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# IT'S THE FOCUS ON BLACK GIRLS FOR ME: A MIXED METHODS INQUIRY INTO PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

Eshe Price
*Rowan University*

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**IT'S THE FOCUS ON BLACK GIRLS FOR ME: A MIXED METHODS INQUIRY INTO PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE**

By

Eshe Price

A Dissertation

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Dissertation Co-chair: Shelley Zion, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
Dissertation Co-chair: Sarah Ferguson, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Interdisciplinary and Inclusive Education and Educational Services Leadership

Committee Members:
Brianne Morettini, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Interdisciplinary and Inclusive Education

**Dedication**

This body of work is dedicated to my daughter, Emory, an amazing little Black girl.

**Acknowledgements**

# Abstract

Eshe Price

IT'S THE FOCUS ON BLACK GIRLS FOR ME: A MIXED METHODS INQUIRY
INTO PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE
2021-2022
Shelley Zion, Ph.D. and Sarah Ferguson, Ph.D.
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Local and national context, along with some educational research, indicate the racialized and gendered challenges Black girls are facing in schools. Although there has been an increase in research centered on Black girls' schooling experiences, few studies investigate the realities Black girls face in rural communities. Accordingly, the aim of this three-article dissertation is to deepen our understanding of Black girls' schooling experiences in order to improve the climate in schools for Black girls in predominantly white, rural communities. The first article is a conceptual paper that unpacks the four tenets of critical race quantitative intersectionality (CRQI). The second article is a quantitative study that operationalizes CRQI to examine Black girls' perceptions of climate. The third article is a qualitative study that centers the voices of Black girls to share solutions for improving the relationship between Black girls and schools in rural communities. Mental health and bullying are areas where both articles align indicating experiential and practical significance for Black girls. Conversely, discipline was an area where both articles diverge. According to the EDSCLS, Black girls' perceptions of discipline, on average, are favorable. However, the qualitative study revealed the challenges Black girls faced with the enforcement of dress code policies. Based on the overall findings from this study, policy and practice recommendations are offered.

*keywords:* Black girls, rural communities, school climate

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# Chapter 1

## Pre-Articles Introduction

**Racial Tensions in South Jersey Schools**

In June 2020, Franklinville, NJ, received national media attention for counter-protesters mocking the murder of George Floyd. In front of the backdrop of Trump support banners, American flags, police support flags strung up on pickup trucks and a handmade "All Lives Matter" sign posted against firewood stacks, one white[1] man laid on the ground while another kneeled on his neck and yelled at protesters, "If you don't comply, that's what happens." This occurred during a peaceful protest led by a young, Black woman who is an activist in Franklinville, NJ, a town in Southern Jersey with a small Black population. In its news report on the story, NBC10 Philadelphia quoted her saying, "It automatically brought me to tears. The display yesterday showed me that racism is real, racism is alive, it's right next door to you." (NBC10Staff & Long, 2020, Paragraph 12)

The opening event is evidence of the antiBlack climate in South Jersey. Dumas (2016) explained antiBlackness as the dehumanization of Black people. It is in these spaces that Black families face acute challenges to their everyday life and existence, as evidenced in the quote above. For students, of course, a key component of everyday life involves schooling. With education and schooling as sites of antiBlackness, Dumas (2016) describes antiBlackness in education as:

The presumed ineducability of Black children, the normalization and justification

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[1] In alignment with the Associated Press, I do not capitalize white in this dissertation. See https://www.ap.org/ap-in-the-news/2020/ap-says-it-will-capitalize-black-but-not-white

of Black suffering in schools, the need to contain and discipline Black bodies,

knowledges, and desires, the "doing" of education policy on Black children and

families, as one might experiment on rats and primates (2016b, p. 9).

Boutte and Bryan (2019) categorized five types of antiBlack violence Black children

suffer in schools as physical, symbolic, linguistic, curricular and pedagogical, and

systemic, all of which result in the dehumanization of Black students (Caldera, 2020).

The schools in the South Jersey area have also been sites for numerous racialized

events. In July 2020, Haddonfield High School reordered yearbooks after discovering

students displaying the white power symbol in a photo (Burney, 2020). Just two years

before, in 2018, a boys' lacrosse player at Haddonfield used a racial slur against a Black

female athlete from another school (Burney & Anatasia, 2018). In January 2018, at

Buena Regional High School, a Black high school wrestler was forced to cut his

dreadlocks at a wrestling match (Stubbs, 2019). In October 2017, at Washington

Township High School, racist text messages led to a fight in a school hallway and a

daylong sit-in (Gray, 2017). These are just a few examples of the racial tension within

schools, in predominantly white communities, that received media attention in South

Jersey. Of course, there are multiple other destructive and dehumanizing incidents that

Black students endure at school that never make the news. With America's reawakening

to racial justice, racialized incidents have received more local and national attention.

**Discipline and New Jersey Schools**

New Jersey's discipline policies and practices reveal racism against Black

students. *The New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE) Annual Report* (2019) on

student discipline showed an alarming increase in student suspensions with a continued

disproportionate impact on Black students: 9 percent of all Black students in New Jersey public schools were suspended at some point during the school year, compared to less than 3 percent of white students. In 2018-2019, 8.9 percent of Black students were suspended from school on at least one occasion, representing a 1 percent increase from the previous year. In addition to the disparity in student discipline between Black and white students, the impact is worsening for Black students.

The report does not provide an intersectional analysis of discipline data. Meaning, data was reported by singular categories such as race or gender. An example of an intersectional analysis would include data reported by race/racism, gender/sexism, and ability/ableism and address the systems of oppression associated with the social locations. In fact, in response to the alarming but limited statistics, the Education Law Center (ELC) and the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey (ACLU-NJ) recommended more transparency and detail in the public reporting on student discipline and safety. Specifically, ELC and ACNJ have called on the NJDOE to:

- Disaggregate the public reports of school safety and discipline by race, gender, and disability;
- Publicly report the number and type of law enforcement officers deployed in school districts, as well as the funding source for each school resource officer (SRO) employed by the district;
- Create a public, statewide repository of all agreements signed by school districts with local law enforcement agencies;
- Adopt rules governing the expenditure of the nearly $300 million in categorical "security aid" distributed annually through the School Funding Reform Act

(SFRA), including prohibition of the use of such aid to hire police officers and

instead promote research-based practices to improve school safety and climate.

(Education Law Center, 2020)

School discipline disproportionately impacting Black students is not unique to New

Jersey. We know from educational research that school discipline is a national problem

that is both raced and gendered (Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2016; Wun, 2018).

**Black Girls' Schooling Experiences**

Nationally, Black girls are subjected to harsh discipline based on teachers' and

school leaders' negative perceptions of Black girls. One common perception is that Black

girls have a bad attitude (Morris, 2016). In a 2-year ethnographic study of public,

predominantly Black, neighborhood middle school, Morris (2007) found that discipline

stemmed from teachers' perceptions of Black girls as challenging to authority, loud, and

not ladylike. Morris (2016) unpacks this perception when she recalled how a school

leader stated, "Our babies [Black girls] can be snappy" (p. 59). This statement suggests

that Black girls are biting and provocative and that the questions they ask and tones they

use in class are perceived to be a problem. Often, Black girls are removed from the

classroom due to perceptions about their attitude which leads to negative schooling

experiences (Morris, 2016).

Black girls face a plethora of challenges in their schooling experiences based on

their race and gender. These challenges include but are not limited to negative perception

of Black girls (Morris, 2007), adultification (Epstein et al., 2017), the policing of Black

girls' appearance (Morris, 2016), and zero-tolerance and other punitive discipline policies

(Morris, 2016; Skiba & Peterson, 2000), all of which have led to the criminalization of

Black girls. In the following paragraphs, I will unpack how each challenge impacts Black girls, their perception of self, their schooling experiences, and their life outcomes by creating harmful experiences through devaluation, dehumanization, and for some, criminalization.

*Adultification*

Adultification is a social and cultural stereotype that is based on how adults perceive children as more adultlike in the absence of knowledge about children's behavior and verbalizations (Burton, 2007). The adultification of Black girls robs them of their childhood, a space and time when human beings are meant to play, experiment, and make mistakes. Critically, the adultification of Black girls can lead to harsher punishments for them at school and a lack of protection and support from teachers and school leaders (Morris, 2016).

This adultification of Black girls can begin when Black girls are as young as five years old (Epstein et al., 2017). Even as they begin Kindergarten, negative perceptions of Black girls are far-reaching as. In *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*, the Georgetown University Law School (2017) found that compared to white girls in their same-age peer group, Black girls are perceived to need less nurturing and less protection, they are perceived as needing less support and comfort while being more independent, and needing to know more about more know more about adult topics, like sexual behavior. The disciplining of Black girls' hair and clothing is a dominant topic within the conversation of the adultification of Black girls. Black hair is a key feature of Black culture; however, Black girls are often disciplined for their hairstyles in school. Recent events around the country include charter students being punished for braided hair

extensions (CBS News, 2017), a third-grader pulled out of class for her "frohawk" (Prekins, 2016); and a Black girl being removed from class because of a hair product she used (Kelleher, 2010). These incidents are evidence of the gendered, racialized experiences Black girls endure at school and how their hair is vilified and policed in schools much differently than other students.

Similarly, Black girls' bodies and clothing are deemed a distraction, or violation of school dress codes, and as a result, turned away from school. Barrett (2018) has written how Black girls in Baltimore City Public School are the group of students most frequently dress coded -- double discrimination. One student explained that her white friends rarely get sent to the office, but her Black friends do quite often. Punishments such as these are grounded in hypersexualization, a component of adultification, and respectability. The hypersexualization of Black girls' bodies reinforces negative stereotypes of Black women related to sexuality (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2022 ) and respectability politics communicate that socialization is more important than education (Harris, 2014). Schools are able to penalize and/or turn away Black girls and other students because of zero-tolerance discipline policies that were intended to address weapons on campus (Gun Free Schools Act, 1994) (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2022).

### *Zero Tolerance Policies*

In the 1990s, zero tolerance policies were written into school handbooks to deter gun violence in schools by cracking down on minor violations. This idea stemmed from the "broken windows" theory of policing, developed by criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). They claimed that crime is a disorder that if controlled early on, an individual will be less likely to commit a more serious crime

later on in life. As a result, schools and districts implemented harsh punishments such as suspension and expulsion for behavior ranging from bringing any weapon to school to willful defiance.

Statistics and research has shown that zero tolerance policies disproportionately affect Black girls. In 2000, Black girls represented about 16% of the student population, but 34% of out-of-school suspensions among girls (Morris, 2016). In 2006, Black girls represented 43% of out-of-school suspensions among girls. In 2009, Black girls represented 52% of multiple out-of-school suspensions. Evidence since 2000 shows that the harsh discipline of Black girls has remained alarming and disproportionate. Given the national findings regarding Black girls and school discipline, one may wonder what the rates are at the state-level.

**Black Students in White Suburban and Rural Communities**

According to an analysis by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA (2017), New Jersey is the sixth most segregated state for Black students, and yet it is also ranked the number one best state for education (US News). In detail, almost 25% of New Jersey schools are segregated, with student enrollment more than 90% white or more than 90 percent students of color (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2017). In spite of New Jersey's urban geography, there are largely suburban and rural areas throughout the state with largely white populations. While most Black and Brown students attend segregated schools in urban areas such as Camden, Newark, and Trenton, some Black and Brown students attend schools in the mostly white suburban and rural communities. The literature on racial and ethnic educational inequality focuses mostly on Black and Brown students in urban communities. Given the literature, educational researchers should engage in

humanizing research with Black students in all spaces they occupy, such as suburban and rural communities (Lewis-McCoy, 2018).

**School Climate**

The National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (2022) states:

> A positive school climate is the product of a school's attention to fostering safety; promoting a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community no matter the setting from pre-k/elementary school to higher education.

According to the Safe and Supportive Schools Model, developed by a national panel of researchers and other experts, positive school climate involves:

- Engagement: Strong relationships between students, teachers, families, and schools and strong connections between schools and the broader community.

- Safety: Schools and school-related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying, harassment, and controlled-substance use.

- Environment: Appropriate facilities, well-managed classrooms, available school-based health supports, and a clear, fair disciplinary policy. (The National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2022).

These components are supported by existing literature and considered to be key components of school climate (Thapa et al., 2013).

Although school climate has been investigated for many decades, only recently have researchers focused on Black students due to the findings that Black students have

less positive experiences and perceptions of school climate (Smith et al., 2020). In a review of school climate research, Thapa et al. (2013) confirmed that race and ethnicity were important factors in explaining perceptions of school climate. However, there was little to no mention of Black girls, specifically, in this review. Most recently, in the only study to focus on Black students' perceptions of school climate, Smith et al. (2020) explored gender differences in the relationship between cultural pluralism (appreciation for and encouragement of cultural diversity), racial identity, and school climate specific to Black students. Black boys were found to be more sensitive to the schooling context due to their racial identity status compared to Black girls. Smith et al. (2020) suggested that Black girls' receipt of more socialization messages that focus on cultural pride may create a more resilient sense of group identity; however, the measure of cultural pluralism in this study did not use language that captured gender-related diversity. These findings indicate a need for more intersectional research.

As it stands, one study focused on the need for reframing school climate through a womanist worldview in order to best support Black girls (Edwards, 2020). In their scholarship, Edwards (2020) provides some insight into Black girls' perceptions of school climate. More attention, however, must be given to the challenges and solutions concerning Black girls' perception of school climate in rural communities.

**Purpose**

Local and national context, along with some educational research, indicate the racialized and gendered challenges Black girls are facing in schools. Although there has been an increase in research centered on Black girls' schooling experiences, few studies investigate the realities Black girls face in rural communities. This lack of research

provides an opportunity for continued exploration. Equally important, if not more so, is the methodological move of positioning Black girls as the experts to guide support for Black girls in school. Accordingly, the aim of this three-article dissertation is to deepen our understanding of Black girls' schooling experiences in order to improve the climate in schools for Black girls in predominantly white, rural communities.

**Overview of Articles**

- *Article 1 - It's the Focus on Meaningful Numbers for Me: Exploring Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality in School Psychology Research*

The first article in this series is a conceptual paper. In it, I unpack the four tenets of critical race quantitative intersectionality (CRQI). CRQI (Covarrubias & Velez, 2013) which is the theoretical and methodological lens used to understand the complexity of inequities related to multiple intersecting forms of subordination (e.g. racism and sexism) affecting students of color.

- *Article 2 - It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Schools for Me: Perceptions of Climate*

The second article is a quantitative study that operationalizes CRQI to examine Black girls' perceptions of climate.

- *Article 3 - It's the Focus on Listening to Black Girls for Me: Exploring the Climate in Schools in Rural Communities*

The third article is a qualitative study that centers the voices of Black girls and women to share solutions for improving the relationship between Black girls and schools in rural communities.

Together, the three articles will identify key areas to focus on to create a safe and

supportive climate in schools for Black girls. Below, I briefly describe each article in this series.

### *Article 1 - It's the Focus on Meaningful Numbers for Me: Exploring Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality in School Psychology Research*

The field of school psychology plays a key role in producing knowledge that informs practice on issues impacting students of color. The research that guides practice must advance equity and justice in school psychology. In this paper I explore the application of critical race quantitative intersectionality (CRQI), a critical race methodology into the field of school psychology. CRQI can serve as a theoretical and methodological approach that offers a more appropriate and accurate picture of intersecting forms of subordination (e.g. racism and sexism) affecting students of color. The paper first conceptualizes and describes the tenets of CRQI and then explores its origins in critical race theory and intersectionality. I conclude with key considerations for researchers who would like to operationalize CRQI in school psychology research.

I submitted Article 1 to the *School Psychology Review, Special Topic Section - Theory, Methods, and Practice to Advance Equity and Justice in School Psychology* on January 18, 2021. This work aligns with the aim and scope of the journal as it provides a theoretical and methodological examination of how scholars can integrate intersectionality, social justice, and antiracism into school psychology scholarship. Much of the literature on school climate comes from the field of school psychology. Later, I was invited to revise and resubmit which I will complete this fall.

*Article 2 - It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Schools for Me: Perceptions of*

*Climate*

School climate is a broad, multifaceted concept that involves many aspects of the student's educational experience. Nationally, Black girls face a plethora of challenges in their schooling experiences based on their race and gender. As outlined in the introduction, in recent years, South Jersey schools and communities have been the site for a number of racialized incidents which has shifted administrations' focus towards being anti-racist in climate/culture, curriculum, and community. In this study, I examine Black girls' perceptions of school climate in rural communities and if their perceptions change over two academic school years with the intent to illuminate the realities of Black girls. Through the lens of critical race quantitative intersectionality, this study takes an intersectional approach to investigate the key areas of school climate (engagement, safety, and environment). Outcomes from this secondary data analysis of the US Department of Education School Climate Survey (EDSCLS) will include identifying key areas for improvement in order to create more safe and supportive school climates for Black girls.

*Article 3 - It's the Focus on Listening to Black Girls for Me: Exploring the Climate in*

*Schools in Rural Communities*

In *It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Schools for Me: Perceptions of Climate*, I identified key areas within the school climate that need improvement in order to provide a more safe and supportive environment for Black girls. As a result, the final article in this study aims to add depth to understanding how Black girls describe and experience school climate in rural communities. Additionally, this study centers the voices of Black

girls and their ways of knowing how to address the climate in their schools and communities. Using Black Feminist/Womanist Research as the guiding theoretical framework, this critical qualitative inquiry will create space for Black girls to share their individual and collective schooling experiences and make connections to place, race, and gender. Findings from this study will lend weight to *Article 1* and complement the findings from *Article 2* and explain what a positive school climate would look and feel like for Black girls.

**Dissertation Format**

Table 1.1, on the following page, provides an overview of all three articles for this project.

**Significance**

While there is a significant body of research on student perceptions of school climate, very few studies focus entirely on Black girls. In fact, Smith et al. (2020) expressed a need for intersectional understanding of Black youth. Studies that do focus on Black girls are either quantitative or qualitative. This study is a response to the call for more intersectional research centering on Black youth and the only study to my knowledge that takes a mixed-method approach. Findings from this project have the potential to help practitioners to have a complete understanding of what a positive school climate would look and feel like for Black girls which would also improve school climate for all students (Schneider & Duran, 2010).

**Table 1.1**

*Overview of Three Articles*

| Article | Theory | Research Questions | Methodology |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 - It's the Focus on Meaningful Numbers for Me: Exploring Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality in School Psychology Research | Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality | Literature Review | Conceptual |
| 2 - It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Schools for Me: Perceptions of Climate | Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality | What perceptions of climate do Black girls have about the schools they attend in rural communities?<br><br>How, if at all, have their perceptions changed from academic years 2019-2020 to 2020-2021? | Critical<br><br>Mixed Methods Research<br><br>Sequential Explanatory Quantitative<br><br>Complementarity<br><br>Methods: Descriptive statistics, Repeated MANOVA |
| 3 - It's the Focus on Listening to Black Girls for Me: Exploring the Climate in Schools in Rural Communities | Black Feminist/Womanist | How do Black girls understand and experience the climate of their schools and communities?<br><br>How do Black girls want schools to better connect with and support Black girls in rural communities? | Generic qualitative inquiry<br><br>Methods: Three interview series |

This project addresses current research gaps in a number of ways. Although the body of research about Black girls has grown, it primarily focuses on Black girls and school discipline in urban communities (e.g., Annamma et al., 2019; Watson, 2016). My dissertation project builds on the literature by providing an analysis of Black girls' schooling experiences beyond school discipline policies and practices. I offer an examination of the racialized and gendered schooling experiences of Black girls in their entirety. Furthermore, in order to better understand the state of Black girls in all the spaces they occupy, this study focuses on predominantly white rural schools and communities.

Methodologically, this study is innovative in its approach to producing knowledge *with* Black girls. In articles 1 and 2, I conceptualize and apply critical quantitative methods which have been considered incompatible with critical theory. CRQI is a relatively new theoretical and methodological approach, and, therefore, only a few scholars have employed it in their research. In fact, only one critical quantitative study (e.g. Young and Cunningham, 2020), in name, has focused on Black girls. My study will contribute to the as-yet limited amount of scholarship that use critical quantitative methods and serve as another model for applying CRQI. Article 3 uses qualitative methods to center knowledge production by the people being represented in the numbers to make meaning. Taken together, the scholarship in this study asserts experiential and statistical significance as equally important.

**Summary of Dissertation**

So far, I have provided background information framing this project in a local and national context. In the national context, I have explained Black girls' schooling

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experiences and their perceptions of school climate. In the local context, I have explained the racial tension and school discipline in South Jersey schools. Given the local and national challenges and limited research centering Black girls, I discussed the aim of this project which is to deepen understanding of Black girls' perceptions of school climate. I have explained how I plan to accomplish the aim of the project by summarizing my dissertation format. In the next section, I will explain the methods for this project.

**Methods**

Local and national context, alongside educational research, indicate the racialized and gendered challenges Black girls face in schools. Although there has been an increase in research centered on Black girls' schooling experiences, few studies investigate the realities Black girls face in rural communities. Equally important is positioning Black girls as the experts to guide support for Black girls in school. Accordingly, the aim of this three-article dissertation is to deepen our understanding of Black girls' schooling experiences to improve the climate in schools for Black girls in rural communities.

*Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework at work in this study combines Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality (CRQI) and Black Feminist-Womanist (BFW) research to illuminate the racialized and gendered schooling experiences of Black girls in rural communities. In the following sections, I explain each aspect of this conceptual framework and then provide a rationale for its use in this study.

**CRQI.** Drawing on Critical Race Theory and intersectionality, CRQI uses numbers as anti-racist praxis to address how quantitative approaches are used to categorize, objectify, and dehumanize communities of Color (Covarrubias et al., 2019).

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Covarrubias and Velez (2013) define critical race quantitative intersectionality (CRQI) as:

> An explanatory framework and methodological approach that utilizes quantitative methods to account for the material impact of race and racism at its intersection with other forms of subordination and works toward identifying and challenging oppression at this intersection in hopes of achieving social justice for students of color, their families, and their communities. (p. 276)

There are four major tenets to CRQI: 1) disrupting dominant data mining - toward an intersectional approach, 2) numbers do not speak for themselves, 3) experientially and materially grounding data, 4) commitment to the structural transformation of intersectional subordination.

CRQI engages all of the tasks that quantitative criticalists take up. Stage & Wells (2014) explained that quantitative criticalists engage in one or more of the following tasks:

- Using data to represent educational processes and outcomes on a large scale to reveal inequities and to identify social or institutional perpetuation of systematic inequalities in such processes and outcomes;

- Questioning the models, measures, and outcomes; and

- Conducting culturally relevant research by studying institutions and people in context. (p. 2-3)

The overall goal is to shrink the gap between equity-minded research and policy. CRQI is a relatively new theoretical and methodological approach; however, there are a few examples operationalizing CRQI (e.g. Van Dusen & Nissen, 2020). For example, Van

Dusen & Nissen (2020) examined the intersectional nature of race/racism and gender/sexism in physics students learning using CRQI and provided a more complete picture of the experiences of students from marginalized groups through the use of two different measures of equity in the analysis.

**Black Feminist-Womanist Research.** Black Feminist-Womanist (BFW) research, informed by Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and Womanism (Phillips, 2006), is a culturally relevant research model focused on Black girls. Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* (1990) empowers and positions Black girls as the experts about their own individual and collective lives which are shaped by intersecting oppressive forces. The four key tenets of Black Feminist Thought are (a) concrete experience as a criterion for meaning, (b) use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, (c) an ethic of care, and (d) an ethic of responsibility.

Similar to Black Feminist Thought, the central tenet of Womanism is the necessity of speaking from and about one's experiential location (Phillips and McCaskill, 1995). Womanism seeks to use the everyday experiences of Black girls to solve problems and end all forms of oppression. Together, Black Feminist Thought and Womanism, provide a strength-based approach for examining and centering Black girls.

BFW responds to the urgent need for a theoretical framework that serves to expose, confront, and eradicate race, class, and gender oppression in our families, communities, and schools (Evans-Winters & Espositio, 2010, p. 22). Lindsay-Dennis (2015, p. 511) defines BFW as a culturally congruent model to guide studies about Black girls. This theoretical framework understands that Black girls do not develop in a vacuum and, therefore, contextualizes Black girls in their community and society in order to best

examine Black girls' perceptions and behaviors as outputs related to their worldview and experiences (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015, p. 511). Based on the BFW perspective, the researcher understands the importance of positionality and reflexivity in research about Black girls. Thus, the researcher relies on personal responsibility, self-awareness, and high commitment to ensure that the research about and with Black girls is authentic and accurate. BFW research allows for the consideration of intersectionality and metaphysical aspects of Black girls and demonstrates a commitment to social change and community building.

### Conceptual Framework Rationale

The conceptual framework in this study combines CRQI and BFW research to ground the experiences and outcomes of Black girls in a culturally relevant, strength-based way. First, both CRQI and BFW center experiential knowledge; this project centers Black girls by providing space for them to reflect on their ideas, speak for themselves, name their own experiences, and make decisions about what they would like to see in their own schools. Placing Black girls at the center of research requires the use of innovative methods which this study achieves. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to provide an enriched understanding of Black girls' perceptions and school experiences.

Second, the conceptual framework of this study allows me to situate the analysis of Black girls' schooling experiences alongside the historical and contemporary oppression within education and society. CRQI and BFW offer critical approaches for examining the intersection of race/racism and gender/sexism in rural schools. While the quantitative analysis will reveal patterns, the qualitative analysis will add voice to the

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numbers. Equally important to mention is that although commonalities among Black girls may exist, this does not equate to universal truths about Black girls (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015, p. 516). The project makes room for varied responses and strengths of Black girls.

Third, the goal of this project is to add voices behind numbers to activate change in rural communities in the northeast region. I use CRQI and BFW to examine our racialized and gendered education system as the approaches 1) foreground race/racism and gender/sexism in the research, 2) privilege the racialized and gendered experiences of Black girls, and 3) offer empowering research methods. Not only does this study identify features of the problems with schools, but it also identifies the solution as seen by Black girls.

**Guiding Paradigm**

This study used pragmatism as the guiding paradigm for the mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Pragmatism is helpful for determining practical solutions and meanings (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006) which aligns with this study's aim to deepen understanding and provide solutions for improving Black girls' schooling experiences. This study centers on the pragmatic, complementary approach for the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to combine the advantages and disadvantages present within each methodology (Shannon-Baker, 2016, p. 325). The complementarity is seen in the quantitative survey, followed by a qualitative focus group.

Morgan (2007) explained that a valuable contribution of pragmatism is the importance of epistemology and the centrality of one's worldview for their research. Given such, pragmatism is an appropriate paradigm to guide this research focused on Black girls' ways of knowing. This can be seen in the conceptual framework combining

both CRQI and BFW research and research design. To address the connection between theory and data, using pragmatism allows me to use "abduction and move back and forth between induction and deduction" (Morgan, 2007, p. 71). In my study, the observations from the quantitative approach will inform the questions for the interviews and focus groups.

**Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are Black girls' perceptions of climate in their rural schools?

2. How, if at all, have their perceptions changed from academic years 2019-2020 to 2020-2021?

3. How do Black girls understand the climate of their schools and communities?

4. How do Black girls want schools to better connect with and support Black girls in rural communities?

**Procedure: Mixed-Methods Sequential Explanatory Design**

This study employed Mixed Methods Research (MMR) to explore Black girls' schooling experience and perceptions of school climate. Donna Mertens (Johnson et al., 2007), a leader in MMR, stated the following:

> Mixed methods research, when undertaken from a transformative stance, is the use of qualitative and quantitative methods that allow for the collection of data about historical and contextual factors, with special emphasis on issues of power that can influence the achievement of social justice and avoidance of oppression (p. 120).

This definition best describes how I use MMR in this project. To meet the aims of this research project, MMR was used to gain a deeper understanding of Black girls' schooling experiences. In order to accomplish this, I situated Black girls in their historical and local/national context; this can only be appropriately done by addressing systems of oppression. The project recognizes Black girls and their ways of knowing through both quantitative and qualitative methods. My understanding of social justice is that it is both a process and a goal. Together, both definitions capture the process and the goal of this MMR project.

The process of this MMR project follows a sequential explanatory design where I first collected and analyzed quantitative data, the findings from which informed the qualitative data collection and analysis (Ivankova et al., 2006). For this study, the quantitative phase examined survey data about perceptions of school climate, followed by interviews and focus groups in the qualitative phase.

*Tension*

I acknowledge that combining quantitative and qualitative approaches can be tenuous; especially, in the area of accomplishing research goals. Quantitative research seeks numerical descriptions, causal explanations, and predictions, while qualitative research seeks subjective descriptions, understanding, and exploration (Johnson & Christensen, 2017, p. 34). I approach this study seeking to provide fuller explanations and understanding as I see value in providing different sorts of knowledge and multiple perspectives about Black girls' perceptions of climate.

*Context*

This project will be situated in a research-practice partnership (RPP) between a

research lab and three school districts in the northeast region (Coburn et al, 2013). The research lab engages in RPPs that support school districts in understanding and implementing policies and practices that can promote equity and contribute to the larger understanding of the practice of systemic change in educational systems (Zion, 2020). School districts come to the research lab wanting to engage in equity work either after a serious incident occurs (reactively) or seeking a deeper understanding of what it means to be an equitable school before such incidents occur (proactively). While the districts come to the RPP for different reasons, they all seek to gain the skills needed to take action to shift their school districts towards equity, by focusing on people, policies, and practices. Recently, districts have made clear their goals embody anti-racist climates, cultures, curriculum, and community while addressing students' learning needs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Research Sites**

I chose three predominantly white school districts as the sites for this study. They have been engaged in a PEER RPP for between 1 and 4 years. In the fall of 2020, two districts began their fourth year and one in its second year of partnership. All three school districts have a student population that ranges between 1,600 to 2,100 with about 8 to 23 percent Black and 60 to 80 percent white student population. See Table 1.2 for the school demographic information.

**Table 1.2**

*School Demographics*

| School | Number of Students | % of FRL | Race/Ethnicity |
|---|---|---|---|
| Asbury Middle School | 563 | 29% | Black 8% Hispanic 9% Two or More Races 6% white 77% |
| Belair Middle School | 236 | 16% | Black 8% Hispanic 8% Two or More Races 8% white 73% |
| Carmichael Middle School | 505 | 21% | Black 23% Hispanic 10% Two or More Races 8% white 55% |

**Participants**

For the quantitative analysis, the primary subject population was 90 Black girls in 2020 and 63 Black girls in 2021, enrolled in three predominantly white middle schools in southern New Jersey. Total population sampling was used given that the population of interest is clearly defined. The advantage of this sampling method is that it eliminates the risk of biased sample selection.

For the qualitative analysis, eleven Black girls that completed the survey participated in the study, which is about 17% of the survey sample and represents diverse perspectives from each school. The girls who participated were selected based on recommendations from their school guidance counselors who were asked to identify

Black girls across the spectrum who will be willing to talk about their schooling experiences and have completed the survey. I held a virtual research interesting meeting at each school for the girls to hear me talk about the purpose of the study and answer any questions. The participants who returned their parent/guardian consent forms participated in the study.  Each participant received a $25 gift card for their participation.

**Quantitative Phase**

The goal of the quantitative phase is to examine Black girls' perceptions of school climate in rural communities and how perceptions have changed with the intent to illuminate the realities of Black girls. This secondary data analysis will examine anonymous ED School Climate Survey (EDSCLS) data from the participating schools in the years  2020 and 2021.

**Measurement Tool**

The ED School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS) are a suite of survey instruments being developed for schools, school districts, and states by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Through the EDSCLS, schools nationwide have access to survey instruments that will allow for the collection and reporting of school climate data across stakeholders at the local level. The surveys can be used to produce school-, district-, and state-level scores on various indicators of school climate from the perspectives of students, teachers and staff, principals, and parents and guardians. For the purpose of this study, student perceptions are the focus.

The EDSCLS consists of 73 items, including 7 demographic questions and 66 items measuring 12 topics in the 3 domains of Engagement, Safety, and Environment. The 7 demographic questions were changed to include questions that capture district

name, school name, and gender-expansive youth (students that do not identify with traditional gender roles). In addition to 'boy' and 'girl' as identity options, 'another not listed here' was added. All 66 topical items used a 4-point Likert response option scale. The number of items in each topic is shown in Table 1.3.

**Table 1.3**

*EDSCLS by Domain, Topic, and Item*

| Domain | Topic | Items |
|---|---|---|
| Engagement | Cultural and linguistic Competence | 5 items |
| | Relationships | 8 items |
| | School participation | 5 items |
| Safety | Emotional Safety | 7 items |
| | Physical Safety | 8 items |
| | Bullying/cyberbullying | 6 items |
| | Substance Abuse | 5 items |
| | Emergency readiness/management | 2 items |
| Environment | Physical environment | 5 items |
| | Instructional environment | 5 items |
| | Mental health | 5 items |
| | Discipline | 5 items |

**Descriptive Statistics**

I used descriptive statistics to organize, summarize and make sense of the survey data about school climate from the perspective of Black girls. In addition to reporting the measure of central tendency, I report measures of variability. This includes the mean and standard deviation.

Scale scores are the primary metric used by the EDSCLS to measure school climate. I used Cronbach's alpha to assess the reliability of the scale scores and items. A scale score combines data for multiple survey items that measure the same topic area into one, creating a more robust measure of a topic area than looking at the data for individual items separately. I computed a scale score for each topic area by averaging respondents. After examining the scale scores, I performed an item-level analysis to dig deeper into the data to target specific areas. Item-level analysis results can reveal concrete examples of the underlying topic that may be actionable. The item-level informed the development of the interview protocol. For example, survey items with the lowest and highest means were turned into survey questions.

Means will be used to gauge the degree to which respondents agree or disagree with the items or topic area. Because all the response options are on a scale of 1-4 (where 1 is less favorable and 4 is more favorable), I will think of the favorability of the item. A mean less than the benchmark of 2.5 would indicate that there are more unfavorable responses, on average, suggesting that the item or topic area is perceived as relatively unfavorable. In contrast, a mean of more than 2.5 would indicate more favorable than unfavorable responses, on average, suggesting that the item or topic is perceived as relatively favorable. A mean of 2.5 indicates equal favorability, suggesting that perceptions are neutral.

**Repeated Measures MANOVA**

Repeated measures Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) were utilized to assess changes in perceptions of school climate over time. Using a MANOVA design is useful in order to avoid a Type I error, also known as alpha level inflation (Meyer et

al., 2016, p. 769). Multicollinearity and Homogeneity of Variance were checked for

assumptions. For Multicollinearity, MANOVAs should not be used with a set of

dependent variables that are highly correlated (.70 or higher). Ideally, dependent

variables should be moderately correlated. Weinfurt (1995) suggests a range between .21

and .36, but Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) suggest a range in the .60s. For Homogeneity

of Variance, Box's M Test is used to assess the homogeneity of the variance-covariance

matrices. It is assumed that the variances and correlations (covariances) of the dependent

variables are comparable. If the Box's M is statistically significant, then the assumption

has been violated. Wilks' lambda will be used to assess the statistical significance of

results and eta squared ($\eta^2$) values will be used to provide effect size (Tabachnick &

Fidell, 2007). After interpreting statistical significance, I will turn to prior literature for

practical significance. All analysis will be performed using the SPSS software package.

An a priori analysis was conducted to determine the sample size requirements for

this repeated measures MANOVA with 13 outcomes across 2 groups. In order to estimate

medium effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.3$), this analysis will require at least 50 participants to

achieve an 80% power.

*Missing Data*

Missing value analysis will be conducted to ensure that all missing data are

missing at random. Only outcome variables that have data missing at random will be

included in analyses.

*Outcome Variables*

The outcome variables are student perceptions on 12 topics in the 3 domains of

Engagement, Safety, and Environment.

*Independent Variable*

The independent variable is the year and will be coded as 2020 and 2021.

**Qualitative Phase**

In the second qualitative phase, I used a generic qualitative inquiry to understand how Black girls in rural communities describe their schooling experiences as racialized and/or gendered. Generic qualitative inquiry investigates individuals' reports of their opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences (Percy et al., 2015). I selected this methodological approach given that the EDSCLS survey provided pre-knowledge/pre-understandings about Black girls' perceptions of school climate. Generic qualitative inquiry supports an investigation to more fully describe school climate from the perspective of Black girls.

For this phase, I purposefully selected eleven Black girls that completed the survey to capture diverse perceptions from each school. To provide an in-depth and contextualized understanding of Black girls' schooling experiences, I used Seidman's (2006) three interview series. According to Seidman (2006), the first interview establishes the context of the participants' experiences; the second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs and the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. Specifically, I used the first interview to get to know the participants as individuals, the second interview to dig deeper into their schooling experiences, and the third interview to facilitate a collective meaning of Black girls' experiences and discuss solutions to improve their schooling experiences. It is important to reiterate that the

protocols for the second and third interviews were informed by my quantitative analyses and the prior interviews.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. In order to identify salient themes and patterns, I conducted two cycles of coding. The first cycle of coding involved two parts - open coding (Charmaz, 2014) and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014). To explore the data and honor the participants' schooling experiences, I used open coding to break down the data into discrete excerpts and reflect on the contents and nuances of the data (Saldana, 2016, p. 115). From the codes, I wrote analytic memos to reflect on the selected excerpts (Saldana, 2016, p. 44). Next, I used theoretical coding to make connections between BFW and what the participants explicitly stated and what I implicitly understood as connected to Black girls' racialized and gendered experiences. In the second cycle of coding, I completed a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to organize themes and offer insight about the data. Both cycles of coding were completed by working through hard copies of the transcripts with pens and highlighters.

The data, including audio recordings of interviews and transcripts, are protected and stored on a password-protected computer and University Google Drive account to ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, I engaged in member checks and critical self-reflection. Member checking requires that I discuss my interpretations and conclusions with the participants for verification, insight, and deeper understanding (Johnson & Christensen, 2017, p. 299). Member checking occurred during the second and third interviews when I presented the initial codes from the first and second interviews to the participants for their review. There were no changes made as a result of member checking.

Reflexivity requires that I examine my place in the research process through critical reflection (Parson, 2019, p. 26). My reflection process involved peer debriefing, an effective way of making the research process more transparent by motivating the researcher to document the evolution of a research study to a 'critical friend'. A critical friend is defined as a person who brings their own lens and experiences to probe and challenge the researcher to think deeper, provide evidence, and consider alternative explanations to their data (Stieha, 2014). In this context, I met with my critical friend and mentor, Dr. Chanelle Wilson, three times to discuss the research process. Dr. Wilson, a Black woman and critical scholar, provided a safe space for me to discuss issues I was having with the data and receive feedback.

**Integration**

Integration refers to the stage or stages in the research process where the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods occurs (Ivankova et al, 2006). In sequential explanatory design, the quantitative and qualitative phases are connected in the intermediate stage when the data of the analysis in the quantitative, first phase of the study informs the data collection in the qualitative, second phase. The connecting point in this project is the development of the qualitative data collection protocol which is based on the results from the quantitative, first phase, to explore those results more in-depth through a phenomenological inquiry in the qualitative, second phase of the study. Specifically, the domains and survey items with the most negative and positive perceptions from the EDSCLS survey informed the development of the interview protocol for the second interview in the three interview series. The second interview will

focus on the details of the participants' experiences within the context in which it occurs. In this case, the survey identified topics that should be further investigated.

Although this project will be written and published as two separate studies, my dissertation will include a discussion of the outcomes of the entire research project. In the Discussion section, I combine results from the quantitative and qualitative analyses to describe the schooling experiences of Black girls in rural communities in South Jersey. Not only will I identify challenges with school climate, but I will also share solutions for addressing these challenges. Lastly, I presented the findings of this research project to the participating schools.

Here, I acknowledge that visualizing MMR can be difficult when described only in sentences and paragraphs, Table 1.4 is a graphical representation of the mixed methods procedures used in this study.

**Boundaries**

From a quantitative standpoint, this study is bounded by sample size. In order to add more complexity to the analysis such as the influence of school and/or individual characteristics on Black girls' perceptions of school climate, the sample size would need to increase in order to meet adequate power. Future research can include a larger sample to improve rigor and generalizability. From a qualitative standpoint, this study does not include Black women as the participants. Womanism (Phillips & McCaskill, 2006) encourages researchers to examine intergenerational survival strategies such as mothering. The centering of Black women and girls in future research can triangulate their worldviews and experiences.

**Table 1.4**

*Sequential Explanatory Design Procedures*

| Timeline | Phase | Procedure | Product |
|---|---|---|---|
| January 2020 - March 2021 | Quantitative Data Collection | ● EDSCLS Survey | ● Numeric data |
| Late March 2021 | Quantitative Data Analysis | ● Multivariate<br>● MANOVA SPSS Software | ● Descriptive statistics<br>● Group means |
| April 2021 | Connecting Quantitative and Qualitative Phases | ● Purposely selecting 2 participants based on recommendation and survey completion<br>● Developing interview questions | ● Participants (n=11)<br>● Three interview series protocol |
| April 2021 | Qualitative Data Collection | ● Three interview series | ● Text data (interview and focus group transcript) |
| May 2021 | Qualitative Data Analysis | ● Theme development<br>● Dedoose | ● Codes and themes<br>● Similar and different themes and categories |
| June 2021 | Integration of the Quantitative and Qualitative Results | ● Interpretation and explanation of quantitative and qualitative results | ● Discussion<br>● Implications<br>● Future research<br>● Community presentation |

**Positionality**

To begin the process of considering my positionality, I start by identifying the salient aspects of my personal identity and the power and privilege embedded into the intersections of my identity. I am a Black Caribbean, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gender woman who is a mother to a six-year-old Black girl. To be clear, all of these identities shape my interest and responsibility to Black girls (Dillard, 2000).

*Insider/Outsider Status*

Adding to my personal positionality, I must navigate my insider/outsider status. Researchers are often insiders as members of certain groups they are exploring but simultaneously are outsiders by their status of researcher or academic (Wiederhold, 2015). This is the case for me as well. I'm a Black woman exploring the schooling experiences of Black girls: our shared race and gender help make me an insider, but as a researcher and adult I am clearly an outsider. This insider/outsider status is a place of power and privilege as a researcher that may present contradictions and conflicts throughout the research process.

*Professional and Academic Experiences and Assumptions*

Over the past ten years, I've been an educator in urban schools and communities. Most recently, in an administrative role, I've collected, analyzed, and used data to inform district-wide decisions. As one who has become intimate with district and state-wide data and also informed by critical theories such as critical race theory and intersectionality, I am frequently questioning if and where Black girls are represented in the data. Thus, when it comes to discussions about equity in schools, it is my belief that in order to address inequity, we must first identify where inequities exist.

Finally, I self-identify as a Black girl. Therefore, this project is personal for me as I care deeply about Black girls. I acknowledge my position and personal responsibility, as well as my self-awareness, to conduct research about/on/with Black girls that is rigorous and authentic (Collins, 2000).

**Chapter 2**

**It's the Focus on Meaningful Numbers for Me: Exploring Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality in School Psychology Research**

**Impact Statement**

The conceptual paper unpacks the four tenets of CRQI: 1) disrupting dominant data mining - toward an intersectional approach, 2) numbers do not speak for themselves, 3) grounding data experientially and materially, and 4) committing to the structural transformation of intersectional subordination. The purpose of CRQI is to challenge the stories quantitative research tells about students of color and their communities which are often incomplete, decontextualized, and deficit-based. Implications include points of consideration and application for researchers in the field of school psychology that wish to apply CRQI in their research.

**Introduction**

The field of school psychology plays an important role in education. School psychologists provide student- and system-level services to meet the academic, social, behavioral, and emotional needs of students (Professional Standards of the National Association of School Psychologist, 2020). At the student level, for example, school psychologists, in collaboration with other members of an interdisciplinary team, conduct assessments to determine students' need for special services, such as special education. At the system level, school psychologists help develop and maintain positive school climates and learning environments that support academic growth, academic engagement, and attendance, and reduce negative influences on learning and behavior. Knowledge of research design, statistics, measurement, and varied data collection and analysis

techniques is foundational for school psychologists and the services they provide in applied settings (Professional Standards of the National Association of School Psychologists, 2020).

The field of school psychology, having both scholars and practitioners, must be informed by quantitative research that is rooted in social justice. In fact, Parris et al. (2019) call for bringing social justice principles into school psychology research. This is important because the field plays a key role in several issues impacting students of color. The overrepresentation of students of color in special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002) and racial discipline disparities (Skiba, 2011) are just two examples where school psychologists serve as gatekeepers. If educators are serious about social justice being integral to school psychology practice and advocacy (Malone & Proctor, 2019), the research that guides practice at the student and system level must be a tool in the toolbox that advances equity and justice in school psychology.

**Problem**

The field of educational psychology has historically placed an emphasis on relatively homogeneous populations, theories, and methods (e.g., Nastasi et al., 2017). First, the people that have been traditionally represented in psychological research are from dominant groups, so called WEIRD (Western Educated Industrialized Rich and Democratic) populations, due to the ease of recruiting these participants (Arnett, 2008). Second, the dominant mode of knowledge production in school psychology is postpositivism (Levitt et al., 2018) which has been viewed as incompatible with critical theory (Sablan, 2018). Given such, social justice research is limited in the field of school psychology (Parris et al., 2019).

**Context**

Moreover, research in general and quantitative research in particular, has been used as a tool of oppression attempting to "prove" the intellectual and cultural inferiority of communities of color and obscure the reality of racism (Cokley & Awad, 2013, Gillborn, 2010). The bell curve, Tuskegee Syphilis Study, eugenics, and IQ testing are examples of scientific racism (Borish et al., 2020), what Taylor refers to as the use of science to support and justify racism against Black people by defining them as inferior beings (Taylor, 1981). Eugenics, specifically, informed education policies such as school segregation, a current issue in the US education system today (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019). Gillborn et al. (2018) argue that the numerical power of statistical findings "are assumed to report 'the facts'; they are seen as authoritative, neutral, dispassionate, and objective" (p.161). Consequently, the stories that are told about students of color and their communities are incomplete, decontextualized and deficit-based.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the application of critical race quantitative intersectionality (CRQI), a critical race methodology, into the field of school psychology. This paper argues that CRQI can serve as a theoretical and methodological approach that offers a more appropriate and accurate picture of intersecting identities affecting Black and Brown students. Given CRQI is a relatively new methodological perspective, in this paper I conceptualize CRQI and explore its origins in critical race theory and intersectionality, along with its  key tenets. This paper concludes with important

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considerations for researchers that would like to operationalize CRQI in school psychology research.

**Solution: Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality**

Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality (CRQI) is grounded in critical quantitative inquiry, which is the use of quantitative methods to examine equity issues toward social justice (Stage & Wells, 2014). Researchers who engage in critical quantitative inquiry, quantitative criticalists, engage in the use of quantitative methods to represent educational processes and outcomes to reveal inequities and to identify perpetuation of those that were systematic (Stage & Wells, 2014, p. 2). CRQI is best used to evolve our understanding of the material experiences and opportunity structures at the intersections of subordination.

CRQI uses numbers as anti-racist praxis to address how quantitative approaches are used to categorize, objectify, and dehumanize communities of Color (Covarrubias et al., 2019). Covarrubias and Velez (2013) define critical race quantitative intersectionality (CRQI) as:

> An explanatory framework and methodological approach that utilizes quantitative methods to account for the material impact of race and racism at its intersection with other forms of subordination and works toward identifying and challenging oppression at this intersection in hopes of achieving social justice for students of color, their families, and their communities. (p. 276)

In the next sections, I unpack the four key tenets to CRQI (to disrupt dominant data mining - toward an intersectional approach, acknowledge that numbers do not speak for

themselves, ground in material experiences, and commit the structural transformation of intersectional subordination).

### *Intersectional Data Mining*

CRQI challenges the use of singular analytic approaches that reduce people to essentialized and homogenizing units of larger social constructions that distribute power (Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013). Social constructions such as race and gender have been shaped over time to privilege certain groups with resources, status, and power over others. CRQI sees people as multidimensional and having relationships with other individuals, groups, and institutions (Covarrubias, 2011). The "intersection" is a real space shaped by and shaping the material conditions of the people who exist within it (Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013). For example, when Morris (2016) wrote about the criminalization of Black girls in schools, most of the prior literature on the school-to-prison pipeline had been written from the perspective of males, which obfuscated the ways that Black females and males experience this phenomenon similarly and differently (Morris, 2016, p. 9).

Jang (2018) and Covarrubias and Lara (2013) demonstrated how to use CRQI to examine multiple systems of power such as racism, sexism, and capitalism. For instance, Jang (2018) uses CRQI to name the patterns of structural inequality of Southeast Asian female students' educational outcomes as a result of multiple forms of oppression (race, ethnicity, gender, and class). For example, a key finding was that math achievement for Southeast Asian girls was not significantly different from their male counterparts; however, Southeast Asian girls' postsecondary aspirations are significantly lower than the Southeast Asian males.

Covarrubias and Lara (2013) used intersectional data mining, a critical methodology that calls for multidimensional analysis of power-based relationships, in response to prior studies' singular focus on race and educational outcome for Mexican-origin students. They used this method to bring forth the influences of citizenship, gender, and race on the educational outcomes of Mexican-origin students. Like Jang (2018), the examination revealed the nuanced educational experiences of undocumented Mexican students. These findings reveal the importance of intersectional analysis that identifies and challenges multiple barriers.

### *Numbers Do Not "Speak for Themselves"*

CRQI acknowledges that numbers are not neutral and they should be interrogated for their role in promoting deficit analyses that serve white racial interests (Gillborn et al., 2017). Numbers are framed by people who use them in ways that protect those in power or constructions that maintain privilege, like whiteness and masculinity. For example, the discourse around an "achievement gap" has enshrined the educational inferiority of Black and Brown students as inevitable and insurmountable. Rather than address structural problems, the definition of success for Black and Brown students is changed, reinscribing their failure as normal and natural (Power & Frandji, 2010). Numbers are meaningless without framing; thus, CRQI argues that quantitative analyses must be contextualized by critical theoretical frameworks to deconstruct traditional claims of neutrality and objectivity (Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013).

The problem with the achievement gap is that it rests on ahistorical quantitative analyses of dropout rates, test scores, college enrollment rates, and other measurements of success in schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Milner (2012) identifies four problems

with achievement gap explanations which are that they: 1) compare culturally diverse students to white students without considering the disparities in group differences, 2) center white students as the norm; thereby placing other racial and ethnic groups in an inferior position, 3) focus only on the shortcoming of students of color, and 4) ignore the racist and sexist systems, structures, social context, policies, and practices that are contributors to the perceived achievement gap. CRQI asserts that numbers can not speak for themselves. It exposes the investment in white supremacy that informs how ideas such as the achievement gap which are informed by quantitative analyses can be used to misrepresent marginalized groups. CRQI commits to unmasking the power dynamics that undergird quantitative analyses and how they're used to represent, measure, and rationalize.

Racial and ethnic categories as variables are not neutral (Gillborn et al., 2019) nor free of historic, economic, or political context. For example, Garcia and Mayorga (2018) found that educational researchers tend to collapse racial and ethnic groups into one 'Hispanic' category and report findings as one racially and ethnically homogenous group. For this reason, they analyzed the ways in which race/ethnicity is treated as an objective variable in the Higher Education Research Institution's home of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and The Freshman Survey (TFS). A close examination of the race/ethnicity variable on the TFS from 1965 to 2014 revealed how the conflation of race and ethnicity is a sociopolitical artifact, showing how the conflation of race and ethnicity has evolved over time (Garica et al., 2018, p. 246). Also, Jang (2018) found it important to examine the educational outcomes of Southeast Asian female students due to the homogeneous grouping of the Asian population into one group

which misses ethnic variations. Collectively, these studies demonstrate how and why the race/ethnicity variable cannot be decontextualized; the consequence is the misrepresentation of marginalized groups.

### *Grounded in the Experiential and Material Experiences of People of Color*

Framed in CRT, CRQI must be grounded in the experiential knowledge of those "at the bottom of the well" (Bell, 1992; Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013). According to Bell (1992):,

> Black people are the magical faces at the bottom of society's well. Even the
>
> poorest whites, those who must live their lives only a few levels above, gain their
>
> self-esteem by gazing down on us. Surely, they must know that their deliverance
>
> depends on letting down their ropes. Only by working together is escape possible.
>
> Over time, many reach out, but most simply watch, mesmerized into maintaining
>
> their unspoken commitment to keeping us where we are, at whatever cost to them
>
> or to us. (Dedication page)

The "bottom" is a fluid and relative position, thus CRQI seeks an intersectional analysis rather than one that is singularly focused on race or gender. This intersectional investigation calls for the inclusion of localized knowledge and collective memories that disrupt majoritarian stories (Covarrubias et. al, 2019).

CRQI asserts that experiential significance is equally as important as statistical significance in quantitative analyses. We have been taught that statistical significance, a $p$-value that is less than 0.05, is the gold standard in quantitative analyses (Servick, 2017) -- that a finding that is statistically significant is real and not due to chance. Statistical significance is narrowly framed whereas experiential significance is informed by other

ways of knowing. Experiential significance "is the magnitude of the measurement that is captured and assessed through the production of various qualitative methods that speak to the impact of the lived experiences of the people represented by otherwise impersonal numbers" (Covarrubias et al., 2019, p. 143).

Williams (2014) uses a strength-based framework for investigating STEM intervention efficacy that reflects experiential significance. In one study, she included a measure of extended family support because although Western tradition has narrowly defined family as married heterosexual couples,, many cultures define family in terms of biological and non-biological relationships (Reyes, 2002). This broader definition embraces more students and recognizes the magnitude of influence that not only parents, but grandparents, mentors, and significant others can have on student success (Denni et al., 2005). Thus, the findings in this study better reflect the experiences of the researched group. Also, experiential significance can come from sharing research findings with the community to receive feedback about what findings were meaningful and important for the community.

### *Commitment to Structural Transformation*

CRQI was developed to expose and transform structural inequities grounded in its commitment to social justice through critical inquiry and critical praxis (Covarrubias et al., 2019). Intersectionality cannot be disconnected from structural transformation nor viewed as a concept that encompasses mere identity or differences. Utt (2017, "Intersectionality as a Theory of Oppression" section) wrote that "Intersectionality isn't a theory of difference. It's a theory of oppression. And when we treat it simply as a way to understand our differences, we erase it's powerfully subversive critique." In light of

CRQI emerging from both CRT and intersectionality, a discussion of foundational

knowledge is critical.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged as a critique of stalled racial reform within

the United States legal arena (DeCuir et al., 2019). For example, although the purpose of

Brown v. Board (1954) was to end racial segregation in schools, many Black students

attend racially segregated schools or experienced forms of de facto segregation (e.g.,

tracking, barriers to honors enrollment, or gifted and talented identification, etc.).

Matsuda (1991) viewed critical race theory as:

> The work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a
>
> jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work
>
> toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms
>
> of subordination. (p. 1331)

The overarching purpose of CRT is to better understand how to change the relationship

between race and the law, in order to eradicate racism (Matsuda et al., 1993).

CRT has expanded from legal studies to many other disciplines including the field

of education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT as an analytic tool to

better focus on critical scholarship on racial justice in education. Now, CRT research

within K-12 has largely centered around the following topics: (1) curriculum and

pedagogy, (2) teaching and learning, (3) schooling in general, (4) policy, school finance,

and community engagement (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). CRT research in higher

education has focused on color blindness, admissions policies, and campus racial climate

(McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). DeCuir et al. (2019, p. 5) stated that scholars who use CRT understand the principles outlined in Table 2.1.

The aforementioned principles have informed pedagogy and research, but given the theoretical and methodological focus of this paper, this review of CRT will focus on how it has been taken up in research.

### *CRT in Research in Education*

In Ladson-Billings (2013) stated the following in reference to the high standards and rigor of CRT scholarship,  Ladson-Billings (2013) stated the following:

> The work of critical race scholars must be rigorous as that of any other scholarship (or perhaps more so). We have an obligation to point out the endemic racism that is extant in our schools, colleges, and other public spaces. We must deconstruct laws, ordinances, and policies that work to re-inscribe racism and deny people their full rights. (p. 45)

Methodologically, educational research using CRT has highlighted experiential knowledge and voice. Sung & Coleman (2019) explained that the primary narrative of critical race scholars in education has traditionally focused on counter-storytelling or *testimonios* of students and communities of color. Originating in LatCrit (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), *testimonios* are individual or collective endeavors that place experiences in conversation with socio historical factors and memories that demonstrate context. For example, Perez Huber and Cuevas (2012) utilized *testimonio* as a methodological approach to understanding how undocumented and U.S. born Chicana/Latina students experience the effects of and responses to a systemic, subtle, and cumulative form of racism, racist nativist microaggressions.

**Table 2.1**

*Principles of CRT*

| Principle | Description |
| --- | --- |
| The centrality of race and racism | Race remains the dominant and consistent, yet sometimes elusive, factor that influences law, policies, relationships, and practices in education. |
| U.S. society is based upon property rights | It is essential to examine social inequities, particularly educational inequities, from the understanding that racism is systemic and whiteness has value. |
| Intersectionality of race and racism with other forms of subordination | Racism is woven within all aspects of society and actively interacts with all forms of subordination. |
| Theory of Interest Convergence | CRT centers on race and racism materially determined such that People of Color historically have made significant gains only to the extent that their interests aligned with white interests (Sung & Coleman, 2019, p. 47). |
| Challenge to dominant ideology | A major goal of CRT is to question and challenge the status quo or majoritarian perspective. CRT supports skepticism towards how the law operates in terms of neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness (being influenced by race). |
| Myth of meritocracy | The idea that advancement in society only occurs because of hard work and ability. |
| Commitment to social justice | The ultimate goal of CRT is to end racial oppression and other forms of oppression through systemic change. |
| Centrality of experiential knowledge | CRT analyses highlight the importance of voice and focus on the experiences of People of Color. |
| Transdisciplinary perspective | CRT analyses take context (historical, political, social) into account. |
| Crosses epistemological understandings of race | CRT stresses the importance of connecting with other disciplines in order to address racism because of it's complexity and intricateness. |
| Reinterpretation of civil rights outcomes | CRT examines the social and political outcomes of civil rights law to explain the current institutional and structural components of racism. |

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) offered counter-stories as methodological tools that challenged deficit storytelling and gave space for research grounded in experiences of knowledge of people of color. For example, Solorzano and Yosso (2001) employed counter-storytelling to examine the different forms of racial and gender discrimination experienced by Chicana and Chicano graduate students.

While studies using CRT have typically used qualitative methodological approaches, research using CRT has expanded into quantitative and mixed-methods research (Covarrubias, 2011; Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013; Teranishi, 2007). A special issue of *Race, Ethnicity and Education* discussed the recent evolution of *QuantCrit* or Quantitative Critical Race Theory (see Garcia et al., 2018). CRQI and QuantCrit (Gillborn et al., 2018) are both specific methods to CRT and quantitative methods "that speak to the overarching structures of racism and racial inequality in framing interpretations, and approach" (Sablan, 2018, p. 7). Given their grounding in CRT, the methods share key tenets while CRQI adds an intersectional quantitative approach to the limits of QuantCrit. In view of their framing in CRT and quantitative methods, QuantCrit will be referenced along with CRQI at times throughout this paper.

Critical Race Mixed Methods (CRMM) combines CRT and mixed methods research to maintain the fidelity of the mixed methods design/analysis process while adhering to a CRT framework (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2019). DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2019) explained how they would use explanatory sequential mixed methods design (quan→QUAL) using an example focused on the manifestation of race and racism for African American women college students. Their perspective is that CRMM can be used to examine the intersections of race, racism, and power.

CRT seeks to address the many forms of racism in order to challenge the status quo with the goal of social justice. This goal can be accomplished through a variety of methods and methodological tools that honor the aforementioned principles. The value of this theoretical and methodological framework is that scholars have the power to shift discourses on and about students of color, policy outcomes, and school practices with the hope of empowerment (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2019).

This section has explored the key purpose of CRT, key principles, and research methods that have been informed by the theory. In the following sections, this paper will dig deeper into one of the key principles of CRT and CRQI - intersectionality. Intersectionality has become a well-known analytic framework in education and other fields. Certainly, the remaining principles of CRT are strongly related to intersectionality; these, however, will be implied throughout the paper as attention will be given to the theoretical underpinnings of CRQI.

**Intersectionality**

Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) coined the term intersectionality but the idea has been around long before its naming (e.g. *Combahee River Collective, 1977*). Crenshaw's fundamental argument regarding intersectionality was that too often issues of race and gender are critiqued in isolation. This privileges the issues of all identity groups before those of Black women. According to Crenshaw (1991), the problem in society is that the narratives of gender are based on the experiences of white, middle-class women, and the narratives of race are based on the experiences of Black men. Based on this essential problem, Crenshaw (1991) believed that we must understand the components of intersectionality on societal structures, policy and politics, and representation as a plan

for action to address the issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and other social locations.

While over time scholars have applied several definitions in an effort to understand intersectionality, this paper will use Collins and Bilge's (2016) six core ideas (see Table 2.2 for explanation) as paramount to understanding intersectionality and its use as an analytic framework.

**Table 2.2**

*Core Ideas of Intersectionality*

| Core Idea | Brief Definition |
|---|---|
| Social Inequality | Intersectionality exists because many people were deeply concerned by the forms of social inequality they either experience themselves or saw around them. |
| Power | Power relations through a lens of mutual constructions. In other words, people's lives and identities are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. Race, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, among others constitute interlocking, mutually constructing systems of power. |
| Relationality | The idea of connectedness and rejects binary thinking. Moving away from analyzing the differences between race and gender and examining their connectedness. |
| Social Context | To contextualize social inequality, relationality, and power in a social context and to be aware of how the historical, intellectual, and political context shape what we think and do. |
| Complexity | Intersectionality itself is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world. |
| Social Justice | Fairness is elusive where the rules themselves seem to be equally applied to everyone but yet still produce unequal and unfair outcomes (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 24-28). |

### *Intersectionality in Psychology*

Intersectionality is an analytic tool for critical inquiry and praxis, the synergy between ideas and action (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Given such, academic disciplines with a clinical or applied focus, such as school psychology, have taken up intersectional frameworks due to their research and practice interconnectedness. For example, the National Association of School Psychologists published an infographic, *Understanding Intersectionality*. Proctor and colleagues (2017) wrote an article in reference to the recent

infographic exploring how intersectionality can be used as a lens to aid school psychologists in understanding their own intersecting identities, as well as those of the students they serve, particularly in relation to how the intersections of identities interact with privilege or oppression. Proctor et al. (2017) discussed the research on the criminalization of Black girls in schools to illustrate their racialized and gendered experiences with school-based disciplinary systems. The article concludes with recommendations for how school psychologists can use intersectionality as a lens to encourage social justice for marginalized students. In this case, research informed practice.

Applying an intersectional analysis into research requires a reconceptualization of the meaning and significance of social categories. Cole (2009) presented three guiding questions for psychologists to consider in taking up intersectional research. These were:

1. Who is included within this category?

2. What role do power and privilege play?

3. What are the similarities?

The first question can facilitate a focus on those that have been systematically neglected and whose experiences have been flattened to singular analytic frameworks. The second question demands that researchers consider and address that individual-level group membership and structural inequalities are interdependent. The third question entails looking for commonalities across differences and requires that researchers view social categories in terms of individual and institutional practices rather than characteristics of individuals. Together these questions require a conceptual shift in the ways that social categories are understood, that the cultural and political history of groups are taken

seriously, as well as the ways that socially constructed categories depend on one another for meaning (Cole, 2009).

Intersectionality is an analytic tool for examining the social locations of individuals and groups within "interlocking structures of oppression" such as racism, sexism, and classism (Collins, 1995, p. 492). Translating the call for studying the interlocking systems of oppression into methodological practice is not easy. For example, Bowleg (2008) writes about the methodological challenges researchers face when grappling with intersectionality, like the limited methodological choices available to researchers due to limited literature on intersectionality from a methodological perspective. Thus, researchers, such as myself, interested in conducting intersectionality research often have to self teach. In view of this methodological challenge, critical race quantitative intersectionality is one possible solution.

Scholars in the field of psychology have made efforts to advance the use of intersectionality despite its slow integration in the broader field (Cole, 2009). For instance, efforts have included a focus on ensuring psychologists understand intersectionality (Cole, 2009), applying rigorous methods (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016), and teaching intersectionality in quantitative research in psychology (Ferguson & Price, 2021). However, Settles et al. (2020) explain the resistance to intersectionality within psychology. The integration of CRQI would increase the inclusion of intersectionality as well.

**Points of Consideration for Applying CRQI in School Psychology Research**

This section will offer points of consideration for researchers in the field of school psychology who wish to apply CRQI in their research. Each stage of the research process

provides a decision point for the researcher. CRQI is a relatively new theoretical and

methodological approach, but the articles discussed in this section provide a starting point

for those looking for examples for operationalizing critical quantitative approaches.

Various parts of the research process such as the introduction, methods, and results will

be used to explicate these considerations (American Psychological Association [APA]

Division 15, 2020).

**Points of Consideration - The Power of the Researcher**

In *Considering Positionality: The Ethics of Conducting Research with*

*Marginalized Groups*, Parson (2019) discussed the implications of conducting research

from a position of privilege with marginalized groups. The concept of *the power of the*

*researcher* is introduced for framing the need for positionality and reflexivity. The power

of the researcher is explained as one's status and ability as a researcher to make decisions

about the research process, from the selection of the research questions, dataset, research

methods, and decisions about how to report and share findings. Researchers have a

significant role in creating and reifying knowledge. In order to identify how the research

might produce or reproduce power/knowledge that further marginalizes groups of people,

researchers must explore their placement and motivation in the research process

(Muhammad et al., 2015).

According to Suffla et al. (2015), "positionality is the researcher's social location,

personal experience and theoretical viewpoint, the relational and institutional contexts of

the research, and the bearing of these elements on the research process" (p. 16). To

consider positionality, one must identify the salient and non-salient aspects of personal

identity and the power and privilege embedded in the intersection of one's identities

(Parson, 2019). Reflexivity is a process where one examines their place in the research process through reflection (Parson, 2019, p. 26). For example, I approach this work from multiple spaces. Personally, I'm a Black Caribbean, middle-class woman claiming a critical epistemological framework contending that reality and knowledge are socially constructed and influenced by power relations within society. As a scholar, I use Critical Race Theory as a framework for approaching inequities in education. My commitment to social justice is informed by my own personal experiences as an urban educator and my frustration as a scholar with dehumanizing and decontextualized quantitative research.

Although less common in quantitative research, those who employ critical quantitative approaches have been naming their positionality to challenge the gaze of objectivity in quantitative research. Positivists assert an objective truth and reject critical notions of power and oppression. CRQI exposes that numbers are not neutral and attempts to dismantle the inherent white supremacy in quantitative data that has led to violence against communities of color (Smith, 2013). The use of statistics as the only true way of understanding the world is the *colonization of interpretation* (Gillborn et al., 2018). Equally important, positivists ignore the bias, thus the power of the researcher, who makes decisions throughout the research process, beginning with conceptualization and design. Like any other research model, quantitative research is not neutral nor objective.

**Introduction**

Young and Cunningham (2020) provided a model for framing a critical quantitative study in *Repositioning Black Girls in Mathematics Disposition Research: New Perspectives from QuantCrit*. In this study, they examined the mathematics

dispositions of Black girls (*N*=1707) who completed the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009/2012 (HSLS:09/12) through cluster analysis. The findings suggested that Black girls' dispositions can be characterized into four distinct categories, each with direct implications for STEM attainment for Black girls.

Young and Cunningham (2020) begin their article by describing the intersections where Black girls and women exist in STEM by centering race/racism and gender/sexism in the description of the problem. For example, they state, "Belonging to two marginalized populations, Black women endure the negative impacts of the representation of their race and gender in STEM professions" (p. 1). They further make clear how race and gender bias can impact mathematics dispositions in Black girls. Framing the problem in the multiple systems of powers exposes the structural inequities that Black girls face.

Furthermore, Young and Cunningham (2020) utilized the opportunity-propensity framework to explain the multidimensional factors facing Black girls as pathways to STEM attainment. They explain the difficulty of materializing some aspects of race and gender inequities; however, the framework provides a conceptual model of the relationship between the multidimensional factors and STEM attainment for Black girls and women. Anchoring the study in the opportunity-propensity framework allowed the researchers to conduct culturally relevant research by examining the mathematics dispositions of Black girls in context (Stage & Wells, 2014).

**Methods**

Van Dusen and Nissen (2020) provided a model for applying CRQI in the methods of *Equity in College Physics Student Learning: A Critical Quantitative*

*Intersectionality Investigation*. They examined the intersectional nature of race/racism and gender/sexism in physics students learning using critical quantitative intersectionality. The sample included 15,267 students in 201 courses from 32 institutions collected through the Learning About STEM Student Outcomes (LASSO). The sample included students' self-selected demographics and a wide range of courses and colleges/universities. Additionally, the large sample size provided sufficient statistical power to allow for the examination of the relationship between gender/sexism, race/racism, and their intersectionality with student learning in introductory college physics courses.

Another point within the methods to be noted is the measure of equity. Both *Equality of Learning* and *Equity of Individuality* were used to address the problem of using a single measure of equity by comparing and contrasting the results for each. *Equality of Learning* is accomplished when students from different gender and racial groups learn equivalent amounts (2020). *Equity of Individuality* is accomplished when an intervention improves the outcomes of students from marginalized groups. In order to provide a more complete picture of the experiences of students from marginalized groups, two different measures of equity were used in the analysis.

**Results**

Fong et al. (2019) provided a model for applying a critical quantitative approach in the results of *Ya'at'eeh: Race-reimaged Belongingness Factors, Academic Outcomes, and Goal Pursuits Among Indigenous Community College Students*. They used a critical quantitative (QuantCrit) approach to race-reimage belonging for Indigenous community college students ($N = 887$) using secondary data from the Community College Survey of

Student Engagement (CCSSE). The study found that Indigenous students conceptualized belongingness differently than non-Indigenous students, but that traditional and native-specific constructions of belongingness factors were salient.

There are several points to be highlighted in this research process. First, Fong et al. (2019) framed their study as a response to the white-centric or colorblind perspectives of belongingness in educational psychology. Second, they drew from CRT and Tribal CRT to highlight asset-based knowledge and shift focus toward indigenous students and their ways of knowing. Third, all of the researchers provided their self-reflexive positions and roles to make clear their place in the research project.

There are a few points of consideration for applying CRQI in school psychology research which begin with the role of the researcher and the decisions that are made at each stage of the research process. While this paper is not intended to be instructional, this section does provide examples of how other researchers have applied critical quantitative approaches in their research. Table 2.3 provides examples of possible applications in the field and what applying CRQI can do to benefit students and the field.

**Table 2.3**

*Application in School Psychology Research*

| Application in School Psychology Research | Benefit/Consequence |
| --- | --- |
| Practice and apply positionality and reflexivity statements to research and manuscripts | Without the practice and application of positionality and reflexivity statements to research and manuscripts, researchers will make little progress towards a critical analysis of themselves and how their personal identities shape their research questions and interpretations. The consequence is possible complicity and reproduction of oppressive research. |
| Include multiple and diverse people on the research team | Multiple and diverse voices on the research team provide invaluable experiential knowledge which can lead to research that better reflects the experiences of the community. |
| Share research with the community | Sharing research with the researched community is one possible measure of experiential significance. Findings should be actionable and impactful for the community. |
| Frame and name interlocking systems of power | Naming and framing interlocking systems of oppression better reflect real-world experiences. |

**Conclusion**

The field of school psychology is currently lagging behind other fields in its

application of social justice research (Graybill et al., 2018). Moreover, the application of

CRQI challenges racism within the field. Specifically, CRQI offers a more appropriate

and accurate picture of intersecting structures of power affecting Black and Brown

students by centering their communities and honoring their ways of knowing. CRQI is missing in school psychology research which is a limit to this exploration. The natural next step for school psychology researchers is to take up CRQI in research and practice and answer the call for social justice principles into school psychology research (Parris et al., 2019).

This paper explored the application of CRQI in school psychology research by unpacking its theoretical and methodological underpinnings in CRT and intersectionality and reviewed empirical studies that have operationalized CRQI. School psychology is an important field that informs a number of practices connected to inequities in education. Given the influence of the knowledge produced and reproduced in the field, scholars must take up quantitative tools that support anti-racist praxis. Not doing so will only continue to harm marginalized students and their communities. CRQI is methodological resistance that starts and ends at the intersections of the lives behind the numbers to contextualize and disrupt structural inequity. This is what counts.

## Chapter 3

## It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Communities for Me: Perceptions of School Climate

**Racial Tensions in Predominantly White Communities**

On May 1, 2018, a Black female athlete from Sterling said she was stretching on the Haddonfield track when several players on the Haddonfield lacrosse team walked by and one of them said: "Move 'N-word,'" (Burney & Anatasia, 2018). An internal school investigation concluded that one of Haddonfield's lacrosse players, in fact, used the racial slur but did not identify who used it. As a result, the team's season was canceled. A parent said it was not uncommon for her children to hear racial slurs during games against Haddonfield. "It just happens all the time and they do it to everybody" the parent expressed. This comment suggests that this racist incident was not isolated.

The schools in the same area have also been sites for numerous racialized events. In October 2017, at Washington Township High School, racist text messages led to a fight in a school hallway and a daylong sit-in (Gray, 2017). In January 2018, at Buena Regional High School, a Black high school wrestler was forced to cut his dreadlocks at a wrestling match (Stubbs, 2019). In July 2020, Haddonfield High School reordered yearbooks after discovering students displaying the white power symbol in a photo (Burney, 2020). These are just a few examples of the racial tension within schools, in predominantly white communities, that received media attention in the northeastern region.

**Black Girls**

The victim of the opening story was a Black girl and Black girls, collectively, face

a number of challenges in schools rooted in racism and sexism. These challenges include

but are not limited to negative perceptions of Black girls (Morris, 2007), adultification

(Epstein et al., 2017), the policing of Black girls' appearance (Morris, 2016), and zero-

tolerance and other punitive discipline policies (Morris, 2016; Skiba & Peterson, 2000),

all of which have led to the criminalization of Black girls. Nationwide, Black girls in K-

12 are seven times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions

(National Black Women's Justice Initiative, 2019). When Black girls are over

disciplined, they are at greater risk for experiencing academic and social problems

throughout their lives.

The challenges Black girls face impact their perception of self, their schooling

experiences, and their life outcomes by creating harmful experiences through

devaluation, dehumanization, and for some, criminalization. Schools are the place where

children spend the day and have a significant influence on how children understand

themselves personally and in relation to the world around them (Morris, 2016 ). Schools

are one of the largest influences on the life trajectory of Black girls. Any effort toward

racial and gender justice must examine schools.

**School Climate**

One of the places to begin is in the critical examination of school climate. The

National Center for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (2022) states:

A positive school climate is the product of a school's attention to fostering safety;

promoting a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and

encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships

throughout the school community no matter the setting from pre-k/elementary

school to higher education.

According to the Safe and Supportive Schools Model, developed by a national panel of

researchers and other experts, a positive school climate involves:

- Engagement: Strong relationships between students, teachers, families, and

  schools and strong connections between schools and the broader community.

- Safety: Schools and school-related activities where students are safe from

  violence, bullying, harassment, and controlled-substance use.

- Environment: Appropriate facilities, well-managed classrooms, available school-

  based health supports, and a clear, fair disciplinary policy. (The National Center

  for Safe and Supportive Learning Environments, 2022).

These components are supported by existing literature and considered to be key

components of school climate (Thapa et al., 2013). Although, there is not one universally

agreed upon definition of school climate, a positive school climate is recognized as

critically important for student success (Cohen et al., 2009; Thapa et al., 2013). Positive

school climate promotes student learning, academic achievement, school success, and

healthy development (Cohen et al., 2009). And still, schools do not exist in isolation.

Naturally, the nature of schools are affected by the communities (local, state, and

national) they are situated within.

Although school climate has been investigated for many decades, only recently

have researchers focused on Black students due to findings in published scholarship that

Black students have less positive experiences and perceptions of school climate (Smith et

al., 2020). In a review of school climate research, Thapa et al. (2013) confirmed that race and ethnicity were important factors in explaining perceptions of school climate. For example, a study by Watkins and Aber (2009) used quantitative survey data from 842 Black and white middle school students, Black, poor, and female students perceived the racial climate more negatively than did their white, non-poor, and male counterparts. The findings support the importance of examining school climate for students belonging to specific races and ethnicities and other social locations, for the improvement of school climate for all.

Most recently, in a study focused on Black students' perceptions of school climate, Smith et al. (2020) explored gender differences in the relationship between cultural pluralism (appreciation for and encouragement of cultural diversity), racial identity, and school climate specific to Black students. Black boys were found to be more sensitive to the schooling context due to their racial identity status as compared to Black girls. Smith et al. (2020) suggested that Black girls' receipt of more socialization messages that focus on cultural pride may create a more resilient sense of group identity; however, the measure of cultural pluralism in this study did not use language that captured gender-related diversity. These findings indicate a need for more intersectional research to examine Black girls' schooling experiences.

**A Womanist Reframing of School Climate**

A womanist reframing of school climate is necessary for interrupting racial and gender discipline disparities through the transformation of school climate. Emerging from Black women's thought and activism, a womanist reframing is concerned for Black girls. One study has focused on the need for reframing school climate through a womanist

worldview in order to best support Black girls (Edwards, 2020). Specifically, Edwards (2020) centered the lived experiences of five Black girls on probation to explain the effects of suspension, expulsion, and arrest. While this study conceptualizes how educators can transform school environments to support the overall well-being of Black girls, it focuses solely on urban public schools. Thus, there is room for the experiences of Black girls in predominantly white, rural communities to be explored. Together, these articles provide some insight into Black girls' perceptions of school climate; however, more attention must be given to the challenges and solutions concerning Black girls in all the spaces they occupy, such as predominantly white, rural communities.

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality (CRQI) is the theoretical and methodological lens used to understand the complexity of inequities related to multiple social categories. CRQI is an extension of critical race theory (CRT). Therefore, a review of the progression of CRT is helpful in order to understand CRQI. The paragraphs that follow focus on CRT and intersectionality.

*Critical Race Theory*

CRT is a widely used framework for examining race/racism in the field of education (Sung & Coleman, 2019) and, therefore, is the foundational theoretical framework that guides this study. After stalled attempts at equal civil rights in the 1970s, Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado realized a need for new critical theories to interrogate new, more subtle, forms of racism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced CRT as an analytic tool to better focus on critical scholarship and racial justice in education. CRT in education includes the

following key tenets: 1) the centrality of race/racism and their intersectionality with other

forms of subordination in education, 2) the challenge to dominant ideology and

narratives, 3) the commitment to social justice in education, 4) the centrality of

experiential knowledge, and 5) the transdisciplinary perspective (Solorzano & Delgado

Bernal, 2001).

Together, these themes comprise a type of toolkit for examining our racialized

education system. They enable researchers to: 1) foreground race/racism in the research;

2) challenge traditional research and examine the material impact of race, gender, and

class on Black students; 3) privilege the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of

Black students; 4) embrace liberatory research methods; and 5) use a variety of

theoretical and methodological knowledge to better understand the various forms of

discrimination (Solarzano, 2001).

### *Intersectionality*

Intersectionality, a theme across CRT tenets, has become a commonly used

theoretical framework in education. Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) coined the term

"intersectionality" but the concept has been around long before it was named in legal

scholarship (Combahee River Collective, 1977). Crenshaw argued that we must

understand the components of intersectionality on societal structures, policy and politics,

and representation as a plan for action to address the issues of race, gender, class,

sexuality, ability, and other social locations. Collins and Bilge (2016) illustrated

intersectionality as an analytic tool for critical inquiry and praxis. Similar to the womanist

worldview, intersectionality is important for naming and understanding the complexity of

marginalized people while bridging theory, research and practice to center and support individuals and communities.

**Purpose**

This study aims to examine Black girls' perceptions of school climate in predominantly white, rural communities (PWRC) and how perceptions have changed from 2020 to 2021 with the intent to illuminate the realities of Black girls. Through the lens of critical race quantitative intersectionality (Covarrubias and Velez, 2013), this study takes an intersectional approach to investigate the key areas of school climate (engagement, safety, and environment). Outcomes in this secondary data analysis of the US Department of Education School Climate Survey (EDSCLS) include the identification of key areas that need improvement in order to create a more safe and supportive school climate for Black girls.

**Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What perceptions of school climate do Black girls report on a survey about the schools they attend in predominantly white, rural communities?

2. How, if at all, have their perceptions changed from academic years 2019-2020 to 2020-2021?

**Education During Crises**

For the purpose of being clear about the context of this study, it is important to address the multiple crises interrupting and disrupting schooling during this time. Throughout 2020, COVID-19 upended schools across the world. In New Jersey, schools halted in-person instruction on March 16, 2020, to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Educators, staff, and school leaders transitioned services to remote settings; families and their communities turned their homes into classrooms; students took on remote learning for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. For the 2020-2021 school year, students attended classes in person, remotely, or in a hybrid format. Alongside COVID-19, we were simultaneously experiencing white America's reawakening to racial injustice and violent extremism, an economic recession, a climate crisis, and political transition.

Early reports explored how the pandemic has impacted students during this time. In fact, COVID-19 appears to have deepened the impact of disparities in access and opportunity facing many students of color in public schools, including technological and other barriers that make it harder to stay engaged in virtual classrooms (US Department of Education, 2021). Also, nearly all students experienced some challenges to their mental health and well-being during the pandemic, and many lost access to school-based services and support, with early research showing disparities based on social locations such as race (US Department of Education, 2021; National Academy of Education, 2020). Additionally, identity-based harassment, abuse, and violence increased (US Department of Education, 2021). Collectively, existing research makes clear that the pandemic exacerbated existing inequities for marginalized student groups. The impact of COVID has the potential to impact school climate since the model for school climate includes engagement, safety, and environment.

**Methods**

Historical and contemporary use of quantitative methods has been "mobilized to obfuscate, camouflage, and even further legitimate racist inequities" (Gillborn, D., Warmington, P., & Demack, S., 2018). Under the gaze of objectivity, quantitative

methods are thought to be more trustworthy and meritorious than other methodologies (Strunk & Hoover, 2019). The gaze of objectivity is a fallacy that ignores the power of the researcher who influences each stage of the research process (Muhammad et al., 2015). Although less common in quantitative research, it is the ethics of conducting research on marginalized communities that requires me to interrogate the power and privilege inherent in my identity (Parson, 2019). I am a Black Caribbean, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gender woman claiming a critical epistemological framework that asserts that reality and knowledge are socially constructed and influenced by power relations within society. As a scholar, I use Critical Race Theory as a framework for approaching inequities in education. My commitment to social justice is informed by my own personal experiences as an educator and my frustration as a scholar with dehumanizing and decontextualized quantitative research. I am Black woman witnessing Black girls missing from critical quantitative research and erasure is a form of violence.

*Data Source: Participants*

In year one, the sample consisted of 90 Black girls and 63 Black girls in year two. The participants were enrolled in three predominantly white middle schools and one elementary school in the northeastern region. The four schools are the sites for this study and have been engaged in a research-practice partnership (RPP; Coburn et al, 2013) with a research lab associated with a local university. The research lab engages in RPPs that support local school districts in understanding and implementing policies and practices that promote equity and contribute to our larger understanding of the practice of systemic change in educational systems. Within the RPP, the schools were awarded the School

Climate Transformation Grant. This study is situated within this larger grant-funded project.

An a priori analysis was conducted to determine the sample size requirements for the MANOVA with 13 outcomes across 2 groups. In order to estimate a medium effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.3$), this analysis required at least 50 participants to achieve 80% power. Total population sampling was used given that the population of interest is clearly defined. Demographic information concerning the participants is presented in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1**

*Participants' Demographic Data*

| Variable | Category | Percentage of Sample |
|---|---|---|
| School | Bayfield Elementary | 3.2% |
| | Ashbury Middle School | 30.2% |
| | Belair Middle School | 7.9% |
| | Carmichael Middle School | 58.7% |
| Grade | 6th | 25.4% |
| | 7th | 47.6% |
| | 8th | 27.0% |

*Measurement Tool*

The ED School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS) are a suite of survey instruments being developed for schools, school districts, and states by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The surveys used scores on

various indicators of school climate from the perspectives of students, teachers and staff, principals, and parents and guardians (EDSCLS Pilot Test 2015 Report for validation information). For the purpose of this study, student perceptions were the focus.

The EDSCLS student survey consists of 73 items, including 7 demographic questions and 66 items measuring 12 topics in the 3 domains of Engagement, Safety, and Environment (Safe and Supportive Schools Model, 2022). The 7 demographic questions were changed to include questions that capture district name, school name, and gender-expansive youth (students that do not identify with traditional gender roles). In addition to 'boy' and 'girl' as identity options, 'another not listed here' was added. All 66 topical items used a 4-point Likert response option scale. The number of items in each topic is shown in Table 3.2. The EDSCLS student survey was created using Qualtrics.

**Table 3.2**

*EDSCLS by Domain, Topic, and Item*

| Domain | Topic | Items |
|---|---|---|
| Engagement | Cultural and linguistic Competence | 5 items |
| | Relationships | 8 items |
| | School participation | 5 items |
| Safety | Emotional Safety | 7 items |
| | Physical Safety | 8 items |
| | Bullying/cyberbullying | 6 items |
| | Substance Abuse | 5 items |
| | Emergency readiness/management | 2 items |
| Environment | Physical environment | 5 items |
| | Instructional environment | 5 items |
| | Mental health | 5 items |
| | Discipline | 5 items |

*Procedure*

As part of a larger school climate grant, the EDSCLS is administered in January, for a four year period, beginning January 2020. The project chose January as the administration point as it is midway through the school year and likely that staff, students, and their families have settled into routines. In addition, this administration point is prior to the spring testing window of statewide assessments.

In January 2020 and 2021, participants were given time to complete the EDSCLS, through Qualtrics, during class, either virtually or in person. A script was provided for teachers to introduce the EDSCLS to students. The EDSCLS was anonymous and voluntary.

**Analysis Approach**

Through the lens of critical race quantitative intersectionality (Covarrubias and Velez, 2013), this study takes an intersectional analytic approach to investigate the key areas of school climate (engagement, safety, and environment).

*Critical Quantitative Inquiry*

Critical quantitative inquiry is the use of quantitative methods to examine equity issues and for social justice. Researchers who engage in critical quantitative inquiry, aka quantitative criticalists, engage in the following tasks: 1) using quantitative methods to represent educational processes and outcomes to reveal inequities and to identify perpetuation of those that were systematic; 2) questioning models, measures, and analytical practices, in order to ensure equity when describing educational experiences; and 3) conducting culturally relevant research by studying institutions and people in context (Stage & Wells, 2014). CRQI is a type of critical quantitative inquiry.

*Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality*

Covarrubias and Velez (2013) define critical race quantitative intersectionality (CRQI) as:

> An explanatory framework and methodological approach that utilizes quantitative methods to account for the material impact of race and racism at its intersection with other forms of subordination and works toward identifying and challenging oppression at this intersection in hopes of achieving social justice for students of color, their families, and their communities. (p. 276)

CRQI is an appropriate theoretical and methodological framework for this study because it bridges both critical theory and quantitative methods to examine Black girls' experiences and perceptions of school climate in PWRC.

*Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive statistics are used to organize, summarize and make sense of the survey data to describe school climate from the perspective of Black girls. In addition to reporting the measure of central tendency, I report measures of variability. This includes the mean and reporting the standard deviation (See Table 3.3).

Scale scores are the primary metric used by the EDSCLS to measure school climate. Cronbach's alpha is used to assess the reliability of the scale scores and items. A scale score combines data for multiple survey items that measure the same topic area into one, creating a more robust measure of a topic area than looking at the data for individual items separately. I computed a scale score for each topic area by averaging responses on the individual items in each domain. After examining the scale scores, I performed an item-level analysis to dig deeper into the data to target specific topics. Item-level analysis

results revealed concrete examples of the underlying pattern in the results that may be actionable.

Means are used to gauge the degree to which respondents agree or disagree with the items or topic area. Because all the response options are on a scale of 1-4 (where 1 is less favorable and 4 is more favorable), I consider item favorability. A mean less than the benchmark of 2.5 indicates that there are more unfavorable responses, on average, and suggests that the item or topic area is perceived as relatively unfavorable. In contrast, a mean of more than 2.5 indicates more favorable than unfavorable responses, on average, suggesting that the item or topic is perceived as relatively favorable. A mean of 2.5 indicates equal favorability, suggesting that perceptions are neutral.

*MANOVA*

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was utilized to assess changes in perceptions of school climate from 2020 to 2021. Using a MANOVA design instead of multiple one-way ANOVAs is useful in order to avoid a Type I error, also known as alpha level inflation (Meyer et al., 2016). Missing value analysis was conducted to ensure that all missing data is missing at random. Only outcome variables that have data missing at random are included in this analysis. The outcome variables are student perceptions on 12 topics in the 3 domains of Engagement, Safety, and Environment. The independent variable is year and will be coded as 2020 and 2021. I conducted the data analysis using the SPSS software package.

**Results**

Research Question 1: What perceptions of climate do Black girls have about the schools they attend in rural communities?

*Domains*

Safety was the most favorable domain, followed by Environment and Engagement. Domain means indicate that Black girls have more favorable than unfavorable perceptions, on average, of safety, environment, and engagement.

*Topics*

The most favorable topics are Substance Abuse, Emergency Readiness/Management, and Physical Safety. The least favorable topics are Emotional Safety, Mental Health, Physical Environment, and Relationships. Topic means indicate that Black girls have more favorable than unfavorable perceptions, on average, in all areas.

*Items*

Out of the 66 items total, 4 items had more unfavorable than favorable responses, on average. These items are:

*Students at this school stop and think before doing anything when they get angry (Mental Health),*

*Students respect one another (Relationships),*

*Students at this school try to work out their disagreements with other students by talking to them (Mental Health),*

*The temperature in this school is comfortable all year round (Physical Environment).*

**Table 3.3**

*Domain and Topic Means and Standard Deviations*

| Domain & Topic | Year 1 | | Year 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | SD | M | SD |
| **Engagement** | 2.18 | .44928 | 2.08 | .44525 |
| Cultural and Linguistic Competence | 2.06 | .55827 | 2.03 | .54185 |
| Relationships | 2.23 | .57832 | 2.12 | .55220 |
| School Participation | 2.02 | .50831 | 2.05 | .49626 |
| **Safety** | 2.00 | .33435 | 1.99 | .58474 |
| Emotional Safety | 2.45 | .70172 | 2.29 | .67482 |
| Physical Safety | 1.89 | .25909 | 1.86 | .59932 |
| Bullying/Cyberbullying | 1.62 | .31709 | 2.08 | .58443 |
| Substance Abuse | 1.94 | .76733 | 1.73 | .76785 |
| Emergency Readiness/Management | 2.08 | .81506 | 1.83 | .70511 |
| **Environment** | 2.36 | .53843 | 2.03 | .49620 |
| Physical Environment | 2.78 | .65799 | 2.17 | .57033 |
| Instructional Environment | 2.01 | .60191 | 1.89 | .49467 |
| Mental Health | 2.51 | .66617 | 2.22 | .68228 |
| Discipline | 2.16 | .62783 | 1.86 | .52269 |

There are 5 items that did not meet the 2.5 threshold but should be mentioned given their proximity. The items are:

*At this school, students talk about the importance of understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others (Emotional Safety),*

*Students like one another (Relationships),*

*Students at this school get along well with each other (Relationships),*

*At this school, students work on listening to others to understand what they are trying to say (Emotional Safety),*

*It is easy to talk to teachers at this school (Relationships).*

Collectively, these items indicate a pattern for specific topic areas about which Black girls have negative perceptions. These areas include relationships, mental health, and emotional safety. Item means and standard deviations can be found in the Appendix.

Research Question 2: How, if at all, have their perceptions changed from academic years 2019-2020 to 2020-2021?

A multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to determine how Black girls' perceptions of school climate changed from 2020 to 2021. The analysis did not pass the test of homogeneity of variance across variances as the Box's Test was statistically significant [Box's M = 234.148, $F(78, 51022.052) = 2.731$, $p < .001$], meaning that the variances of the dependent variables, the survey topics, from year to year are statistically different. This difference is most evident when looking at the standard deviations for *physical safety* and *bullying* from 2020 to 2021. For *physical safety*, the SD is .25090 in 2020 and .59932 in 2021, indicating that in 2020 the scores were tighter compared to 2021. For *bullying*, the SD is .3170 for 2020 and .76374 for 2021. Again, the scores were

tighter in 2020 compared to 2021. This variance is not surprising given that in 2020, prior to the pandemic, students were physically in school, compared to in 2021, during the pandemic, when students were experiencing school in a variety of formats. In view of the statistically significant Box M's test, Pillai's trace is used to evaluate the multivariate effect because it is less affected by the violation of the variance-covariance homogeneity assumption (Meyers et al., 2016, p. 771).

The multivariate effect of the year was statistically significant, Pillai's trace = .48, $F(12,137) = 10.55$, $p < .001$, 1 - Wilks lambda = .48. This means that 48% of the difference in how Black girls answered the school climate survey can be explained by the in which the data was collected. The post-hoc univariate analysis indicates a difference between years in bullying, physical environment, mental health, and discipline, with small to medium effect sizes. Specifically, from 2020 to 2021, 14% of the variance in bullying, 18% of the variance in physical environment, 4% of the variance in mental health, and 5% of the variance in discipline can be explained by time (year). These results are statistically and practically significant. Meaning that for these topics there is a meaningful difference in Black girls' responses between the two academic school years.

**Discussion: Interpretations**

This study aimed to examine Black girls' perceptions of school climate in predominantly white, rural communities (PWRC) and how perceptions have changed from 2020 - 2021 with the intent to illuminate the realities of Black girls. The results of this study tell a particular story about Black girls in PWRC before and during the pandemic. In this section, I discuss three focal points of the story.

**Table 3.4**

*MANOVA*

| Topic | MANOVA | |
|---|---|---|
| | P-value | Effect Size |
| Cultural and Linguistic Competence | .720 | -.006 |
| Relationships | .247 | .002 |
| School Participation | .741 | -.006 |
| Emotional Safety | .158 | .007 |
| Physical Safety | .590 | -.005 |
| Bullying/Cyberbullying | .000 | .142 |
| Substance Abuse | .096 | .012 |
| Emergency Readiness/Management | .054 | .018 |
| Physical Environment | .000 | .183 |
| Instructional Environment | .202 | .004 |
| Mental Health | .011 | .036 |
| Discipline | .003 | .051 |

Point One: Black Girls' Perceptions of School Climate Changed Significantly from 2020 to 2021. The first point is this: Black girls' perceptions of school climate changed significantly from 2020 to 2021. This is supported by the result that about 48% of the variance in climate perceptions and experiences is explained by the year. This result is not surprising given how girls have borne the brunt of the pandemic's outcomes (Alliance for Girls, 2021). In one report focused on how girls experienced the various aspects of their lives in 2020 and in 2021, findings revealed an increase in caretaking

responsibilities for siblings and other family members and increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression exacerbated by increased isolation brought on by COVID-19 lockdowns and social distancing requirements (Alliance for Girls, 2021). At the same time, considering the number of challenges Black girls face in schools, such as adultification (Epstein et al., 2017), the policing of their appearance (Morris, 2016), and other punitive discipline practices, including zero-tolerance policies (Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Morris, 2016), remote learning may have lessened opportunities for the harm Black girls endure at and on the way to school.

In light of existing literature on Black students' perceptions of school climate, the first point suggests that, like Black boys, Black girls are also sensitive to the schooling context due to their racialized and gendered identity. This stands in contrast to the findings of Smith et al. (2020) which suggested that Black girls are less sensitive to schooling context than Black boys. This may be, in part, due to the #BlackGirlMagic messaging within the Black community, but this messaging has also been used as a trope to diminish the impact of racism and sexism and other systemic oppression which Black girls face (Patton & Croom, 2016). Similar to Black girls in urban schools, Black girls in rural communities also face challenges with bullying/cyberbullying, discipline, and mental health. This, therefore, suggests a shared, or common, experience for Black girls' perceptions of school across geographical contexts. Meaning, that their challenges need continued and deeper examination.

Point Two: Physical Environment and Bullying/Cyberbullying Changed Significantly from 2020 to 2021. The second point: Physical environment and bullying/cyberbullying changed significantly from 2020 to 2021 is supported by the

univariate statistical significance and medium effect size. The mean for physical environment decreased from 2.78 in 2020 to 2.17 in 2021. Physical environment survey items focused on cleanliness, temperature and repairs within the school. The improvement of Black girls' perceptions of the physical environment is not surprising given that schools closed their physical spaces in March 2020.

However, the mean for bullying/cyberbullying increased from 1.62 in 2020 to 2.08 in 2021. Conversely, Black girls' experiences and perceptions of bullying/cyberbullying worsened by about 28%. Again, this result is unsurprising given that girls' education and social lives moved almost entirely online. This result extends existing research on COVID-19, girls, and cyberbullying. Current research indicates that during the pandemic, girls who do not identify as cisgender experienced cyberbullying at higher rates (Alliance for Girls, 2021; US Department of Education, 2021). Furthermore, girls with previous suspension or school expulsion are five times more likely to experience cyberbullying (Alliance for Girls, 2021). Prior to the pandemic, Black girls experienced higher rates of online sexual harassment and solicitation compared to their male peers (Tynes & Mitchell, 2014). For Black girls, these multiplying factors make online spaces unsafe. In fact, in recent years, there has been an increase in Black girls taking their own lives in responses to school-related encounters, particularly situations where they are bullied at school or online by their peers (Aurelia Alessandrini, 2021). Black girls need targeted support in the area of mental health.

Point Three: Black Girls Need Targeted Support in the Area of Mental Health. This final point is supported by the univariate statistical significance. The mean for mental health in 2020 was 2.51, which indicates that Black girls have neutral (equally

favorable and unfavorable) perceptions of mental health, on average. Despite neutrality, this mean indicates that on average at least half of the population of Black girls had unfavorable perceptions of mental health. This result supports existing research that indicates that girls of color face unique stressors rooted in racism and sexism which contribute to emotional pain, and remain unacknowledged as sources of distress (Leary, 2019). One possible unique stressor for Black girls, in particular, is school discipline.

Federal data continue to show that Black girls are suspended or expelled from public schools at disproportionate rates. For example, in 2015-2016, Black girls were suspended over five times as often as their peers (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2018). Oftentimes, the justification for the harsh discipline are behaviors that may reflect exposure to trauma. These behaviors are often referred to as "acting out." But, for Black girls, these behaviors are perceived as disobedient, disruptive, and disrespectful (Morris, 2016). Ultimately, Black girls face harsher discipline than their peers for similar behavior, with this punishment taking the place of the understanding and mental health support they deserve (Leary, 2019). Consequently, and tragically, a real effect of schooling for Black girls is exacerbated emotional suffering. In order for Black girls to thrive in their schools, they need to be able to recognize and communicate their feelings to those who support and protect them (Jacobs, 2022).

### *Boundaries*

While this inquiry was able to examine Black girls' perceptions of school climate during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are a few notable limitations to its scope. One is the difference in the sample size from 2020 to 2021. Fundamentally, the approximate thirty-person difference could have an impact on the results. In terms of generalizability,

the results are limited by the sample size and context which includes three middle schools and one elementary school in PWRC. Given these factors, the results of this study are not generalizable. Also, the methodological choices were constrained by the measurement tool, the EDSCLS survey. While the EDSCLS survey examines perceptions of school climate, it does not examine the reasoning behind perceptions. Thus, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine why perceptions changed or even how Black girls understand and experience the climate of their schools and communities. These limitations, especially the final one concerning why perceptions have changed, present an opportunity for further qualitative research on these questions.

**Implications**

The results of this inquiry are valuable to scholars and practitioners for a number of reasons. First, the results provide insights about Black girls' perceptions of school climate before and during two different global pandemics: COVID-19 and racism. While plenty of research about schooling and education during COVID-19 demonstrates the stark and often unjust consequences of remote learning for Black and other minoritized students, little if any of this research centers Black girls and their particular perspectives, positionalities, and power. Second, these results build on existing literature by providing an analysis of Black girls' schooling experiences beyond school discipline policies and practices. Furthermore, in order to better understand the state of Black girls in all the spaces they occupy, this study focuses on rural schools and communities. Third, these results serve as guideposts for the strategies educators, school leaders, and researchers need to more quickly and comprehensively achieve educational equity for Black girls in schools.

**Recommendations**

The results of this study lead to practical actions and recommendations for educators, school leaders, researchers, and policymakers. First, educators should engage in specific training related to Black girls and bullying/cyberbullying. Inadequate responses to bullying show how educators and the policies they uphold heighten the risk of school disconnection and negative schooling experiences (Edwards, 2020) which Black girls are most vulnerable to. Refusing to support students through the social pressures they face suggests that peer relationships don't influence their schooling experiences and is a form of malpractice.

School leaders should incorporate healing-centered engagement (HCE) into the school day and out-of-school time. While the pandemic has exacerbated the need for mental health support for all students, Black girls, in particular, need HCE as it is strength-based, advances a collective view of healing, and re-centers culture as a central feature of well-being (Ginwright, 2018). Given the focus on culture and identity, HCE highlights the intersectional nature of identity and the ways in which culture offers a shared experience, community, and sense of belonging (all of which are connected to school culture). With culture and identity at the center of support, Black girls can receive mental health support that is both historically and culturally relevant for them.

Researchers and policymakers must collect data that are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and other social locations and examine the material impact of social location and its relationship to history, communities, and educational systems. Far too often the needs of Black girls go unnoticed because their experiences are lost within singular analytic approaches. Intersectional analytic approaches are necessary in order to

address the needs of Black girls. In fact, researchers must be incentivized to report the outcomes that allow the lived experiences of Black girls to become accessible so that public systems can act on the existing inequities (Leary, 2019). School districts must be required to address the outcomes of intersectional data through strategic planning. These recommendations are by no means exhaustive, but a place to start in improving the schooling experiences for Black girls in PWRC.

**Chapter 4**

**It's the Focus on Listening to Black Girls for Me: Exploring School Climate in**

**Rural Communities**

**Introduction**

Reign is an eighth-grade student at Carmichael Middle School. She is a thoughtful Black girl with a calm demeanor. While responding to the question: "How do you feel about school?" she looked at me and replied: "Sometimes I hate it, sometimes I like it, and sometimes I'm just in the middle. Sometimes I'm just trying to succeed." I slowly nodded my head as I appreciated her honesty with me, a person, at that time, she hardly knew. Reign was insightful and possessed a critical eye for how her experiences as a Black girl at a middle school in a predominantly white rural community were worthy of exploration.

**Problem**

Research across local and national contexts indicates the racialized and gendered challenges Black girls face in schools. Reports such as *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood* (Epstein et al., 2017); *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected* (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015); *Unlocking Opportunity for African-American Girls: A Call to Action for Educational Equity* (Smith-Evans & George, 2014); and *Race, Gender, and the "School to Prison Pipeline": Expanding Our Discussion to Include Black Girls* (Morris, 2012) document the complex and harmful realities for Black girls in schools and other educational spaces. Although there has been an increase in research centered on Black girls' schooling experiences, few studies investigate the realities Black girls face in rural communities (Banks, 2005;

Russell, 2015). Banks (2005) and Russell (2015) have examined Black girls in predominantly white suburban schools, their schooling experiences, and identity construction. The experiences of Black girls in rural communities require continued examination in order to improve the schooling experiences for Black girls in all of the spaces they occupy. Perhaps the most important move is the methodological move of positioning Black girls as experts who can support Black girls in school.

**Purpose**

*It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Schools for Me: Perceptions of Climate* identified key areas within school climate requiring improvement in order to provide a safer and more supportive environment for Black girls. The results from this critical quantitative research provided an opportunity to dig deeper into Black girls' experiences in school. This study aims to complement the aforementioned article (Price, 2022) and deepen our understanding of how Black girls describe and experience school climate in rural communities. To address the climate in their school, I take up the methodological move of centering Black girls, their voices, and ways of knowing.

**Research Questions**

This study pursues the following research questions:

1. How do Black girls understand and experience the climate of their schools and communities?

2. How do Black girls want schools to better connect with and support Black girls in rural communities?

**Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist-Womanist Research**

Black Feminist-Womanist (BFW) research, informed by Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and Womanism (Phillips, 2006), is a culturally relevant research model focused on Black girls. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (2000) positions Black girls as the experts about their own individual and collective lives which are continuously shaped by intersecting oppressive forces. The four tenets of Black Feminist Thought are: (a) concrete experience as a criterion for meaning, (b) use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, (c) an ethic of care, and (d) an ethic of responsibility.

Similar to Black Feminist Thought, the central tenet of Womanism is the necessity of speaking from and about one's experiential location (Phillips & McCaskill, 2006). Womanism seeks to use the everyday experiences of Black girls to solve problems and end all forms of oppression. Together, Black Feminist Thought and Womanism, provide a strength-based approach for examining and centering Black girls' experiences.

BFW responds to the need for a theoretical framework that serves to expose, confront, and eradicate race, class, and gender oppression in our families, communities, and schools (Evans-Winters & Espositio, 2010, p. 22). Lindsay-Dennis (2015, p. 511) defines BFW as a culturally congruent model to guide studies about Black girls. This theoretical framework asserts that Black girls do not develop in a vacuum and, therefore, contextualizes them in their community and society in order to best examine Black girls' perceptions and behaviors as outputs related to their worldview and experiences (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015, p. 511). Based on the BFW perspective, the researcher understands the importance of positionality and reflexivity in research about Black girls. Thus, the researcher relies on personal responsibility, self-awareness, and high

commitment to ensure that the research about and with Black girls is authentic and accurate. BFW research allows for the consideration of intersectionality and metaphysical aspects of Black girls and demonstrates a commitment to social change and community building.

**Methods**

The schools in this study halted in-person instruction on March 16, 2020, to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Students' homes turned into classrooms and students took on remote learning for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. For the 2020-2021 school year, students attended classes in person, remotely, or in a hybrid format. Alongside COVID-19, throughout 2020 and 2021 we witnessed America's reawakening to racial injustice and violent extremism, an economic recession, a climate crisis, and political uprising.

*Research Sites*

Three predominantly white rural middle schools are the sites for this study and have been engaged in a research-practice partnership (RPP) with a research lab (Coburn et al, 2013). Within the RPP, these three schools were awarded the School Climate Transformation Grant. This study is situated within this larger grant-funded project. All three school districts have a student population that ranges between 1,600 to 2,100 with under 23 percent Black and between 60 to 80 percent white student populations. See Table 4.1 for the school demographic information.

**Table 4.1**

*School Demographics*

| School | Number of Students | % of FRL | Race/Ethnicity |
|---|---|---|---|
| Asbury Middle School | 563 | 29% | Black 8% Hispanic 9% Two or More Races 6% White 77% |
| Belair Middle School | 236 | 16% | Black 8% Hispanic 8% Two or More Races 8% White 73% |
| Carmichael Middle School | 505 | 21% | Black 23% Hispanic 10% Two or More Races 8% White 55% |

*Participants*

Purposeful sampling was used to select eleven participants across three predominantly white, rural middle schools (PWRS). School staff at each school were asked to identify Black girls with differing experiences with schools who would be willing to talk about their schooling experiences with a researcher. Black girls that were recommended by school staff (principals and guidance counselors) were asked to be participants. Additionally, participants needed to have completed the EDSCLS in 2021. Both participant verbal assent and parental signed consent were provided. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant as well as the school to ensure anonymity.

Of the eleven participants, nine identified as African American or Black, with three students identifying as biracial (two Black and Asian, and one Black and white). Students were in sixth grade (3), seventh grade (5), and eighth grade (3). The girls range in age from 11 years old to 14 years old. Participants belong to varying family structures including two parents, single parent, and extended family structures. All information included was self-reported by participants. See Table 4.2 for participant information.

### *Reflexivity*

Reflexivity requires that I examine my place in the research process through critical reflection (Parson, 2019, p. 26). As a Black female who grew up in both predominantly Black and white upper-middle-class, suburban areas, part of the subjectivity I bring to this research is my sense of racial identity and class privilege -- both, either, or none of which may be shared by the girls. To ensure that I did not make unfair assumptions about the participants, I asked for clarification throughout the interviews and debriefed with a peer. After several interviews, it became clear that my racialized and gendered positionality made the participants feel quite comfortable in discussing sensitive topics with me.

Also, I approached this study as a mother to a Black daughter and an educator with years of experience with teaching Black and Brown students. I aimed to create spaces where Black girls felt comfortable being their complete selves. Throughout the study, I shifted between being a researcher, serving as a facilitator of discussion, and acting as a mentor. As a researcher, I listened for their wisdom and how they experienced discrimination in school. As a facilitator, I shared survey data and discussion questions for the girls to reflect on as it related to their own experiences. As a mentor, I shared my

own experiences and posed questions that would help them think critically about their

own experiences and solutions for improving their schooling experiences.

**Table 4.2**

*Participant Information*

| School | Name | Grade | Age | Race |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ashbury Middle School | Kayla | 7 | 13 | Black |
| | Kendal | 7 | 13 | Black |
| Belair Middle School | Simone | 6 | 12 | Black |
| | Kelly | 6 | 11 | Black and Asian |
| | Rae | 7 | 13 | Black |
| | Rose | 7 | 13 | Black and white |
| | Nyla | 8 | 14 | Black |
| Carmichael Middle School | Amy | 6 | 11 | Black |
| | Addison | 7 | 13 | Black |
| | Jasmin | 8 | 13 | Black and Asian |
| | Reign | 8 | 13 | Black |

*Data Collection*

A generic qualitative inquiry was used to understand how Black girls in rural

communities describe their schooling experiences as racialized and/or gendered. Generic

qualitative inquiry investigates individuals' reports of their opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences (Percy et al., 2015, p. 78). This methodological approach was used given that the EDSCLS survey provided pre-knowledge/pre-understandings about Black girls' perceptions of school climate. Generic qualitative inquiry supports an investigation to more fully describe school climate from the perspective of Black girls.

To provide an in-depth and contextualized understanding of Black girls' schooling experiences, I used Seidman's (2006) three interview series. According to Seidman (2006), the first interview establishes the context of the participants' experiences. The second allowed participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. The third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. Specifically, I used the first interview to get to know the participants as individuals, the second interview to dig deeper into their schooling experiences aligned with the literature on cognitive interviewing (e.g. Collins, 2014), and the third interview to facilitate a collective meaning of Black girls' experiences and to discuss solutions aimed at improving their schooling experiences. Between May 2021 to June 2021, I conducted 11 interviews and three focus groups with this study's participants.

In the first interview, I got to know the participants by asking them questions about them and their families, likes and dislikes, extracurricular activities, friends, current issues, feeling like a member of the community, and what they wish their teachers knew about them. The second interview was informed by the quantitative analysis in *It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Schools for Me: Perceptions of Climate*. Question items from the ED School Climate Surveys (EDSCLS) ( ) with the highest and lowest

favorability amongst Black girls were identified and used to guide the second interview. For example, I asked questions that dug deeper into question items such as: *Boys and girls are treated equally well. School rules are applied equally. I feel safe at school. Teachers understand my problems.* I asked about how the participants understood certain words such as respect and feeling safe. In addition, I asked for the girls to recall their experiences with discipline and culturally responsive curriculum and instruction. I shared the results from the EDSCLS survey and asked if there were any questions missing from the survey. In the focus groups, the participants were asked to think about their dream school - what did it feel, sound, and look like. Using collective problems identified from the second interviews, I asked how schools could address these problems.

**Data Analysis**

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. In order to identify salient themes and patterns, I conducted two cycles of coding. The first cycle of coding involved two parts - open coding (Charmaz, 2014) and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014). To explore the data and honor the participants' schooling experiences, I used open coding to break down the data into discrete excerpts and reflect on the contents and nuances of the data (Saldana, 2016, p. 115). From the codes, I wrote analytic memos to reflect on the selected excerpts (Saldana, 2016, p. 44). Next, I used theoretical coding to make connections between BFW and what the explicitly stated and what I implicitly understood as connected to Black girls' racialized and gendered experiences.

In the second cycle of coding, I completed a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to organize themes and offer insight about the data. Following Macquire's & Delahunt's (2017) six step guide to thematic analysis, I began the second round of coding

by re-reading and re-listening to the transcripts and audio recordings to become familiar with the data (Step 1: Become familiar with the data). Next, I generated codes related to the research questions (Step 2: Generate initial codes). Driven by the research questions, the codes were sorted into two broad categories - bodies and mental health (Step 3: Search for themes). While reviewing the themes (Step 4: Review themes), I considered the research questions and the importance of not only describing Black girls' schooling experiences but or better connecting with and supporting Black girls in rural communities. This led to identifying problems and solutions within each theme and including a range of evidence to support the identified themes in this article (Step 6: Writing-up).

Both cycles of coding were completed by working through hard copies of the transcripts with pens and highlighters.

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, I engaged in member checks and critical self-reflection. Member checking requires that I discuss my interpretations and conclusions with the participants for verification, insight, and deeper understanding (Johnson & Christensen, 2017, p. 299). I discussed my interpretations with each participant throughout the second and third interviews; but there were no changes that needed to be made. Reflexivity requires that I examine my place in the research process through critical reflection (Parson, 2019, p. 26). Finally, I committed to peer debriefing three times with a 'critical friend' (Stieha, 2014) who supported my reflexivity throughout this project. During these debriefs, I was able to talk through the identified themes in a safe space and receive feedback about organizing identified themes.

**Findings**

BFW research posits that Black girls are the experts of their own experiences and valid sources for solutions to social and educational inequities. Findings from this study suggest that Black girls' daily interactions with adults and their peers are central to how they experience school. Although many themes were identified, here I focus on two major themes that illuminate how Black girls understand and experience the climate of their schools: 1) Black Girls and Their Bodies, and 2) Black Girls and Their Mental Health. Within each theme, I outline the problem and solution, as seen by the girls, and make connections to racialized and gendered systems of power and oppression.

*The Problem: Black Girls and Their Bodies*

When asked directly if boys and girls were treated equally, a recurring theme across schools was double standards regarding appropriate dress. Black girls experienced stricter enforcement of the dress code than their white or male counterparts, as evidenced in the following statements:

> I don't think that boys and girls are all the same.
>
> Because boys can wear like anything they want and girls have to wear hoodies and she says on the loudspeaker every day that we have to wear like hoodies like cover our bodies and stuff. (Kendal)
>
> Like the dress code, no because like boys can wear shorts as short as they want but like girls can't. And like shirts they don't care about the boys clothes but like the girls like say if it's right here they can't wear that. So dress code, no. (Amy)
>
> No. First of all the dress code. They have it more strict on girls I guess because we have curves and something like that, that we shouldn't be showing that stuff

but you know the male teachers and the male students shouldn't be looking at that you know. So I guess you have to tell them that too instead of just telling us we can't wear this because what we wear is our choice you know. (Addison)

Girls' bodies are policed in ways that are different from boys and they are subjected to public embarrassment to uphold seemingly neutral dress code policies. The public embarrassment and instructional time devoted to the perceived violation of the dress code policy is not lost on girls. This is evident in the following discussion between two students:

And like also some teachers and they like they really don't care they'll tell you in class like in front of everybody like you can't be wearing that and stuff like that. And they'll take you out of the classroom in front of everybody and like they'll yell at you in front of everybody and stuff like that. And that just makes you feel bad about what you're wearing. (Addison)

It embarrasses. They let you in the classroom and then when they tell you they don't pull you aside they pull you aside in the middle of class. So I remember I got pulled aside and everybody's like oh she in trouble. I'm like why didn't you just do this after the period because it made no sense. (Reign)

Reign noticed a particular difference between clothing with political symbols and statements such as the Confederate flag and Blue Live Matters. Specifically, Reign explained that a student can wear what can be viewed as a hate symbol, and not be disciplined for violating the dress code but if a girl shows a part of her body, she is disciplined. This is evident in the following explanation:

Wait, no because sometimes like the dress code is like really targeted towards girls. And like I saw people wearing Confederate masks one time like shirts or sweatshirts with like things that shouldn't be said in school but they didn't get dress coded but if we show like a tiny bit of our stomach it's a problem. So I feel like when it comes down to the dress code we're not treated equally. That's it pretty much, everything else we're treated equally.

Yeah we're allowed to express our political like sayings and like movements going on. Like I saw somebody with a Blue Lives Matter mask. He's still wearing it. I didn't say anything because that's how he thinks and I'm not really going to waste my time on it. When I see those things sometimes if they speak on it yeah I'll see them as like a supporter of it. But sometimes you just use it as a retaliation to hate on black people even when some people don't support the movement they still hate on it like the Confederate flag. Like they don't use it as a symbol of their heritage, they use it as a symbol of hate because it has a lot of history behind it towards black people. (Reign)

Together, the girls make clear their awareness of and experiences with racism and sexism within the enforcement of dress code policies. As forms of resistance, some have spoken out for themselves and others have borne the injustice. Specifically, Addison described being sent to the school nurse for a change of clothes and telling the nurse that the dress code policy was unfair. Also, some described keeping additional items of clothing in their locker for when they violate the policy. The male gaze and the hypersexualization of Black girls' bodies was both an individual and collective experience shared by the girls within the study. Hypersexualization, a component of

adultification, attributes sex as part of the natural role of Black women and girls (Dagbovie-Mullins, 2013). This theme connects to the male gaze and hypersexualization of Black girls' bodies as one example of characterizing climate within schools as both raced and gendered.

***The Solution***

When asked directly about how to address the discriminatory dress code, the girls offered a variety of noticings and solutions, beginning with addressing the male gaze. The girls made clear that boys should be held accountable for sexualizing their bodies. This is evident in the following comment:

> They can change the dress code or let the boys know don't look at us in that way.
>
> (Addison)

In this statement, 'in that way' suggests a sexualized way of looking that empowers boys and objectifies girls. Under the male gaze, girls are visually positioned as an "object" of desire and their feelings and thoughts are less important than being "framed" by desire. Reign made clear that a possible solution is reframing the male gaze as the problem by stating,

> And if the teacher sees that they're looking at us or getting distracted they can
>
> take action and tell them or move away, and don't tell us that we can't wear those.

In the following statement, Amy adds that she would like boys to be held accountable for their own actions, in the following statement:

> To change our clothes because they just need to…it shouldn't be against the girls
>
> because they're the ones looking or whatever, but then we get in trouble for
>
> wearing it when it's actually them who's…

In addition to addressing the male gaze, the girls recommended specific changes to the existing dress code. For example, some girls suggested removing camisoles and spaghetti straps from the list of prohibited clothing. In fact, Addison stated,

> Or they could like take some of that stuff off that's like reasonable that girls can wear. Like it could be reasonable like oh I understand I can't wear that, or I understand that I have to like cover up and something like that. See if I wear this [referring to her camisole] and we were like still out and about in the hallways and stuff or we're still walking to lunch…

In their view, a camisole or spaghetti straps, particularly during warmer weather, is appropriate clothing, thus a reasonable request for removal from being on the list of dress code violations. In lieu of removing camisoles and spaghetti straps, another young woman suggested that their school require uniforms. She recommended that the dress code should focus on what students can wear versus what they can not wear and how this would be most helpful. Furthermore, she explained the emotional impact of the constant policing of their bodies in the following statement,

> Or instead of just telling us not to wear something give us a uniform. Like a uniform that we can wear or like tell us like colors we can wear. Like some people wear khakis like you're supposed to wear khakis to some schools. I know in Weston you have to but like stop trying to make us feel bad. Maybe like just give us a color to wear or give us specific things to wear not like don't say we can't wear this but say that maybe we should wear like other things. Like maybe we should wear like uniforms that they give us, or we shouldn't wear shorts or we shouldn't wear spaghetti straps, or we can't wear this and that.

Finally, after this discussion, the girls arrived at abolishing the dress code because, despite revisions, girls would continue to be the target of the policy. They believed that students should be trusted to dress appropriately and that appropriateness should be determined by students and their parents/guardians and not the school. Again, the girls made connections between their self-esteem, body positivity, artistic expression via their attire, and how current enforcement of the dress code policy hinders growth in these areas. This is evident in the following exchange:

I feel like the dress code should be like taken away because the dress code in my opinion is like rules that goes against all the things that girls like or girls wear. And I feel like the dress code like can also contradict because some girls wear things that makes them feel good about their body and makes them feel happy and the dress code goes against that. (Reign)

Or like that basically like take the dress code away but like if you take the dress code away I don't feel like anyone in the school is going to really be trying to show themselves like wear like stuff all the way up here and all the way up here. I don't feel like anyone's going to try and do that. But if they did then that's where you could take action and be like oh well cover up a little bit. It shouldn't be to the extent where you're wearing like biker shorts. (Amy)

Yeah and if like you feel like and your parents feel like because I know some people's parents see them before they go to school, like if your parents feel like you shouldn't wear that, do that, but if your parents feel like oh that's okay. (Addison)

Reign understands that clothing is fashion - an important form of expression. She is not

alone in her understanding as a fashion icon and Black woman, Rihanna stated, "Fashion

for me is just another way I get to express myself creatively." This observable expression

of creativity is also connected to self-esteem, particularly in adolescents. Behavior

scientists recognize the role of clothing as an aid in the establishment of self-identity

(Dater, 1990). Some students use clothing as a tool to help them feel good about

themselves, their bodies, and view themselves with positive self-esteem. Reign's point is

how the evaluation and objectification of their bodies are harmful to their personal and

collective development and wellness.

### *The Problem: Black Girls and Their Mental Health*

Another recurring theme in my analysis was mental health. In Reign's very first

interview, when asked what she wished her teachers knew about her. She stated,

> I wish they knew that like they say like Reign is really smart but behind this
>
> image is that sometimes I have anxiety and sometimes when I'm not talking I'm
>
> just thinking about my things and I panic. Like right now I'm shaking my leg but
>
> many teachers don't see that so I wish they could see that I actually have like
>
> something going on. They did recognize that but the only time the school
>
> recognized it was when I had a panic attack.

While Reign did well academically, she expressed concerns and self-awareness about her

own  mental health. She felt that her mental health needs went unrecognized by the

school until her intense feelings of fear and anxiety were at their highest point. Her

experience reveals how the mental health needs of Black girls, particularly those who

perform well academically, go unnoticed in schools. To be ignored is traumatic. Like

Reign, a few of the girls referenced their mental health by expressing how, since the COVID-19 pandemic, they grieved loved ones and experienced overall stressful situations. As the girls had these experiences, they also communicated that it was not easy to talk to the teachers at their school. When asked if it were easy to talk to teachers at her school, Rose stated,

> I've gone through some stressful situations and don't have anyone to talk to but I feel like I wouldn't think of a teacher first.
>
> I feel like there's something between that educational and kind of emotional situation that divide the two. (Rose)

Rose was not alone in her feelings; similarly, other girls expressed that they did not feel like their teachers understood their problems. When I asked girls directly if they believe their teachers understand their problems, they responded in the following ways:

> Mostly yeah, there's some no because they say like you've been through that but some teachers hasn't so they don't understand fully. They understand but not fully like what other people go through, they just say their opinion to see what they can like say what's right and what is wrong. (Nyla)
>
> I can go up to my teachers and share my problems with them. They might act like they understand but yeah they'll act like they understand but you never know. (Rae)
>
> I don't think they like have been there, but I think they'll probably like try to understand. (Kendal)
>
> I don't think they understand my problems. I feel like they'll listen to what I have to say. (Kayla)

When asked to explain their thinking, some cited racial differences. Specifically, Kayla explained, "Because they don't look like me. They don't understand what I'm going through". Kendal also stated, "Because like…I don't know. We have like two different backgrounds. Like racially, we're not the same." For Kayla and Kendal, the cultural mismatch between them and their teachers, predominantly white women, caused them to believe that their teachers could not understand, nor relate to their experiences as Black girls in PWRC. In addition to cultural mismatch, a few of the girls perceived expressions of inauthentic care from their teachers. Taken together, the girls do not feel comfortable communicating their mental health needs to their teachers.

### *The Solution*

When asked to imagine their dream school, collectively, the girls imagined a school with mental health support. During the focus group, the first question asked what physical things they would see in their dream school. Rose was the first person to express:

> I personally would like to see more diversity and multiple mental health outlets,
> because it's a really big thing for schools.

Rose and Nyla expressed the need for mental health services to be delivered by outside professionals. Rose, with nods of agreement from the other girls, explained how at their school they view guidance counselors as teachers and would like mental health support from someone other than a teacher. This is clear in the following statement:

> I feel like someone other than a teacher might be a little better because it's not
> personal thing where you might see them, for us in the middle school, for three

years, every single day of that year. So you might feel a little more comfortable

with that. Like opening up to them. (Rose)

They wanted professionals to come into the school at least twice a month to educate them

on mental health and provide space for them to share their feelings. In addition to the

mental health professionals, in their dream school, they would have rooms as designated

spaces for students to release their big emotions. These rooms are often referred to as

chill zones, zen dens, or comfort rooms. The exchange below shows how students think

the rooms might be used:

That way it would be better for students that have like anger issues and they can

go in and just chill out and not take their anger out on people around them.

(Reign)

Maybe there could be like what you were saying rooms for people with anger

issues and stuff and to calm down. It could be like step in that room and could

break or like you could punch or something. (Addison)

Also, mentioned was the desire to have more people of color in their schools in their

dream school. Kayla stated, "More diversity. There's like 20 Black people in the school.

Teachers, too." When asked how it would feel to attend their dream school, Kayla stated,

"Feel more comfortable. Just knowing you have people that like look like you…".

The girls discussed many other experiences that this article does not explore given

the focus to address both problems and solutions related to the school climate in PWRC.

However, I would like to acknowledge these experiences. Some positive experiences

included: feeling like members of their community and the belief that their teachers cared

about them. Some racialized experiences included: lowered expectations for disabled

students, bullying/cyberbullying, debating current social movements such as Black Lives Matter, and narrow curriculums. Additional solutions to improving school climate include a better selection of clubs and visible support for Black students.

**Discussion**

Black girls in schools in PWRC understand and experience the climate of their schools and communities as racialized and gendered. This is evident in how they described their experiences with the double standards regarding appropriate dress, the hypersexualization of their bodies, unrecognized mental health needs, and lack of cultural understanding. At the same time, they expressed feeling like members of their school communities and believed that their teachers genuinely cared about them.

Existing research reveals the plethora of challenges Black girls face in their schooling experiences based on their race and gender which include the policing of their appearance (Morris, 2016), adultification (Epstein et al., 2017), and hypersexualization of their bodies (Morris, 2016). The girls within this study share these racialized and gendered experiences. The reports *Mental Health and Girls of Color* (Leary, 2019) and *Uniting Isolated Voices: Girls and Gender-Expansive Youth During COVID-19* (Alliance for Girls, 2021) document past and current mental health outcomes and needs for girls of color. One of the most reported negative effects of COVID-19 by girls is the difficulty with emotional coping described as increased stress, anxiety, depression, worry, and feeling overwhelmed (p. 5). In addition, children of color have the highest rate of unaddressed mental health needs but are less likely to receive mental health care because services are inaccessible, stigmatized or their needs are unrecognized by providers (Leary, 2019, p. 10). Girls of color may not seek services because they report distrust of

mental health services and confidentiality concerns. The girls in this study also reported increased stress, unrecognized needs, and concerns of lack of understanding.

Framed within BFW research which is informed by Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and Womanism (Phillips, 2006), the everyday experiences of Black girls within the context of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression shaped their collective and individual perspectives and solutions to problems they identified. For the discriminatory dress code policies, the girls believed the best way to support Black girls in schools in PWRC is to do away with the policies, entirely. In the area of mental health, the girls wanted schools to partner with mental health professionals to provide education and service opportunities to all students at least twice a month. In addition, diversifying school faculty and staff would support Black girls better connecting with adults with whom they can identify racially and culturally.

The findings demonstrate that the girls can clearly identify issues and possible solutions, but not all of their solutions are coming from a critically conscious space. This is evident when school uniforms are suggested as a solution for addressing the racism and sexism they face from dress code policies. Reducing distractions in the learning environment is the most common justification for the implementation of uniform policies (Knipp & Stevenson, 2022), but those most likely to be labeled as distracting are typically female, Black, economically disadvantaged, and/or curvier in size (Epstein et al., 2017). During our discussion about the dress code policies, was one moment that I stepped into the role of a mentor because I felt a personal responsibility to help the girls think critically about their solutions. One way I did this was I posed questions such as

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"Who is most vulnerable?" to help the girls think about how dress code policies disproportionately target clothing styles typically associated with female students.

Although not an identified finding, the critical conversations that occurred between the girls and I supported positive identity development and critical consciousness. I was a Black woman facilitating critical conversations, those that raise the subject of challenging topics such as racism and sexism (Hipólito-Delgado & Zion, 2017), with groups of Black girls in predominantly white schools. Showing up as a Black woman to talk to Black girls about their schooling experiences validated our existence. Critical consciousness as a process to acquire the necessary critical thinking tool so that students, instead of internalizing their oppression, understand how institutions of power work to deny them equality of treatment, access, and justice (p. 17). Positive identity development and critical consciousness are two of three elements (missing social action) to psychological empowerment. Critical civic inquiry (CCI), is a transformative student voice initiative that engages students in critical conversations about educational equity and inquiry-based learning to increase student voice and promote civic action is proven to increase psychological empowerment in marginalized youth (Hipólito-Delgado & Zion, 2017).

### Implications

The findings from this study are valuable for scholars and practitioners for a number of reasons. First, this study responds to the call for the use of culturally relevant theories and research to study Black girls (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Secondly, the findings from this study extend existing research on Black girls. Also, this study extends the existing research on Black girls by focusing on Black girls in schools in

PWRC. Prior studies on Black girls in predominantly white rural schools generally focused on private schools or girls who have been bused out of their local schools to high-income suburban communities (Holland, 2012). Additionally, this study provides insight into the experiences of Black girls during the COVID-19 pandemic and America's racial reawakening.

*Limitations*

This study is not intended to generalize the experiences of Black girls in school in PWRC. Although there are commonalities among Black girls, this study does equate to universal truths about what it means to be a Black in schools in PWRC. Also, during interviews, we wore masks and at times were behind plexiglass with distance between myself and the girls. Naturally, these safety precautions made it difficult for me and the recorder to hear the participants. This is especially true for the focus group at Belair Middle School. Some of the data were lost due to parts of the conversation being inaudible. Lastly, this study does not examine Black girls within other geographical contexts and other social locations such as disability/ableism and class/classism. Thus, there is ample opportunity for future research to extend the findings of this study and our understanding of Black girls' experiences in schools.

*Recommendations*

The perspectives offered in this study draw attention to how Black girls experience the climate in school in PWRC. Based on this study's findings, the following recommendations are offered to educators and school leaders:

**Revise Dress Code Policies and Adapt Equitable Policy Language.** The girls clearly articulated their negative experiences with the enforcement of a dress code they

perceived to be discriminatory. This included embarrassment and the hypersexualization of their bodies. However, dress code policies can interrupt this cycle and create an avenue for liberatory change. School policies, such as the model dress code policy provided by Oregon National Organization for Women (2016) which promise to "not reinforce marginalization or oppression" and do not ban distracting clothing, but instead require students to "manage their own personal distractions," challenge the status quo and offer an alternative (p. 1).

**Improve Access to School-based Mental Health Professionals Trained in Intersectional and Culturally Responsive Practices.** Mental health is essential for student success. Several of the girls expressed unrecognized mental health needs, struggling with stress, loss, and anxiety. Yet, they did not seek mental health support due to concerns of mistrust. Schools must examine the mental health services and supports that are offered in their schools and provide access to school-based mental health professionals trained in intersectional and culturally responsive practices (Jacobs, 2022).

**Create Safe Spaces for Black Girls.** Create spaces where Black girls can freely express their ideas, hopes, dreams, and challenges. These spaces must operate as refuge for all Black girls as they individually and collectively share, examine, and interrogate their racialized and gendered experiences. For example, Ruth Brown collaborated with Black girls and women to create Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths as "a space to envision Black girlhood critically with and among Black girls." (Brown, 2013, p. 1).

This study complements *It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Schools for Me: Perceptions of Climate* by digging deeper into Black girls' experiences in school. Through the centering of Black girls, their voices, and ways of knowing, racism and

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sexism was identified within the enforcement of dress code policies and unrecognized mental health needs. School leaders and educators can interrupt racism and sexism within school policies and practices. This study created space for a Black woman to listen to Black girls sharing their wisdom and ways of knowing because of the responsibility she has to Black girls.

# Chapter 5

## Post-Articles Analysis

**Discussion**

This dissertation explored Black girls' schooling experiences and perceptions of school climate in PWRC. As a reminder, I will revisit the key findings from each article and then discuss the outcomes of the entire project.

The first article of this dissertation, *It's the Focus on Meaningful Numbers for Me: Exploring Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality in School Psychology Research*, included points of consideration and application for researchers in the field of school psychology who wish to apply CRQI in their research. I will unpack how I applied CRQI in my second article, *It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Communities for Me: Perceptions of School Climate*.

- My positionality statement makes clear that I am a Black woman seeking justice for Black girls. The study is not neutral nor objective.
- Black girls were not compared to any other group because our experiences are unique and valid without comparisons to other groups.
- Racism and sexism are named and discussed throughout the study for framing the school climate through systems of oppression.
- To include experiential significance, the results from article two informed the interview questions in article three.

With my power as the researcher, these were the decisions I made about the research process to disrupt harm against a marginalized group.

*It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Communities for Me: Perceptions of School*

*Climate*, a quantitative study, concluded the following key findings:

- **Black girls' perceptions of school climate changed significantly from 2020 to 2021.** The MANOVA indicated that about 48% of the variance in school climate perceptions and experiences is explained by the year. In the topic areas of bullying, physical environment, mental health, and discipline, there is a meaningful difference in Black girls' responses between the two academic school years.

- **Physical environment and bullying/cyberbullying changed significantly from 2020 to 2021.** Black girls' experiences and perceptions of the physical environment in their schools improved from 2.78 in 2020 to 2.17 in 2021. However, Black girls' experiences and perceptions of bullying/cyberbullying worsened by 28%, as the mean increased from 1.62 in 2020 to 2.08 in 2021.

- **Black girls need targeted support in the area of mental health.** In 2020, at least half of the population of Black girls had unfavorable perceptions of mental health with a reported mean of 2.51.

Recommendations from this study included professional development for educators related to Black girls and their vulnerability to bullying/cyberbullying, the support and incorporation of healing-centered engagement into schools from school leaders, and intersectional analytic approaches that center Black girls from researchers and policymakers.

In qualitative study, *It's the Focus on Listening to Black Girls for Me: Exploring School Climate in Rural Communities*, two major themes were identified:

- **Black Girls and Their Bodies.** Black girls experienced discrimination, hypersexualization, and objectification through the enforcement of dress code policies. In their eyes, dress code policies should be removed.

- **Black Girls and Their Mental Health.** Black girls experienced their mental health needs being ignored, increased stress, and distrust in understanding from teachers. As a result, they wanted more mental health support and Black teachers.

This article focused on problems and solutions, as seen by Black girls, but other identified themes included: lowered expectations for disabled students, bullying/cyberbullying, debating current social movements such as Black Lives Matter, and narrow curriculums. Additional solutions to improving school climate include a better selection of clubs and visible support for Black students.

Recommendations from this article included revising dress code policies, improving access to school-based mental health professionals trained in intersectional and culturally responsive practices, and creating safe spaces for Black girls.

*Integration*

Mental health and bullying/cyberbullying are areas where both articles align, quantitatively and qualitatively, indicating experiential and practical significance for Black girls. Questions within the EDSCLS prompted deeper conversations with the girls that connected to their mental health. For example, the question item, *Teachers understand my problems*, revealed a concern for understanding due to cultural mismatches. Although bullying/cyberbullying was not a major theme in the qualitative

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articles, incidents rooted in racism were discussed. Not to mention, all of the incidents involved racism, online.

Conversely, discipline was an area where both articles diverge. According to the EDSCLS, Black girls' perceptions of discipline, on average, are favorable. However, the qualitative study revealed the challenges Black girls faced with the enforcement of dress code policies. An item from the survey (this item did not measure perceptions of discipline), *Boys and girls are treated equally well*, prompted discussion about dress code policies. What I found interesting was how this clear problem for Black girls was not reflected in the survey, but the strongest commonality amongst the girls in the qualitative study.

The beauty of this study, as a whole, is the opportunity to take data from a survey and have a conversation with Black girls about school climate. A critical mixed methods inquiry was necessary to best understand school climate from the perspective of Black girls in rural communities. Either approach alone would simply provide an incomplete understanding of their schooling experiences. Perhaps most importantly, is that this mixed methods study is framed within the historical and cultural context with the goal of justice for Black girls and done by a Black woman. Both the quantitative and qualitative analyses examined power dynamics and the systems of oppression Black girls face in rural schools.

So how does this study contribute to the knowledge base regarding the problem? This project fills research gaps on Black girls in schools in PWRC and Black girls' perceptions of school climate. Methodologically, this study is a pragmatic, yet innovative approach to producing knowledge about and with Black girls. Grounded in critical

quantitative research and a culturally relevant research model focused on Black girls, this study adds voice to 'numbers'. Together, this project asserts experiential (qualitative) and statistical (quantitative) significance as equally important. This study is an example of data collection being built on trust and relational capital. The goal is to have data built on the tenets of culturally responsive education informing policy for district transformation. While focusing on the "problems", this project demonstrates how Black girls must be a part of the solution.

### Recommendations

Based on the overall findings from this study, I offer the following recommendations for policy and practice.

- Policymakers must review their policies by asking questions such as, "What works about this policy for Black girls? How have intersectional data informed this policy?"

- Researchers must collect data that are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and other social locations and examine the material impact of social location and its relationship to history, communities, and educational systems.

- Researchers use both quantitative and qualitative methods, grounded in critical theory, to capture a more complete picture of Black girls' experiences.

- School leaders must examine their current policies and practices, such as discipline practices and dress code policies) and consider the unjust impact on Black girls.

- School leaders must improve access to school-based mental health professionals trained in intersectional and culturally responsive practices (Jacobs, 2022).

- School leaders must be informed by localized experiential data that emerges from the lived experience of Black girls. While survey data is helpful in determining trends within a school or district, we must dig deeper in order to humanize the process of gathering data (Safir and Dugan, 2021).
- School leaders, educators, and practitioners must focus on the wisdom within (bring Black girls into the conversation) to co-create policies that actually support the needs of Black girls.
- School leaders, educators, and practitioners must create safe spaces for Black girls to freely express their ideas, hopes, dreams, and challenges. These spaces must operate as refuge for all Black girls as they individually and collectively share, examine, and interrogate their racialized and gendered experiences. Importantly, this space must develop critical conversations that support positive identity development and critical consciousness.

Most of the solutions benefit not only Black girls, but all students. In an earlier piece, *Partnering with Families to Support Black Girls* (Alvarez & Price, 2021), we discuss solutions for combining support between families and educators.

**Black Girls**

I end this dissertation with a message to Black girls in predominantly white rural communities. Being a Black girl anywhere in America is not easy and it never has been. You don't have to be strong, magical, or in a particular place or space to matter. You deserve to be heard, valued, supported, protected, and loved. You deserve to heal, learn, and have joy because of the conditions in your schools, not in spite of them.

**Future Research Goals**

My overarching goal is to extend my research agenda, while publishing, presenting, and developing further expertise in critical research methods. In detail, I plan to:

- Expand my current research to include EDSCLS data from the 2021-2022 school year and counterstory telling for its alignment with critical race theory.

- Publish at least four articles in both peer-reviewed journals and free online space. The additional findings in the qualitative study that were mentioned but the focus of the study, will be published in the fourth article, *Are You Listening? What Is And Isn't Working For Black Girls*.

**Table 5.1**

*Article Timeline*

| Article Title and Focus | Target Journal/Outlet | Timeline |
|---|---|---|
| It's the Focus on Meaningful Numbers for Me: Exploring Critical Race Quantitative Intersectionality in School Psychology Research (Conceptual) | School Psychology Review (Revise and Resubmit) | August - September 2022 |
| It's the Focus on Black Girls in Rural Communities for Me: Perceptions of School Climate (Critical Quantitative Research) | Journal of School Psychology Journal of Black Studies Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness | November - December 2022 |
| It's the Focus on Listening to Black Girls for Me: Exploring School Climate in Rural Communities (Qualitative) | International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education | February - March 2022 |
| Are You Listening? What Is and Isn't Working for Black Girls (Practitioner Focused) | Learning for Justice | May - June 2022 |

- Present my research in at least four national conferences and four local platforms

  that the Northeastern American Research Association (NERA) annual conference

  in October 2022 and American Education Research Association (AERA) annual

  conference in April 2023. I would like to continue to present my research at local

  conferences and equity council and school board meetings.

- Attend professional development opportunities focused on mixed methods, advanced quantitative research methods, and critical qualitative research methods. One opportunity is The Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation And Assessment annual conference focused on empirical methods in educational research and evaluation. Another opportunity is The Institute In Critical Quantitative, Computational, & Mixed Methodologies (ICQM) focused on methodological knowledge and critical perspectives on the use of quantitative computational methods. Both professional development opportunities support the development of theoretical and methodological knowledge to apply in my own research.

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**Questions for Interview Protocols**

| Interview 1 | Interview 2 | Focus Group 3 |
|---|---|---|
| 1. How are you doing? How is the year going so far?<br>2. How do you feel about school?<br>3. Who are your best friends? Where did you meet them and why are they your best friends?<br>4. What do you like or love about your school?<br>5. Name some extracurricular activities you enjoy at school. What activities/clubs do you wish your school offered?<br>6. Do you feel like you are a member of your school community? If so, how? If not, why?<br>7. Who do you talk to when you have a problem?<br>8. Tell me about what social media you use.<br>    a. What kinds of things do you see on social media? What inspires you on social media? | 1. Tell me about your experience with discipline at your school?<br>2. What did you understand by the term 'equally' when answering this question: *Boys and girls are treated equally well. School rules are applied equally.*<br>3. What does the term 'respect' mean to you?<br>4. How easy or difficult was it to remember when the school provided instructional materials that reflected your cultural background, ethnicity, and background?<br>5. How do you understand the 'feeling safe'? What time period were you thinking about when answering *I feel safe at school*?<br>6. When did you last have the opportunity to talk about the importance of understanding your own feelings and the feelings of others? | 1. What does your dream school look, sound, and feel like?<br>2. What can your school do to provide a greater focus on 'X' at your school?<br>3. What can adults do to improve 'X'? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 9. With all that is going on in the world right now related to race/racism, what have you discussed with your family, friends, or in school? How did that make you feel?<br>10. What is it like to be a Black girl during these racially charged times?<br>11. What are some things you wish other students and teachers knew about your culture and identity? | 7. How did you work out your answer to this question: *I am happy to be at this school*?<br>8. How accurate would you say the average perception is?<br>9. How did you feel about being asked this question: *Teachers understand my problems*?<br>10. Are there any categories missing from the question or options provided or do they cover everything? What is missing? | |

# Appendix B

## Item Means and Standard Deviation

| Item | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| All students are treated the same, regardless of whether their parents are rich or poor. SMengclc8 | 2.03 | .746 |
| Boys and girls are treated equally well. SMengclc9 | 2.13 | .859 |
| This school provides instructional materials (e.g., textbooks, handouts) that reflect my cultural background, ethnicity, and identity. SMengclc10 | 2.07 | .602 |
| Adults working at this school treat all students respectfully. SMengclc11 | 1.98 | .779 |
| People of different cultural backgrounds, races, or ethnicities get along well at this school. SMengclc12 | 2.02 | .741 |
| Teachers understand my problems. SMengrel13 | 2.24 | .881 |
| Teachers are available when I need to talk to them. SMengrel14 | 1.84 | .578 |
| It is easy to talk to teachers at this school. SMengrel15 | 2.39 | .817 |
| My teachers care about me. SMengrel16 | 1.75 | .537 |
| My teachers make me feel good about myself. SMengrel17 | 1.98 | .713 |
| Students respect one another. SMengrel18 | 2.56 | .917 |
| Students like one another. SMengrel19 | 2.45 | .823 |
| If I am absent, there is a teacher or some other adult at school that will notice my absence. SMengrel20 | 1.76 | .670 |
| I regularly attend school-sponsored events, such as school dances, sporting events, student performances, or other school activities. SMengpar21 | 2.26 | .867 |
| I regularly participate in extracurricular activities offered through this school, such as school clubs or organizations, musical groups, sports teams, student government, or any other extra-curricular activities. SMengpar22 | 2.23 | .857 |
| At this school, students have lots of chances to help decide things like class activities and rules. SMengpar23 | 2.26 | .828 |
| There are lots of chances for students at this school to get involved in sports, clubs, and other school activities outside of class. SMengpar24 | 1.79 | .681 |
| I have lots of chances to be part of class discussions or activities. SMengpar25 | 1.77 | .584 |
| I feel like I belong. SMsafemo26 | 2.23 | .831 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Students at this school get along well with each other. SMsafemo27 | 2.42 | .835 |
| At this school, students talk about the importance of understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others. SMsafemo28 | 2.46 | .848 |
| At this school, students work on listening to others to understand what they are trying to say. SMsafemo29 | 2.39 | .737 |
| I am happy to be at this school. SMsafemo30 | 2.18 | .940 |
| I feel like I am part of this school. SMsafemo31 | 2.20 | .891 |
| I feel socially accepted. SMsafemo32 | 2.15 | .928 |
| I feel safe at this school. SMsafpsaf33 | 1.97 | .706 |
| I feel safe going to and from this school. SMsafpsaf34 | 1.87 | .724 |
| I sometimes stay at home because I don't feel safe at this school. SMsafpsaf35 | 1.67 | .655 |
| Students at this school carry guns or knives to school. SMsafpsaf36 | 1.46 | .621 |
| Students at this school threaten to hurt other students. SMsafpsaf37 | 2.00 | .894 |
| Students at this school steal money, electronics, or other valuable things while at school. SMsafpsaf38 | 1.75 | .830 |
| Students at this school damage or destroy other students' property. SMsafpsaf39 | 1.93 | .910 |
| Students at this school fight a lot. SMsafpsaf40 | 2.25 | 1.035 |
| Students at this school are teased or picked on about their race or ethnicity. SMsafbul41 | 2.13 | 1.033 |
| Students at this school are teased or picked on about their cultural background or religion. SMsafbul42 | 1.95 | .921 |
| Students at this school are teased or picked on about their physical or mental disability. SMsafbul43 | 2.02 | 1.017 |
| Students at this school are often bullied. SMsafbul44 | 2.10 | .943 |
| Students at this school try to stop bullying. SMsafbul45 | 2.13 | .826 |
| Students often spread mean rumors or lies about others at this school on the internet (i.e., Facebook™, email, and instant message). SMsafbul46 | 2.28 | 1.067 |
| Students use/try alcohol or drugs while at school or school-sponsored events. SMsafsub47 | 1.60 | .785 |
| It is easy for students to use/try alcohol or drugs at school or school-sponsored events without getting caught. SMsafsub48 | 1.73 | .868 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Students at this school think it is okay to smoke one or more packs of cigarettes a day. SMsafsub49 | 1.67 | .837 |
| Students at this school think it is okay to get drunk. SMsafsub50 | 1.85 | .925 |
| Students at this school think it is okay to try drugs. SMsafsub51 | 1.84 | .986 |
| Students know what to do if there is an emergency, natural disaster (tornado, flood) or a dangerous situation (e.g. violent person on campus) during the school day. SMsaferm52 | 1.84 | .840 |
| If students hear about a threat to school or student safety, they would report it to someone in authority. SMsaferm53 | 1.84 | .778 |
| The bathrooms in the school are clean. SMenvpenv54 | 2.15 | .867 |
| The temperature in this school is comfortable all year round. SMenvpenv55 | 2.52 | .883 |
| The school grounds are kept clean. SMenvpenv56 | 2.05 | .782 |
| I think that students are proud of how this school looks on the outside. SMenvpenv57 | 1.95 | .753 |
| Broken things at this school get fixed quickly. SMenvpenv58 | 2.21 | .700 |
| My teachers praise me when I work hard in school. SMenvins59 | 1.90 | .630 |
| My teachers give me individual attention when I need it. SMenvins60 | 1.82 | .725 |
| My teachers often connect what I am learning to life outside the classroom. SMenvins61 | 1.98 | .725 |
| The things I'm learning in school are important to me. SMenvins62 | 2.12 | .739 |
| My teachers expect me to do my best all the time. SMenvins63 | 1.64 | .637 |
| My teachers really care about me. SMenvmen64 | 1.80 | .610 |
| I can talk to my teachers about problems I am having in class. SMenvmen65 | 1.97 | .823 |
| I can talk to a teacher or other adult at this school about something that is bothering me. SMenvmen66 | 2.15 | .880 |
| Students at this school stop and think before doing anything when they get angry. SMenvmen67 | 2.68 | .899 |
| Students at this school try to work out their disagreements with other students by talking to them. SMenvmen68 | 2.52 | 1.013 |
| My teachers make it clear to me when I have misbehaved in class. SMenvdis69 | 1.70 | .619 |
| Adults working at this school reward students for positive behavior. SMenvdis70 | 1.90 | .656 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Adults working at this school help students develop strategies to understand and control their feelings and actions. SMenvdis71 | 1.85 | .659 |
| School rules are applied equally to all students. SMenvdis72 | 1.88 | .885 |
| Discipline is fair. SMenvis73 | 1.98 | .854 |