got suspended for five days, and then they had wrote me up for a citation, and they gave me a court date all because I jumped in. I guess I was in an altercation, but that wasn't fair either.
>
> **Jamelia:** What do you think should have happened?
>
> **DeJanae:** What should have happened was I shouldn't have got suspended. I don't think I should have gotten suspended, and I definitely shouldn't have got no court date.

DeJanae's story reflected a common zero-tolerance practice described by *CRP* students. When fights happened, school security and the principal often relied on video footage from the campus surveillance cameras and social media to identify and punish students. The students were frustrated with this practice because the principal and school security disregarded potentially mitigating circumstances in favor of handing out punishments to all students implicated in the video. This meant that even if a student did not start the fight, they were subjected to severe consequences. In some cases, students notified adults in advance that they were experiencing conflict or being bullied by another student, and still received suspensions for attempting to

defend themselves. For example, Ashley, Ma'Kiya, and Reigan each shared stories of being suspended after they were "rushed" (a girl ran up and assaulted them while they were not paying attention) or jumped by multiple girls who they had already reported to security for bullying and making threats. In many ways, zero-tolerance and safety policies, including automatic suspensions and surveillance systems, perpetuated an unsafe school climate where students distrusted school officials' commitment to protecting them (Jones, 2010). They also expressed feeling powerless to defend themselves from threats of violence because the school enforced draconian punishments without providing sufficient resources or alternatives for navigating student conflict.

Regardless of the circumstances, each student in this study reported receiving a 5-day suspension for fighting. Similar to what researchers report (Gregory et al., 2010), most students emphasized that missing school due to suspension negatively impacted their grades. Some students fell behind on credits because they were not allowed to make up exams. Amberlee stated that being suspended made it "harder to graduate":

> It makes my grades go down, and it's harder to graduate [pauses]... To bring it up. It just makes it ten times harder. They don't care if you're suspended, your grades will drop. When you come back and ask them for makeup work, they won't give it to you.

Amberlee, who is 14 years old, had been charged with battery for fighting. In addition to the instructional time she missed due to suspension, she continued to miss more days of school for mandatory court appearances. Amberlee expressed that being suspended subjected her to stigmatization and heightened surveillance by security. She recounted how being perceived as a "fighter" led security to accuse her of smoking in the bathroom:

> Because you get judged a lot, off the bat, they just think you're a fighter, you have a smart mouth, just off the bat. Mostly everybody here thinks I'm a fighter… the teachers. Some . . . will give you the wrong vibes. They think we're ghetto. And that we might not be seen as good as the other colors. This morning there were some girls in the

> bathroom. They were smoking, right? Before I've been with friends and we'd been accused of smoking and weren't even smoking. I told them there are girls there and they went in there, and they told the girls to get out. They didn't get in trouble or anything. But one of the security guards came in when I was with a group of girls, and it smelled like marijuana in the bathroom, and we automatically got accused. They searched us and everything. They took everything out of your backpack, they look through everything, and they take you in this room. They search you to see if you have a lighter right here [points at her breast].

Interestingly, Amberlee shared this story in response to the question, "How do you feel being a Black girl affects your school experiences?" Earlier in the morning, she observed multiple Latina girls in the bathroom who were smoking. When the security officers came into the bathroom, they were allowed to leave without being searched or punished. She mentioned this incident to highlight the differential treatment she experienced when a similar situation happened to her earlier in the school year. She recalled, "the security did not believe us. They automatically accused us and said we were lying. Then when we got an attitude, they didn't believe us even more and took us to the security office to be searched." The male security officers searched through her backpack for marijuana. The woman security guard took her into a private room where she made her "take off her jacket and spread her arms" to search for a lighter under her bra. Amberlee's casual demeanor as she shared this story led me to question whether this was a standard practice, to which she informed me, "Yeah. It happens to us all the time." Her interpretation that this experience related to adults' perception of her as a "fighter" and "ghetto Black girl" is supported by research which suggests that Girls of Color with prior discipline history are surveilled and punished more harshly (Sheets, 1996). These discipline practices shed light on why Black girls disproportionately receive multiple suspensions (OCR, 2018; Skiba et al., 2002). These narratives illustrate the severe, negative consequences that zero-tolerance policies have on Black girls' educational experience. These policies neglect to protect Black girls from violence and punish them for asserting their agency to defend themselves.

Though zero-tolerance policies were purportedly designed to "improve school safety," the students' narratives revealed how these policies were counterproductive to Black girls' safety and well-being.

Managing the "Threat" of Black girls: Excessive Force & State Violence

Among this study's most disturbing findings, multiple students identified excessive force and police brutality as the punishments they felt Black girls experienced more often than any other group of girls. Though these practices were not registered under the provisions of zero-tolerance or the institutional discipline processes (Smith, 2016; Wun, 2016), evidence from this study shows that girls who were viewed as "violent" and threatening suffered egregious forms of extra-legal force, brutality, and trauma from encounters with school security and police. Momo, a twelfth-grade honors student, explained the rules for fighting were "applied differently" for Black girls:

> **Momo:** Nowadays, when you see someone get in trouble, it's mostly Black girls. Like the fight incident. If it's just Black people fighting, Black girls to be exact, [emphasis added] you *get the harshest treatment*. You can see someone get thrown. Someone being held down.
>
> **Jamelia:** Wow.
>
> **Momo:** And being thrown.
>
> **Jamelia:** By who? Security?
>
> **Momo:** Yeah. If two Latina girls got in a fight versus two Black girls got in a fight, they just going to pull them apart, and that's it.
>
> **Jamelia:** The Latina girls would get pulled apart, but the Black girls, what would happen to them?
>
> **Momo:** They would most likely be pinned down to the ground. It was like that freshman year. A lot of girls would fight; a lot of Black girls would fight. And they would snatch the girls up, and it'd be to the point where... One of the security guards he would put girls in handcuffs. They'll put you in handcuffs, and they'll hold you all extra tight and stuff. But with other people, they don't do that. I don't understand that. I don't know if they think it's not serious enough to do that too. But still, it's like, how could you sit

> there and be different . . . disciplined differently for other races. That's how I see it. And it's happened before . . . *especially with the cops, too.*

While media discourses concerning anti-Black state violence often focus on the harrowing experiences of Black boys and men (Ferguson, 2001; Hirschfield, 2008; Rios, 2011; Taylor, 2016), Momo's statement shows that Black girls are also targets of police brutality and physical assaults by state proxies (Lindsey, 2018; Richie, 2012). During a group session, Ma'Kiya detailed a traumatic incident where she was "dog-piled" by school security for "almost fighting":

> **Ma'Kiya:** So, my teacher, at this point, he just called the security, and they were coming. We were, we were doing okay like my friends were like still pulling me away from her, but it's like once the security came, she got extra like amped up, like trying to do stuff. I'm like the security already, and they were already like in front of me; I got suspended cause I scratched him. That's the only reason I got suspended. We didn't fight; I don't understand. I showed the principal like Ms. I don't have nails. Like I barely had a little nub. Like I have bad anxiety, I bite my nails of my entire life. I explained to her like I can't even like I don't scratch... The security . . . they tackled me, like five of them. And my knee was scarred up. It was bleeding. I'm like, "Did he even have a scratch?" She [principal] was like, "Well, we just have to do it because he made the accusation." So I'm like.
>
> **Reigan:** I don't like that. They're treating us like we're really, prisoners. An accusation? Can't I confront you with my evidence?
>
> **Momo:** I can't show you that this grown man physically harmed me?
>
> **Ma'Kiya:** They are huge men, so they don't have to use as much force as they do. They tend to overuse it. They act like they can't control you or like they can't, they can't do their job. *They always want to have them overuse their power, knowing they are some big men at that.*
>
> **Jamelia:** But they don't even take the time to listen to the other side.
>
> **E. Lovely:** They don't. This is a school. We're not a prison yard or nothing. You don't need to be doing that to the kids.

Ma'Kiya and several other students often reported that security "overuse their power and overdo their job." As Ma'Kiya explained, most of these officers were "huge men," however, they violently restrained Black girls' bodies as if "they [couldn't] control them." Throughout the

interview, she recalled how confused and powerless she felt to have "huge men" using excessive physical force to restrain her even though she and the other student did not fight. Her use of the word "dog-pile" literally captured the dehumanizing treatment and brutality she suffered. Ma'Kiya claimed that the school administration authorized excessive force ("they always want to have them overuse their power") because there were never any consequences for security who used these practices. More pointedly, the principal's decision to suspend Ma'Kiya even after she sustained injuries from the assault rather than hold the security officer accountable reveals her compliance and underscores the ways Black girls' status as "victims" of violence and police brutality are denied through controlling images that frame them as aggressive, dangerous, and adult-like (Epstein et al., 2017; Lindsey, 2018; McArthur, 2018). The lack of culpability for the security officers who assaulted Black girls on school premises normalized these practices within the school culture, subjecting them to school environments that resembled a "prison yard."

In addition to these encounters with security, the *CRP* students shared countless stories about the violence police commit against Black students and the emotional harm and trauma they endure due to witnessing and surviving these encounters. Their narratives revealed various instances where police officers responded to classroom level behavioral infractions and violently arrested students for fighting. Reflective of the "presumption of guilt" Black people commonly endure throughout society; Black girls were treated like "suspects" when interacting with police. DeJanae shared that one consequence of living in a heavily policed neighborhood and attending an "iconic ghetto" high school was the increased likelihood of being stopped and searched by law enforcement while in route to and from school:

> I've been arrested after school before while walking home. I was walking home with my friends and… it was like ten cop cars came upon us with a helicopter, and they had us up at gunpoint, and they were just like... They put us in these handcuffs, and they were rough. This was like something that we should have been able to push to sue for. And

> they dumped out all our stuff, our backpacks. They had us in the police cars, questioning us, writing us up for walking home from school because they heard like I told you, they heard it was a fight. They heard it was an incident and they heard that somebody had a gun, so we were the only ones that they came and checked. We were a group of Black kids, though. It was just five of us, and we were all of color. And this was in this neighborhood right behind the school.

While walking home from school, DeJanae and her friend were stopped by police officers responding to a report that students were fighting near the park. The officers immediately drew their weapons on DeJanae and her friend, forcing them to lay face down on the concrete while searching through their backpacks. She explained that this experience was incredibly traumatic for her as a Black girl who survived state violence and reinforced her fear and distrust of police:

> **Jamelia:** How does it feel to be a Black girl who's stopped by the police?
>
> **DeJanae:** It feels real nerve-wracking because you just never know what's going to happen with the police and Black kids because all around the world for how many years they've been killing us off. Cops or something like that pull me over, I'm more likely to listen and more I'm just going to listen to anything they got to say. So very nervous. I just get pulled over, getting pulled over I get real nervous, even that because even dealing with the police. Even with my friend Tamir, when we all got pulled over at that park, Tamir was telling them that he didn't do anything, and they had us lay down on the ground for about 10 minutes. And they told us, I'm telling Tamir, "You need just to get down because you are a Black boy and the cops are known for killing Black people." And I was trying to tell him because I was just so nervous on the ground because I just like, "Oh my God, I don't want him to shoot me," and "I don't want anything to happen to me." And every time something happens with the police, that's how I think, like, "Please, do not shoot me," because I be so nervous about everything I've been through in my life with the police.

DeJanae's narrative reveals the near-death encounters Black girls frequently have with police often muted from contemporary discourses. This experience with police violence is part and parcel of the prison industrial complex and school/prison nexus that disproportionately plagues racially segregated neighborhoods with concentrated poverty (Davis, 2003; Gilmore, 2007; Lipsitz, 2011; Sojoyner, 2013). The police talk is often framed as an unnecessary "rite of passage" for Black girls to receive (Malone Gonzalez, 2019). However, DeJanae's narrative

reveals the multiple consciousness that Black girls are frequently disqualified from the protections of their girlhood and childhood innocence, especially when interacting with police (Epstein et al., 2017). The terror she describes reveals how the police's increased visibility and involvement in school discipline processes reproduce schools as yet another site of state violence and potentially death for Black girls (Lindsey, 2018).

Interpretations of violence against Black girls. The *CRP* students were adamant that anti-Blackness and misogynoir held a significant role in the disproportionate physical assaults and police brutality Black girls endure in school (Bailey, 2018; Dumas, 2016). During the final *Concrete Rose Project* (*CRP*) Group Session, I presented data visuals depicting the inequitable discipline disparities facing Black girls at Desert Rose High School. I asked the *CRP* students a series of questions that would allow them to discuss the contours of Black girls' vulnerability to exclusionary punishments and critically reflect on the factors they believed contributed to DRHS status as one of the *high schools with the highest suspension and arrest rates for Black girls in the state of California* (OCR, 2018). Ashley, an eleventh-grade honors student who experienced two suspensions and multiple detentions, raised her hand to share the list of factors she wrote, as her *CRP* peers interjected with their insights:

> **Ashley:** My number *one* reason was because they see us as a danger, which I feel is true. They just see us as a threat, I guess. I actually don't know why. I mean, it's because of our skin color, but I just don't know why they really think like that.
>
> **Teiara** [interjects]: That was the first thing I wrote down too. It's because of the color of our skin because you know, stereotypes, and stuff. Like she said, I feel like they see a threat. When they see us, they just be feeling scared.
>
> **Ashley:** Then *two* because they stereotype us, which they do. They want to call us ghetto and this and that. They just look at us. As soon as we walk in the classroom, it could be the first day of school. They never seen us; they don't know us. *Three*, because they genuinely don't want us here, which is true. I just feel like they want a certain type of student body here. That's not Black people or Black girls, which I feel like is true. Then *four,* because they don't care for us. They don't see us as something to; I don't know

how to explain it. They don't see us as important. They just think that they're better than us.

The notion that adults viewed Black girls as threats and dangerous related to the process of adultification, which dehumanizes Black girls and causes them to be perceived as more adult-like (Morris, 2016; Epstein et. al. 2017). After discussing several moments when they felt mistreated and punished because of the stereotypes that cast Black girls as "threatening" "dangerous" and "ghetto," I asked the students to elaborate on *what it means to be viewed as a threat* and *why they believe this causes Black girls to be disciplined more at DRHS?* The students explained:

> **Ashley:** Because they see us as a threat, they just want to kind of take us out. Like, take us out of school. They don't want us to be here. They want to eliminate us from the whole population-
>
> **Teiara:** The [school] police and security be tackling people . . . oh my gosh
>
> **Ashley:** [Black girls] be fighting. They want to tackle people like they are a quarterback or something, like sir, calm down. I get they fighting but still chill out.
>
> **E. Lovely:** They don't want us to be above them. They try to keep us in our place. I feel they think one day we going to rise up and actually, take over and stand up and do better for our people and stuff. But they trying to keep us degraded.
>
> **Ashley:** Exactly; they keep degrading us
>
> **E. Lovely**: They down talk us and stuff like that. That's what I think. and they want us silent
>
> **Ashley:** Like she said before, if she gon says something that's going to be "disrespectful." And I know what she means because… if a white girl did it, "Oh, she just speaking her mind. She's just upset right now. Let her be." If I speak, then you would probably try to tackle me to the ground.

Ashley, E. Lovely, and Teiara succinctly analyzed how violence against Black girls is normalized and legitimated within school systems. Their statements about security physically assaulting Black girls who were involved in fights underscores the power of ideology (Collins, 2000) and speaks to a recurring pattern regarding the disciplining of Black girls who deviate

from hegemonic gender norms (Crenshaw, 2013; Jones, 2010; Lindsey, 2018; Smith, 2016; Wun, 2016). These students conveyed a collective standpoint that the symbolic construction of Black girls as "ghetto" and "threatening" evoked police and school security to use their bodies as receptacles for enacting racialized and gendered violence. Through their trenchant analysis, the students of the *Concrete Rose Project* conveyed an embodied knowledge and discerning wisdom about the oppression of Black girls in school disciplinary systems - knowledge and insight that I argue extend far beyond traditional framings of the "school to prison pipeline" research (Losen & Skiba, 2010; Meiners, 2011; Noguera, 2008; Sojoyner, 2013). More specifically, and as the excerpts above illustrate, the *CRP* students were readily able to name the continuing legacy of anti-Black racism and misogynoir in American schooling and policing systems (Hartman, 1997) that systematically and institutionally *kill* Black girls by "taking their bodies, or murdering their spirits" (Love, 2016, p. 2).

Matrix of Domination: Theorizing Black Girls' Oppression in Schools

Michael Dumas (2016) contends that anti-Blackness manifests in nearly all education inequality areas, including discipline disparities. Thus, he posits a theorization of anti-Blackness in education policy discourse to identify and respond to the ways anti-Black racism informs the "formation and implementation of education policy" (p.11). While Dumas (2016) scholarship advances important understandings about the role of anti-Black racism in school systems, the lack of explicit attention to the impact of gendered anti-blackness on the nationwide discipline gap obscures a crucial intersectional inequity that renders Black girls structurally vulnerable to punishment. This study's findings illuminated the ways Black girls conceptualized the operation of power in school punishment and everyday forms of marginalization that revealed discipline inequities as part and parcel of a broader structural condition of gendered anti-Black racism.

Thus, to advance an intersectional interrogation of anti-Blackness in the contexts of Black girls' punishment and disciplinary experiences, I operationalized *Matrix of Domination* as a heuristic device to analyze the multiple spectrums of identity and power structures that produce inequitable outcomes for this particular population of students. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) describes intersectionality in terms of a broad *Matrix of Domination* (p. 222), which functions as the organizing system of Black female oppression. This matrix comprises the *structural*, *disciplinary*, *cultural*, and *interpersonal* domains, across all of which Black girls and women experience and resist oppression. In what follows, I describe, in more detail, the narratives of Concrete Rose Project students using the theory of Matrix of Domination to highlight how these girls both experience and name intersectional oppression within various domains of power.

Cultural Domain

Patricia Hill Collins's (2009) theorization of the *Cultural Domain of Power* contends that social institutions manufacture racist and sexist controlling narratives to justify Black girls and women's subordination in society. Thus, Collins regards the *Cultural Domain of Power* as the glue that links and reinforces oppression across all other domains. Similarly, all 13 participants cited that educators and administrations were motivated by racialized-gendered biases and dehumanizing stereotypes when evaluating their behaviors and enforcing punitive policies and practices, most explicitly describing the effect of the "ghetto" stereotype. For instance, when asked to describe the impact of race and gender on their classroom experiences, participants often described how Black girls disproportionately bore punitive consequences for infractions such as being "disrespectful," loud, and "having an attitude"—behaviors that rely on the subjective interpretations of educators (Blake et al., 2011).

Participants' stories suggest that controlling narratives can be harmful and punitive for Black girls because these ideas create an interpretive frame that informs adults' evaluations of their actions and behaviors. Quoting the earlier statements of Ms. George, a white educator in this study, the Black girls at DRHS were viewed among staff as "flippant," and their home environments were believed to be places they "witnessed their mothers being beaten, so they learned violence was the only answer." By internalizing these master-narratives about the lives of Black girls and their family structure, staff drew on these ideas as frames when interpreting behaviors and enforcing punitive policies and practices in the *Disciplinary* and *Structural* domains.

Disciplinary and Structural Domains

As Collins (2000) theorizes, the *Disciplinary Domain* is "where people use the rules and regulations of everyday life to uphold the racial hierarchy" (Collins, 2009, p. 53); and the *Structural Domain* reveals "how racism as a system of power is set up" (p. 53) and encompasses structural parameters, such as policies, that disadvantage Black girls.

Though school policies and practices purport to be race and gender-neutral, the Black girls at Desert Rose High were often discriminatorily targeted for behaviors in ways that recapitulated the racialized and gendered hierarchy of femininity (Jones, 2009). *Concrete Rose Project* students described being differently surveilled and policed in their classrooms and other school spaces. When involved in fights or other behavioral infractions listed under the zero-tolerance policy, they were often presumed guilty without the opportunity to explain their actions and circumstances, and thus received more severe consequences than non-Black girls. Additionally, consistent with previous research about the nature of Black girls' disciplinary experiences, each of the 13 CRP students observed adults differentially enforce dress code

policies based on race, gender, class, place, and body type (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Morris, 2016; NWLC, 2017). Less about protecting girls from sexual harassment and abuse, the students understood the dress code as a discriminatory policy that disproportionately targeted Black girls who embraced enactments of Black Femininity within hip hop culture and profiled them as thugs.

Interpersonal Domain

The findings regarding Black girls' hostile interactions with their educators illustrate the operation of power in the *Interpersonal Domain*, which accounts for how these students "are treated in everyday social interactions that perpetuate oppressive power struggles" (Collins, 2009, p. 53). The *Concrete Rose Project* students often described social punishments such as feeling mistreated and belittled, unfairly targeted through classroom management practices, negatively labeled, and continuously disrespected by their educators and other staff. When these young Black girls exerted their agency and attempted to defend themselves against mistreatment, their actions were nearly always conceived as "a challenge to authority" and thus rendered punishable offenses (Koonce, 2012; Neal-Jackson, 2020; Watson, 2016; Wun, 2016). Monique Morris (2016) similarly found that Black girls "interpreted their attitude, not as a stagnant expression of anger or dissatisfaction. Rather, it lived along a continuum of responses to disrespectful or degrading triggers in their lives, many of which were present in their learning environments" (p. 86). The innumerable punishments *CRP* students experienced for "disrespect" suggested that beyond viewing Black girls' actions as a command for respect and human dignity, they were understood as an attempt to resist power dynamics between adults and students to shift the status quo (Crenshaw, 2020). Lacking the power to contest their teachers' discriminatory practices through the institution, the *Concrete Rose Project* students often looked to the

Interpersonal Domain of power as a platform for resistance (e.g., talking back or with an attitude) because this was the only aspect of schools in which they felt they had power (Murphy et al., 2013; Watson, 2016).

Matrix of Domination theory affords a critical analytic tool to examine how intersectional oppression operates throughout Black girls' schooling experiences. Policymakers, school leaders, and researchers can employ this framework as a heuristic device to identify the factors and structures that perpetuate Black girls' disproportionate punishment by examining discipline data or purposively conducting focus groups with Black girls to develop responsive strategies, interventions, and counter-structures. For instance, in the *Cultural* and *Interpersonal* domains, the participants' responses offer insight into how stereotypes impact educators' perceptions and Black girls' resulting treatment. These findings underscore the imperative need for educators and school leaders to engage in critical-self reflections and conversations about the biases they internalize about Black girls and the structural forces of anti-Black racism, sexism, and classism within the school that influence these attitudes. Familiarizing school personnel about the unique socio-cultural identities and contexts of Black girls will reduce the negative stereotypes these students contend with in school, redress the hostility between Black girls and staff, and ultimately reduce the number of discipline referrals that they receive. Students' responses also offer clear implications for ways that high schools can address power in the *Disciplinary* and *Structural* domains by reviewing practices and policies to examine the extent to which they disproportionately impact Black girls. This consideration is critical to understanding the embedded nature of gendered anti-Black racism in school discipline systems that reinforce the infrastructure of racial-gender discipline inequities.

Conclusion

The Black girls in the *Concrete Rose Project* faced daily punishments and innumerable forms of violence in school in ways that replicated the ubiquitous presence of anti-Blackness and misogynoir in society. Findings in this chapter show how Black girls discerned the arrangement of power that contributed to these oppressive school conditions and reinforced their marginalization. As the narratives presented throughout this chapter clarified, Black girls understood the underlying role of stereotypes in determining racialized-gendered discipline inequities. Specifically, the students' narratives suggest that the image of the "ghetto Black girl" created an interpretive climate that informed how Black girls' behaviors were evaluated and punished. In this way, Black girls were perpetually regarded as oppositional to the white-normative constructions of femininity typically reinforced through school behavior expectations. As a consequence, the *CRP* students were subject to discipline and punishment as a means to groom their flawed femininity. Furthermore, when Black girls spoke up against mistreatment and attempted to defend themselves against violence and unjust policies, their anger and enactments of agency were often characterized as punishable offenses by adults (Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010; Bierria, 2014).Yet, the systemic conditions and multiple intersecting forms of violence that produce harm and "anger" in Black girls' lives inside and outside of school remained unaddressed (Wun, 2018). Overall, the Black girls in this study identified various interpretations of their discipline experiences, which help us apprehend the conditions that reproduce schools as sites of disproportionate criminalization for Black girls and facilitate their "pushout" into the school/prison nexus (Morris, 2016). Their insights have the potential to deepen our understanding of how to rectify the unjust policies and practices that pervades urban

schools (Evans-Winters et al., 2018) toward creating humanizing learning spaces that empower Black girls to do more than simply survive.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation examined the unique ways Black girls are positioned within a context that, referring to similar communities, Elijah Anderson (2017) has described as an iconic ghetto. In these contexts, Black people, and the subject of this dissertation, Black high school girls, are subjected to intersecting and layered forms of violence and punishment. Desert Rose High School, the site of this study, has one of the highest suspension, expulsion, and arrest rates for Black girls in Southern California (CDE, 2018). The severe disciplinary inequities at DRHS provided the opportunity for me to examine an intrinsic case (Stakes, 1995) that explored the contours of Black girls' criminalization and school pushout (Morris, 2016). In particular, the students' narratives and insights in this study provided an in-depth examination of how Black girls who face exclusionary punishments live and interpret the school/prison nexus phenomenon.

To develop this study, over an uninterrupted twelve-month period, I conducted ethnographic research and qualitative interviews with ten educators and school leaders and thirteen Black girls with school discipline records. At the beginning of our time together, the girls and I formalized the project by naming it the *Concrete Rose Project*. Kimmerer (2003), as cited in Popova (2015), a Native American storyteller and botanist, highlighted the power of naming: "The names we give ourselves are a powerful form of self-determination, of declaring ourselves sovereign territory." Together, in the *Concrete Rose Project*, we explored how youth participants use *CRP* as a site of epistemic agency, resistance, and placemaking (Butler, 2018; Hunter et al., 2016; McKittrick, 2006). My research drew on critical cartography research methods and Black Feminist-Womanist storytelling (Lindsey-Dennis, 2015; Annamma, 2016). Grounded in the ethos of Black Feminism, I drew on an innovative, multi-methodological

approach to offer a culturally congruent model for researching *with* Black girls (Lindsey-Dennis, 2015) that empowered them as knowledge holders and experts.

In this study, I explored separate, but related concerns, that took the form of three research questions. Each concern seeks to understand Black girls' meaning-making of their punitive experiences at Desert Rose High School.

1. How do Black girls describe and understand their experiences with discipline and punishment in relation to the intersections of race, gender, class, and space/place?
2. How are Black girls and their punishment experiences positioned within the socio-cultural and geopolitical context of Desert Rose High School?
3. How can Black girls' engagement in the *Concrete Rose Project* foster new theoretical considerations about the power domains that drive the relationship between race, gender, poverty, space/place, and the school/prison nexus?

Guided by *Matrix of Domination* theory (Collins, 1990, 2000), this study, in brief, builds upon the current school/prison nexus research that often neglects to consider the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and place and typically focuses on Black boys, suspensions, and zero-tolerance policies (Hirschfield, 2011; Laura, 2014; Payne & Welch, 2010; Rios, 2011; Sojoyner, 2013). I elaborate on the myriad forms of violence, and misogynoir Black girls endure in school spaces that often fall under the purview of institutional discipline policy and quantitative data, paying specific attention to their encounters with formal and informal punishments (Jones, 2009; Rios, 2011; Wun, 2016). Findings from this study closely align with the body of empirical and theoretical scholarship within Black Feminist studies suggesting that Black girls' daily encounters in school stimulate a multiple consciousness (King, 1988) that prove central to how they understand the mistreatment and punishment they face in relation to their intersectional identities (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Joseph et al., 2016). At the same time, the findings

lend toward critiques from scholars within Black Girlhood studies regarding Black Feminism's primary focus on adult Black women and lack of theorizing about adolescent Black girls' experiences within interlocking systems of race, gender, class, sexuality, place, and age oppression (Brown, 2013; Butler, 2018; Hill, 2019; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Smith, 2019). By centering the often-marginalized voices of Black girls and engaging them in naming their experiences, this study sought to position Black girls at the center of an effort to create theoretical and empirical space to theorize about the oppression and systemic violence Black girls face within school systems. In so doing, this dissertation expands upon the project of Black Feminist Thought and contributes to the emerging body of theoretical scholarship about Black Girlhoods by centering Black girls in the *Concrete Rose Project* as contributors of their own intellectual and activist tradition. Data from this dissertation reveal how Black girls conceptualize a theory of power that accounts for how anti-Black racism, misogynoir, and classism operate as structural conditions in their everyday schooling experiences, rendering them vulnerable to excessive punishment and dehumanizing treatment.

This chapter considers the study's most prominent findings, situating the discussion in conversation with existing research in a manner that explicates the nature of Black girls' experiences in the school/prison nexus and the imperative with which they need intersectional justice. The chapter concludes with implications and recommendations for educational stakeholders and, a unique contribution of this effort, a joint letter that was co-written with the *CRP* students to endow our collaborative work with a vision for the intersectional justice that they and other Black girls so richly deserve.

Summary of Findings

Not unlike studies documenting Black girls' perspectives of their schooling experiences (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Evans-Winters, 2017; Morris, 2016; Murphy et al., 2013; Wun, 2014), the *Concrete Rose Project* students conveyed an astute awareness about their vulnerability to racialized and gendered forms of discipline and punishment. When describing their understanding of Black girls' disproportionate suspension rates and mistreatment at Desert Rose High School, these girls discussed two prominent contributing factors. The first regards institutional policies and practices which the students conceptualized as zero-tolerance mechanisms of punishment that "only attack Black girls." Though school discipline policies and practices purport to be race and gender-neutral, the *Concrete Rose* girls often described being differently surveilled and discriminatorily targeted for behaviors as a result of "the enduring incompatibility of Blackness and hegemonic white bourgeois norms of femininity" (Shange, 2019, p. 6).

A second interrelated interpretation, which is perhaps one of the most important findings of this study, concerned the role of dehumanizing and reductive stereotypes in determining how school staff and the police evaluate, interact with, and punish Black girls. In particular, the Concrete Rose students suggested that Black girls at DRHS were more likely to be subject to punitive punishments and extra-legal force by school security and police because adults stereotyped them and their school institution as "ghetto." This stereotype was mentioned when students discussed the racialized policing they experienced due to the school's reputation, known as "the most ghetto high school in the district." Additionally, when asked, "How being a Black girl affects their schooling experiences at DRHS?" participants almost immediately described the "ghetto Black girl" stereotype and its substantive role in the enactment of culturally deficit

practices and policies that contributed to their marginalization. Significantly, across both contexts – Black girls' individual experiences and Desert Rose High School as a physical place– the girls expressed that being marked as "ghetto" encompassed a pedagogy of pathologization (Annamma, 2018) associated with crime, moral deficiency, and pervasive academic failure that tagged these students as unlikely to succeed and a danger to public safety (Anderson, 2017). These findings have broader implications regarding the enduring presence of anti-black racism, misogynoir, and classism within the geographic history and institutional culture of Desert Rose High School that facilitated Black girls' exclusion from education opportunities across multiple generations.

As the scholarship of Nikki Jones (2009) and Elijah Anderson (2017) have demonstrated, this study's findings confirm that Black girls in ghettoized school contexts are heavily stigmatized and negotiate various forms of policing and intersectional violence based on their "Blackness and association with the ghettos in which they are situated in" (Anderson, 2017, p. 62). While Jones' (2009) ethnographic research is describing Black girls' experiences in the neighborhood context broadly, her analysis provides additional evidence to the current study's findings that being viewed as "ghetto" positions Black girls as outcasts in school spaces due to the racialized and classed hierarchy of femininity, which makes them more susceptible to punitive treatment by educators and the police. At the same time, the findings of this study suggest that the "ghetto Black girl" image had a detrimental impact on CRP students' academic worlds because it also reinforced the pervasive and ubiquitous nature of low academic expectations, which manifest through low-income Black girls' susceptibility to the myth of Black girl anti-intellectualism (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). While the work of Fordham (1993) and Carter Andrews et al. (2019) confirm the academic marginalization Black girls face as a

consequence of race and gender oppression, the findings in this study revealed that students linked negative perceptions of their intellectual capabilities to their multiply marginalized status as poor Black girls from the ghetto. These low expectations reflect a conviction internalized by educators of Black girls in ghetto schools that marks students as "incapable of succeeding" and "unworthy of the investment of public resources." (Anderson, 2017, p. 70). Employing the lens of Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018) brought to light the ways stereotypes linked to race, class, gender, and place manifest in the classroom, suggesting these controlling images shape adults' attitudes towards Black girls' academic potential and their commitment to educating them. The findings from this research have the potential to deepen our understanding of how Black girls conceptualized the impact of the "ghetto Black girl" stereotype on their schooling experiences and, also, provide a more nuanced picture of the role this image plays in the enactment of punitive policies and culturally deficit practices that facilitate their criminalization and school pushout (Morris, 2016).

Current research on the school/prison nexus among Black girls derives primarily from studies that focus on the extent and nature of youth's experiences without accounting for the processes and mechanisms that reinforce these disturbing patterns across race, gender, class, and place. By operationalizing Matrix of Domination as a theoretical framework, as well as Black girls' own words, this dissertation fills an empirical gap about the role that gendered anti-black racism, classism, and white supremacy play in shaping the girls' disparate treatment and discipline rates, with particular attention to how Black girls conceptualize these inequities themselves and with respect to their lives. The interpretations of this study's findings support assertions by Michael Dumas (2016), who theorizes how the specificity of anti-black racism — the "cultural disregard and disgust with Blackness" (p. 11) manifests in educational inequality

and racialized discipline disparities. At the same time, this study expands the framings and focus of Dumas' theorization of anti-blackness in education policy discourse by documenting the ways sexism, classism, and geography impact Black girls' experiences with anti-Blackness in school. Ultimately, this study's findings illuminated the centrality of racialized, gendered, and classed systems of power in enacting school policies and practices that perpetuate the relationship between Black girls and the school/prison nexus. Black girls' narratives and critical engagement in the *Concrete Rose Project* exist as a contradiction to the notion that Black girls who get in trouble in school are apathetic towards learning and "oppositional" to the public education systems. Instead, the Black girls in this study described how Desert Rose High School perpetuated their academic marginalization and pushout by problematizing their ways of being and engaging and diminishing their intellectual contributions. For this reason, I argue that efforts to address the disproportionate impact of school discipline for Black girls must identify and respond to the ways intersectional oppression functions within school discipline systems to routinize daily forms of violence and punishments against these students for "choosing to bring their whole selves when schools demand fragmentation" (Butler, 2018, p. 35). This argument undergirds the concluding implications and recommendations that follow.

Implications for School Policy and Discipline Reform

The conversations with staff in this study revealed several ongoing initiatives intended to redress racialized discipline disparities. Dr. Richardson, the school principal, surmised that the district-wide implementation of Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS) offered a proactive and non-punitive solution by incentivizing "good" behavior through a reward system. Despite the institutional efforts to integrate PBIS into the discipline culture at DRHS, through mechanisms including formalizing a PBIS center and appointing a PBIS administrative team, the

school's discipline gap remained unimproved. This study's findings suggest that school leaders and educators' hold racist and sexist biases. That these biases, along with their philosophical commitment to punitive punishment, can hinder the impact of PBIS and other such inclusionary discipline models.

For instance, my conversation with Mr. Ty, the PBIS director, revealed how staff often misappropriated the PBIS Center as a form of exclusionary punishment to remove Black girls for subjective infractions, which he characterized as influenced by these students' "strong-willed," "opinionated," and "theatrical" nature. As we heard from Ms. George, many adults constructed Black girls through pathologizing ideas concerning the "violence and neglect" they witnessed in their home environment and believed these socio-contextual factors influenced Black girls to perpetrate violence in the school setting. Yet, when Black girls were involved in fights—a behavior staff commonly cited as a prime factor that led to DRHS' significantly higher suspension rates and characterized as a reflection of their "difficult home lives"—these youth rarely spoke about PBIS as an alternative option made available for them. Instead, each *Concrete Rose Project* student received a mandatory 5-day suspension, and several students also received court referrals for a battery charge.

While students were aware of the consequences they would face, they distrusted their school's ability and commitment to protecting them from threats of violence.many looked to fighting as a vital navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) to negotiate what Elijah Anderson coins as the "code of the street" (Anderson, 1998; Jones, 2009) I argue that their sentiments were evidenced by the school's lack of institutional structures and resources that would help girls "talk through their issues" in nonviolent ways and the principal's decisions to suspend them even when they did not initiate the fight and were only attempting to defend themselves. Consider Dr.

Richardson's assertions that Black girls were "messier, trickier," and more prone to enacting violence alongside her admission that she "suspends more harshly for violence than drugs,"[2] because “certain behaviors warrant suspensions and expulsions for the good of the learning environment.” The findings in this study clarify the impact of racist-sexist-classist biases when issuing discipline referrals that can contribute to an overreliance on punitive disciplinary consequences within urban school settings.

Carter, Skiba, Arredondo, and Pollock (2015) argue that schools cannot effectively address racialized discipline outcomes without reconciling with the enduring presence of systemic racism, including the ways these forces are foregrounded by racial and class segregation:

> It is impossible to tell the full story of racial discipline disparities without considering the full range of racialized historical and current factors that shape school life in the United States. The ravages of slavery and Jim Crow, forced migration, and policies that enforced unequal treatment placed African Americans and most people of color at an economic and social disadvantage that persists to this day . . . . Regrettably, our history also left us with pervasive and false ideas about “races” that have shaped our perceptions of who is valued and who is not, who is capable and who is not, and who is “safe” and who is “dangerous” (p. 2).

The case of Desert Rose High School provides an exemplary model of why many discipline reform efforts, even when undertaken by well-intentioned educators and leaders, have failed to make a significant impact. These initiatives are often limited in their focus on implementing inclusionary discipline alternatives (e.g., PBIS and restorative injustice) while minimal attention is granted to addressing the structural conditions that result in historically marginalized students being most likely to face punitive consequences (Dumas, 2014; Lewis &

[2] Extensive research establishes that White students are more likely to be suspended for objective behaviors, such as drug offenses (Skiba et al., 2002).

Diamond, 2015; Noguera, 2003). As the scholarship of Michael Dumas (2016) and others contend (Coles & Powell, 2019; Hines & Wilmot, 2018; Shange, 2019; Wun, 2016), anti-Blackness is a permanent and endemic feature of American society and reinforces the infrastructure of discipline disproportionality. Beyond a matter of implicit racial bias training and inclusive discipline techniques, I argue that to disrupt the school/prison nexus for Black girls, discipline reform initiatives must emphasize addressing how the undercurrents of gendered anti-Black racism structures the school discipline system and influences behavioral management decisions. This work must actively confront anti-Blackness and misogynoir and track the overt and covert ways it manifests in policy, practices, ideas, and everyday social interactions.

As long as structural misogynoir looms large, discipline reform initiatives will only create new structures with old attitudes towards Black girls that will continue to disproportionately target them for punishment and exclusion (Morris, 2016). Working to dismantle the contextual factors that induce racialized-gendered disparities and attend to staff attitudes and biases toward Black girls is necessary for this wave of action to realize its potential. To achieve this ends, this research contributes to the growing platform demanding for anti-racist curriculum and training (in schools, teacher education, and principal leadership programs) that address the specificity of misogynoir and anti-Blackness (Coles & Powell, 2019; Dumas, 2016) toward the development of a pipeline of critical educators and school leaders committed to social justice and anti-racist work (Love, 2019). Social justice and anti-racist oriented professional developments and training should be provided across all school contexts. These sessions can and should be driven and informed by Black girls' lived experiences and perspectives (e.g., using qualitative surveys and focus groups) as they plan strategies to restructure unjust policies and practices. By engaging Black girls in the process of developing and implementing delineated

expectations such as dress code and other safety policies, these youth may feel more empowered and connected to a school system that they believe deliberately "attacks" them and silences their voice.

Methodological and Analytical Contributions

Recent works of Black Women and Women of Color scholars have shed necessary light on Black girls' multifaceted and complex experiences in schools and the carceral system (Morris, 2016). While these studies help to combat Black girls' erasure in the research and public discourses, there remains a lacuna in the scholarship that theorizes about Black girlhood and research methodologies specific to conducting studies with, about, and for Black girls. In response to these limitations, the present study's findings offer two significant methodological and analytical contributions that should inform future research

Black Girlhood Participatory Data Analysis. First concerns the active participation of *Concrete Rose Project* students and their role as research partners of this study. As Desert Rose High School functioned as an exclusionary and intellectually suppressive space for Black girls, the *Concrete Rose Project* offered a critical counter space for these students to reclaim their epistemic agency and power by naming the intersectional oppression that they face within the school context. In facilitating this group, I drew guidance from Black Feminist theories to develop a culturally congruent research model that would allow me to create a space that privileged these young Black girls' literacies by positioning them as research partners. Through this work, I advanced the use of "Black Girlhood Participatory Data Analysis" (BGPDA), in which Black women scholars conduct research with Black girls that honors their voices throughout the research process and propels them into theorizing about their lived experiences. With a study centered on how Black girls name experiences of punishment and misogynoir,

BGPDA provided a useful methodological and analytic tool to allow participants to construct knowledge about the individual and collective struggles they negotiate in school while contextualizing the meanings ascribed to these experiences as they relate to interlocking systems of oppression. Future research focused on Black girls' schooling experiences should consider employing Black Girlhood Participatory Data Analysis as an analytic approach that honors the validity and effectiveness of Black girls' understanding of their own experiences; and that in its form, may reveal a great deal about Black girls' perceptions, responses, and strategies than traditional interviews or survey. As a starting point, I offer the following three principles, which derive from the core tenets of Black Feminist Thought:

> The purpose of BGPDA is to engage Black girls in the co-production of knowledge and a Black girlhood intellectual and activist tradition that 1) centralize on Black girls' epistemic agency to name and speak back against oppression as a praxis of resistance and empowerment and 2) places Black girls at the locus of analysis 3) validates and honors their understandings about their lived realities and experiences as a criterion of meaning (Harris, 2020).

In this study, I drew on BGPDA to privilege Black girls' insights in transformative and healing ways that could be reified to rectify unjust policies and practices. The central focus on uplifting the narratives and interpretations of Black girls whose voices and ideas are routinely marginalized in school spaces and whose commitment to the project is rooted in their pursuit of just and equitable school conditions is what makes BGPDA a praxis-oriented framework. By operationalizing BGPDA, I was able to focus on Black girls' sense-making and understandings of their experiences, which I hope will influence further scholarship within Black Girlhood studies, which has mostly relied on the analyses of adult Black women to explain and analyze racialized-gendered schooling experiences *on behalf* of Black girls.

As a practice, researchers can employ BGPDA to conduct future studies using diverse research methods to solicit Black girls' insights and analytic interpretations of study data. These

methods can and should engage students in in-depth and critical discussions, using transcripts and other relevant data sources to illuminate how participants interpret the significance and identify salient patterns and emerging themes. For example, during the final Concrete Rose Project group session, I employed BGPDA by engaging students in a gallery walk. The students collaboratively analyzed data from a word association activity that involved prompting students with a word (e. g. "suspension," "court," "police," "teachers," and "school") and having them state the first three words or phrases that come to mind. One salient theme that students identified during the gallery walk were how students used similar language when describing the court system and school discipline. Across both systems, participants discussed the lack of justice and due process that result in the disproportionate criminalization of Black youth.

Similar to the foundational principles of Black Feminist Thought, I argue that Black girls possess a distinctive standpoint about the oppression they face in society and need their own physical and scholarly spaces to cultivate knowledge and to "envision Black girlhood critically among and with Black girls" (Brown, 2013, p. 1). These spaces should position Black girls as experts and stakeholders in social issues that impact their learning and livelihood by centering them in naming, unpacking, and addressing their multiply marginalized state. BGPDA offers an invaluable technique to incorporate these youth in contributing to the intellectual project of Black Girlhood Studies while also providing a mechanism for researchers to conduct member checking and triangulate the study's findings to ensure trustworthiness, reliability, and validity.

Black Girl Cartography. Second, this works attention to how Black girls unpack their schooling experiences in relation to their identities, and geospatial location offers a conceptual and methodological contribution to the emerging body of scholarship in the field of Black Girlhood Studies that Tamara Butler (2018) defines as Black Girl Cartography. In the current

study, Black Girl Cartography provided a methodological and analytic lens to engage in explicit conversation about the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and place that inform "how and where Black girls are physically and socio-politically mapped in education" (Butler, 2018, p. 29). While a growing body of educational research studies examines the racial and gender dimensions of Black girls' social and academic experiences in school, this focus on Black girls as racialized and gendered beings often implicitly leaves their remaining social and geographic locations uncharted (Butler, 2018; Morris, 2007; Morris, 2016). The lack of theorizing and articulations of Black girls' experiences results in over-essentialized descriptions that fail to sufficiently capture the full spectrum of Black Girlhoods. Thus, as a Black Girl Cartographer, I approached this research with the understanding that Black girls' identities, lived experiences, and ways of knowing are shaped and informed by race, gender, class, age, and place.

In *Demonic Grounds*, Katherine McKittrick (2006) argues that Black women create physical, creative, and imaginative geographies in contestation to geographies of domination through which distinct ways of knowing and geographic stories can be told. Through this work, I argue that Black girls' location at the intersection of race, gender, class, age, and geography, generates ways of knowing and lived experiences that are often epistemically and empirically excluded from Black Girlhood and Black Feminist Studies. Therefore, through the intellectual work of Black girls in the Concrete Rose Project, we come to see how Black girls create counter geographies of their own through storytelling, naming, and collectively assembling knowledge about experiences of oppression and domination. As an analytic frame, Black Girl Cartography allowed for critical analysis of how Black girls' unpack experiences with violence and punishment as linked to power relations of race, gender, class, and geospatial location.

Indeed, many of the experiences that Black girls in the *Concrete Rose Project* shared provided evidence of their oppressed status as low-income Black girls who live in a racially segregated, high poverty neighborhood. For instance, students described how living in a majority Section 8 neighborhood subjected them to stigmatization, overly policed schools, dress code policies developed in response to local gangs, and educational inequities reinforced by district zoning policies. These raised questions of how educators and other adults map certain stereotypes and ways of being onto ghetto schools and their students that systematically regard them as less deserving of educational opportunity and more susceptible to criminalization "because of where they live." Moreover, the extent to which the "ghetto" stereotype was referenced as a factor that determined Concrete Rose girls' mistreatment and punishment brings attention to their distinct and collective standpoint about their lived realities as low-income Black girls in the prevailing presence of anti-blackness, misogynoir, and classism in school. These findings contribute to the emerging body of scholarship focused on theorizing Black Girlhood and expand on the ways Black girls construct place-based knowledge about the manifestation of spatialized inequalities in their schooling experiences, which is something that prior research has yet to explore sufficiently.

By accounting for the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and space/place in the lives of Black girls who live in ghettoized neighborhoods, this research sought to disrupt the monolithic ways their lives are written about in scholarship. Past studies have grappled with the connection between Black girls' intersectional identities, geography, and schools (Grant, 1984; Jones, 2009; Watson, 2016; Morris, 2016; Annamma, 2017; Butler-Barnes, 2018); however, there is a need to champion this work further, across different contexts.

Recommendations

Addressed in this section are recommendations for practice and research, all of which seek to ameliorate the injustices Black girls navigate in their schooling environments. Each recommendation is designed to reflect intersectional justice; therefore, it is rooted in Black girls' voices and lived realities.

Intersectionality as a Practice Lens

Echoing previous research, the *Concrete Rose Project* students determined that the marginalization they experienced from educators for being loud and outspoken animated the lack of cultural competence among their school's majority white staff (Yosso, 2005; Evans-Winters, 2005) as well as the "abusive" power dynamics in the classroom (Murphy et al., 2013). Ultimately, participants' descriptions about the underlying role of stereotypes revealed how racist and sexist stereotypes create an interpretative climate that informs educators' evaluations and treatment of Black girls. Implicit in these findings is the need for school leaders and educators to develop an intersectional awareness regarding Black girls' nuanced identities and the structural forces that shape their daily lives.

As Crenshaw (1991) reminds us, the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black girls' lives in ways that "cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately" (p. 1244). Intersectionality offers a useful lens for educational stakeholders to examine and redress the structural forces that often contribute to Black girls' marginalization in school settings. An intersectional competence can also facilitate educators' internal processes of interrogating how white supremacist, patriarchal, and capitalistic values manifest in the behavioral norms they draw from when evaluating Black girls. Proctor et al. (2016) and Harris (2020) offer essential guidance about ways school leaders and educators can incorporate an intersectional practice lens to unpack their own intersectional identities and

challenge imbalanced power/privilege hierarchies in school toward creating safe, inclusive, and just educational contexts that embolden Black girls. Based on this scholarship and the findings of this study, I offer several guiding questions and action steps across three levels - individual, interpersonal, and institutional - from which such work can begin. In each level, all participants and stakeholders would benefit from examining their positionality and assumptions.

Individual. One of the most critical steps to facilitating an intersectional practice lens involves self-awareness that considers the intersection of one's positionality at the individual level. To engage this work, educators can leverage practices such as journaling to reflect on their personal and professional positionality, including their identities, locations of power, personal values, and beliefs. The following guiding questions can be used to engage educators in unpacking their positionality through personal reflections or group discussions:

- What socio-cultural locations and intersecting identities (race, ethnicity, nationality, class, age, ability, education, sexuality, gender) shape your personal and professional positionality (how you experience and interpret the world)?
- In what ways do these locations and identities influence how you experience power, privilege, and oppression in society and the school context?

Interpersonal. At the interpersonal level, engaging intersectionality as a practice tool should consider how educators' positionality may impact their interactions and relationships with students, families, and the community in which their school sits. Questions for educators and school leaders to consider include the following:

- What are the socio-cultural locations and intersecting identities of the students, families, and communities you serve?

- How does your personal and professional positionality align with or diverge from the students, families, and communities you serve?
- How does your positionality influence the ways you recognize, honor, and/or problematize students based on markers of difference?

Educators and school leaders engaging in this process of reflection could bring various experiences and socio-contextual factors to their consciousness, which can have a bearing on their interactions with students in positive or potentially harmful ways. Beyond the internal positionality work, educators and leaders must invest in learning about the multiply marginalized populations they serve by providing space for these students to articulate their self-definitions. Such work can take place through everyday conversations – such as asking students about their values, cultural heritage, and identities, as well as more structured pedagogical approaches such as "I am poems" and other creative projects that prompt students to share imperative information about themselves and their goals and aspirations for the future.

Institutional. At the institutional level, employing intersectionality requires staff and educators to attend to the ways intersectional oppression interacts with and has an impact on practices and policies in ways that can determine academic and behavioral outcomes. A classic example, in the literature (Morris, 2007) and frequently occurring issue, in this study, was the perception that Black girls were disrespectful to authority. Students' interviews and Concrete Rose discussions and staff interviews spoke to the disproportionate frequency of which Black girls were targeted for removal due to their more vocal and outspoken nature, which educators often misconstrued as a symbol of disrespect for authority.

Discipline data, including office and detention referrals, and conducting classroom level observations of educators with higher referral rates, provide evidence, for school staff, to begin

to consider, locate and address how racialized and gendered biases influence behavioral evaluations and inequitable outcomes. More in-depth work might involve engaging in discussions about the assumptions and beliefs that staff internalize about Black girls. Staff might also identify their perceptions about Black girls' behavior, and consider how dominant perceptions that frame Black girls' ways of engaging in the classroom relate to historicized controlling images that continue to be reproduced and sustained through popular media. School leaders can and should draw from online resources such as *Teaching Tolerance* and the *African American Policy Forum* websites to develop and implement school-wide professional development and create learning communities (including readings focused on intersectionality, the adultification of Black girls, and anti-racism). Interventions like these may encourage staff to engage in conversations about intersectional oppressions and to develop strategies to proactively challenge how their positionalites and perceptions are made manifest in deficit practices and policies that marginalize Black girls.

Center Black Girls' Voices in School Policy Reform

Few efforts have been made to integrate Black girls' voices into the policy reform discourses addressing inclusive school culture, safety, and educational climate. Likewise, it is essential to understand Black girls' perspectives regarding their schooling experiences and their conceptualization of a 'safe school climate.' To that end, researchers, policymakers, and school leaders should advance opportunities to integrate Black girls' voices and participation in school reform and policy-focused research, especially issues concerning school safety and policing. The small body of research focused on youth participation among Black girls demonstrate how these youth create local and societal change by organizing and utilizing research to address issues that impact their lives, schools, and communities (Evans-Winters, 2017; Garcia et al., 2020). These

studies attest to the transformative power of Black girls' civic engagement and leadership. The work highlights how Black girls challenge structural and systemic racism directly and advance institutional and structural change by "collectively questioning, exploring, engaging, and naming [their] reality" (Evans-Winter, 2017, p. 8).

Further work should incorporate Black girls' voices into education policy by positioning these youth as stakeholders at the decision-making table. These efforts should entail creating opportunities for Black girls to participate in conversations where decisions are being made about their education, such as incorporating their perspectives on governing bodies and the local school board. Schools can also develop structures that incentivize girls to participate in these conversations as leaders by compensating them through stipends and ensuring the meetings are accessible to students and their families (e.g., time of day and location). Other mediums through which Black girls' input can be solicited include conducting surveys, ensuring representation on student-led leadership boards and newspapers, and hosting student focus groups. Black girls have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling; their voices warrant attention and a place at the table when it comes to education reform decisions. As the dominant narrative holds that Black girls – particularly those who get in trouble – are apathetic towards education, efforts to incorporate Black girls' voices must begin with intentionally disrupting this myth and including their voices at the center, not in the margins.

Conclusion: Roses Still Bloom in the Ghetto

I returned to Desert Rose County with this study to provide a platform for Black girls in my hood to share their brilliance and wisdom. I genuinely believe that their brilliance and wisdom, in the face of daily schooling experiences of anti-blackness and misogynoir, provide essential lessons for strengthening education and life pathways for girls in similar school

contexts. Substantially, this study demonstrated how Black girls conceptualize the ways misogynoir and anti-blackness operate in the everydayness of schooling, which is responsible for the ways policies and practices disproportionately "attack" their identities. *Concrete Rose Project* students' lived truths illustrate that in school, just as in society, Black girls are subjected to dehumanizing stereotypes and controlling narratives that render their statuses as children and human illegible. Regardless of whether schools implement positive and inclusive discipline strategies, these pathologizing beliefs about Black girls will continue to inform the ways their behaviors are interpreted, and consequently, these shifts will result in "new rules, but old attitudes about how to treat Black girls" (Morris, 2016, p. 113). Only by acknowledging and confronting the permanence of misogynoir and anti-blackness in school structures and centering the Black girl voice in decisions that concern their education, safety, and well-being can stakeholders proactively work to mitigate the effects of oppressive structures that inflict injury and harm. The *Concrete Rose Project* demonstrates the possibilities of centering and honoring Black girls' voices and lived experiences to promote socially just learning environments that normalize their humanity and affirm their intersectional realities.

As a tribute to their brilliance and sacrifice toward this work, I conclude my dissertation with a joint letter written by the thirteen students of the *Concrete Rose Project*, which highlights how these young Black girls demand to be seen and treated by adults in school and society at large.

A Collective Letter Written by the Black girls of the Concrete Rose Project.

We want teachers and other adults to know:
We are more than just ghetto Black girls.
You need to know your students, their background, and where they come from before judging them.
Some of us are loud and love to laugh; some are shy; some get distracted.

But not everyone's the same, and not everyone comes from the same place, so don't assume you know us.
There are things in life that can cause Black girls to act in a certain way. We might have an attitude and not express what we're feeling. We are human, and sometimes we do get upset.
Be a mentor, leader, or someone to comfort us. Be there when we need you.
Ask us why our homework didn't get turned in before you yell at us and assume we have no potential.
We try hard in your classes, even when we don't understand, we always try.
Take consideration of what you say because it truly matters and affects us.
We are intelligent, beautiful, inspirational, devoted, independent, creative, loving, and *too real*.
We are destined to become doctors, multibillionaires, entrepreneurs, cosmetologists, artists, and lawyers.
We are determined to be greater than what society expects us to be because we are strengthened and empowered by our ancestors, mothers, future children, and ourselves.
We are full of purpose and possibilities.

We are Hidden Roses.

APPENDIX A: STAFF PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name	**Role**	**Years at School**	**Identities**
Dr. Richardson	Principal	8	white Female
Dr. Lawrence	Counselor/Black Girl Success Club Advisor	2	Black Female
Mr. Haynes	Counselor	20+	Latinx/Asian Male
Mrs. Rios	Counselor	4	Latina
Mr. Jones	Teacher/ Black Male Success Club Advisor	12	Black Male
Ms. George	Teacher	1	white Female
Mr. Harper	Teacher	11	Black Male
Mrs. Davis	Teacher/PBIS Administrative Support	3	Latina
Mr. Philip	Teacher/ PBIS Director	2	white Male

APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

This dissertation combined key concepts from Black Studies, Black Feminist Studies, Black Girlhood Studies, Sociology, and Education. To achieve clarity and accessibility, I relay definitions of specialized terminology as defined by the study's relevant field.

anti-Blackness: A concept developed by afro-pessimism theorists that assert Blackness renders humanity beyond the reach of Black people (Dumas, 2014).

Black: a self-determined "name of a racialized social group that shares a specific set of histories, cultural processes, and imagined and performed kinships. Black is a synonym (however imperfect) of African American and replaces previous terms like Negro and Colored, which were also eventually capitalized, after years of struggle against media that resisted recognition of Black people as an actual political group within civil society" (Dumas, 2016).

Black Girlhood: considers the ways Blackness interlocks with systems of gender, class, sexuality, and age oppression (Smith, 2019)

Carceral: of or relating to jail or prison; prison-like.

Criminalization/ Hyper-Criminalization: The process by which an individual's everyday behaviors and styles become ubiquitously treated as deviant, risky, threatening, or criminal, across social contexts" (Rios, 2011).

Discipline Disproportionality: This term describes the inequitable distribution of disciplinary actions in schools to a specific population or group of students relative to their percentage in the total enrollment population (Skiba, 2002).

Exclusionary Discipline: Includes the "use of suspension, expulsions, and other disciplinary action resulting in the removal [of the student] from the typical educational environment" (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010, p. 59).

Iconic Ghetto: Relates to the stereotypical depictions of ghetto life, including racialized poverty, police omnipresence, crime, and violence; these symbols produce racialized meanings that sustain racial inequality and segregation.

Informal Punishment: Concerns unaccounted forms of social punishments, "policing, and surveillance that [do] not register under the current conceptualizations of 'zero tolerance' [and] institutionalized forms of discipline" (Wun, 2016, p. 745).

Misogynoir: Refers to the specificity of attacks Black women endure at the intersections of anti-Blackness and misogyny; this concept names the historical ways Black women have been degraded and violated in society and the controlling stereotypes that render us more susceptible to interpersonal, institutional, and systemic violence.

Power: An abstract concept that shapes and captures individual relations of domination and oppression.

Racism: A "system of power or a way of organizing power relations that might range from extreme egalitarianism to systems of vast social inequality" (Collins et al., 2009, p. 44)

School/ Prison Nexus: Refers to "interlocking sets of structural and individual relationships in which youth, primarily of color, are funneled from schools and neighborhoods into under- or unemployment and prisons" (Meiners, 2013).

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