For Black Girls Too Fast Too Furious: Black Girlhood & School Discipline

Senior Research Thesis

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by
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Acknowledgment

I dedicate my senior thesis to my younger sister, my niece, to Black girls I know, to Black girls I don't know at all, and to the younger version of myself. There will be moments when you don't feel seen, you don't feel heard, you don't feel protected or cared for. This work is for those moments. This work is my expression of love and care for you. This is my reminder to you that you are powerful. You are capable. Stand in your truth. Unapologetically.

As I complete this work in the midst of a pandemic I must express my gratitude for my health. I am eternally grateful to be well enough to see this project to the end. I hold in my heart closely all the loved ones we lost during this trying time. I take this space to honor the memory of my grandmother Joyce. You have motivated me to finish this project when I didn't think I was strong enough to do so.

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For Black girls
Chapter I: Introduction & Methods

By the time I reached senior year of high school I had been suspended at least five times. I have been kicked out of the classroom more times than I am able to recollect. I have been permanently removed from after-school enrichment programs. I served a number of detentions and memorized the path to the principal’s office. I have been publicly ridiculed. I had a principal threaten to call Child Protective Service after begging that my parents wouldn't be called. To my face I have been called a “waste of space,” “a bad kid,” and labelled incorrigible.

I spent a lot of time feeling frustrated. I spent a lot of time struggling with feelings of hypervisibility and invisibility. I spent my entire school experience feeling like I had to balance combat boots on eggshells. I came to understand myself as a nuisance. I struggled because everything that made me also made me vulnerable to disciplinary action. I came to hate the way I spoke so much, so loud, and so passionate. I made it my goal to shrink myself, to be quiet, to be less, to do less, and when I did things changed for me. I learned that in order to stay under the radar that this was the me I needed to be.

My experiences in the classroom undoubtedly shaped the formation of my identity. They influenced the way I understood myself and my place not only in the classroom but in the real world. The idea that I did not belong was always apparent to me. I did not see myself reflected in learning materials. I did not see myself fitting into uniformed school cultures that I was always too loud for. I did not see my wants, needs or culture reflected in teachers who “got paid regardless.” My identity made school less about learning the necessary academic skills I needed to be a successful student and more about conforming. Eventually I learned to focus my efforts on the curriculum in which I was really being graded. I became the type of young lady I was
supposed to be. My schooling experiences had many implications I was unaware of and later required me to do a lot of unlearning in order to discover and become comfortable with my true self.

My study of identity via African American Studies and Women and Gender Studies and through the study of Urban Education gave me the knowledge and language that allowed me to begin to make sense of my experience in the classroom as a Black queer women from the Bronx. My new understanding of theory inspired praxis, and served as an analytical tool for activism. In 2016, I wrote my first college research paper ‘The Damage of Discipline: Discipling Black Girls In NYC Schools’ in which I began to explore discipline disparities for Black girls in New York City schools. In 2017 I constructed and published a Blog site titled Dear, Urban Education where I presented an accessible analysis of the way Black femininity is rejected in the classroom. In 2018 I drafted a policy memo to NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio & Chancellor Richard A. Carranza suggesting mandatory restorative justice programs in all NYC schools as an alternative to suspension. It was through the analysis of my own experiences that I understood the urgency for more tangible intervention that could address the realities of school discipline for Black girls.

Through academic scholarship I discovered that my experience is not an isolated incident. I know that other Black girls can relate to my experiences in educational spaces. I can imagine that other Black girls are grappling with similar feelings regarding sense of belonging. And so I feel a personal obligation, not only as a Black Feminist Scholar but also as an educator, Black woman, and former urban student to continue to make sense of my experiences for the frustrated little girl I used to be and for all Black girls alike.
The reality is that schools are pushing students out of the classroom and into the prison system. A wealth of research has been done regarding Black students and the School to Prison Pipeline.¹ This research often falls short because it focuses particularly on Black boys and/or considers the experiences of Black girls and Black boys to be homogeneous. Fewer studies have been done to examine how race and gender interact to influence the practices and policies that create the pipeline.² The research that has been done shows that Black girls are also affected by school discipline policies and practices. However, they experience this policing in a way that is unique from their counterparts. Black girls are disciplined for very particular reasons usually tied to both racial and gender biases.

These policies and practices have tangible implications. Black women represent thirty percent of all incarcerated women in the United States but represents thirteen percent of the general population of women.³ But beyond that, Black girls are dropping out of school.⁴ Black girls are referring to themselves as “bad students” and dread going to school every morning. Black girls who have learned to silence themselves in the classroom are doing the same thing in corporate offices, hospitals, domestic relationships, and everywhere else in the world. Schools as institutions, and the discipline policies and practices they adopt, are a cause of this phenomenon. The lessons that Black girls are learning from the classroom through multiple forms of discipline can be internalized and brought with them into the real world. This, amongst other implications, is missing from the current conversation surrounding school discipline. Are only the girls who are being suspended, arrested or end up in prison in need of support and intervention? I argue

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¹See: Advancement Project, “Education On Lockdown”, (2016); Nocella, From Education To Incarceration; Bahena, Disrupting the School to Prison Pipeline; Winn, “The Right to Be Literate: Literacy, Education, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline.”
² Morris, Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools
³ ACLU, “Facts About The Over-incarceration Of Women In The United States”
that there is an urgent need of visibility and support for Black girls whose experiences do not fit into the narrowly defined pipeline.

Until the conversation about discipline and the School To Prison Pipeline considers the experiences of Black girls to be relevant enough to study extensively as a separate entity, Black girls will fall through the cracks and remain invisible. Racial and gender identity leaves Black girls with an extra set of implicit rules they are expected to follow, and thus allows for more modes of transgressions. Since identity is the root of these disparities, it is, therefore, necessary to analyze the way Black girls’ identities are understood in these institutions. We must consider how race and gender influence the way Black girls are regarded in academic spaces, listen closely and think critically about the interactions Black girls have with their teachers, staff, and the school and school discipline policies. We must consider how these experiences influence Black girls lives directly both immediately and long term. Not only should we be imagining an educational experience that does not steer Black girls to prison but one that does not lead to any other traumatic experiences. By utilizing and centering the testimonies of Black girls themselves, myself included, I hope to isolate concrete causes and effects of discipline policies and practices that are specifically enacted as a result of identity intersection in order to critique and propose possible solutions.

Defining Terms

The School to Prison Pipeline (STPP): The term School to Prison Pipeline was born out of the term “Schoolhouse to Jailhouse,” coined by lawyers of the Advancement Project. The term was meant to “conjure a vivid, evocative, and unambiguous image: poor and Black and Brown children being derailed from academic and vocational paths, and directed toward jails and
The School To Prison Pipeline concerns the ways in which schools refer students to law enforcement directly and indirectly by creating conditions, such as suspension and expulsion, that increase the likelihood of them eventually becoming incarcerated. It also mentions the ways in which schools create a culture and environment that leads students to develop negative attitudes towards schooling which indirectly influence other behaviors that increase the likelihood of imprisonment. This term is racialized and is primarily concerned with Black and Brown students, as they are the most affected by the policies and practices that inform the pipeline.

I employ the language of the School To Prison Pipeline as an entryway to expand the conversation regarding the educational experiences of Black girls. I believe this term is too absolute and in that way leaves out many Black girls' experiences. The phrase is usually used narrowly in terms of policy, i.e. Zero-Tolerance, Guns Free School Act. It draws attention specifically to school and prisons and neglects the other routes in which students find themselves involved with the carceral state. Researchers also neglect the complementary forms of confinement that also imprison young people. Then, no space is left to hink about the implications for youth who do not become involved with the criminal justice system.

This phrase also regards the process in which students become engaged with the prison system as linear, when the process is not. Carla Shed names the “Cumulative criminal continuity” which refers to a dynamic process in which delinquent behavior at one point in time has consequences that increase the likelihood of continued delinquent behavior at later points in time. This builds on the idea of a carceral continuum, which is the notion that interactions with

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5 A.K., “A History of Legal Exclusion”
law enforcement impacts the life trajectory of Black youth, always and everywhere.⁶

Adolescents' interactions with key authoritative figures including teachers and police officers have an impact on their formative experiences and their attitudes about themselves and the world they live in. The terminology of “The School to Prison Pipeline" leaves this important realization out and limits our analysis. So, while I do utilize this term, I do so only as an entry way into discussion.

**Black Girls:** The term “Black girl” can be interpreted to mean many things depending on who is defining the term or ascribing the label. I am defining Black girls to include non-trans girls who have ancestral roots linked to the broader African diaspora. I am deliberate to define girls as being between the age of 5-18 in order to include the ages Black girls are in traditional K-12 education spaces. I regard middle school and high school aged girls as “girls' intentionally, as Black girls have a complicated history with adultification that I do not wish to support or further encourage.⁷ The majority of the girls I included in my research self-identified as Black girls.

**Discipline:** Data regarding school discipline considers discipline to include, suspensions, expulsions, in school arrest, the use of restraint, and seclusions.⁸ I define discipline as any act of punishment that attempts to inculcate students to obey rules or codes of behavior. While this can include in-school suspensions, off-site or superintendent suspension, referral to alternative school and expulsion, it also considers scolding, revoking a privilege, negative phone calls home, temporary and permanent removal from the classroom, office referrals, conduct markings, and

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⁶ Shed, *Unequal Cities*
⁷ Jacob. "Adolescent Citizenship, or Temporality and the Negation of Black Childhood in Two Eras
⁸ Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot, School Discipline,
reprimanding as forms of discipline. Forms of discipline such as suspensions and expulsions are easily quantitated and are thus privileged in research. However I included other forms of discipline, forms that are usually unarchived to add to the discussion. These practices also affect Black girls' schooling experience.

**Framework**

The goal of this thesis is to pull together existing research regarding Black girls experiences with school, including authors and works from different fields, who use different research methodologies, and approach the topic through different avenues. When these works are analyzed together and put in conversation with one another it allows me to more thoroughly comprehend the experiences of school aged Black girls and thus make sense of my own experiences. Examining existing research also allows me to determine gaps in the research, as I attempt to fill them. I take a multidisciplinary approach as I center my work primarily in the fields of Education Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies and Black Studies. However, I borrow from scholars in various fields including Anthropology, Sociology, Law and American History.

**Learning Theory**

In my approach I employ theories of learning as a framework to describe, understand, and explain educational policies and practices, as well as understand Black girls learning experiences in the schools. These educational theories cite learning to the persistent change in human behavior, performance or potential as a result of reinforced practice. For something to be considered learning a change in performance must present as a result of the learners experiences

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9 Olson, *Introduction To Theories Of Learning.*
and interactions with the world. I employ this theory in connection to classroom and school learning and the epistemology of identity formation.

**Black Feminist Thought**

I also utilize Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical framework, articulating a standpoint of and for Black women of the African Diaspora, and holding close the theory of intersectionality. Intersectionality is an understanding of the process in which race, gender, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation interlock to shape the unique experiences of Black women individually and collectively.¹⁰ As a Black Feminist scholar, I understand the importance of centering lived experiences. From the Combahee River Collective, I understand that “the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity”¹¹ Patricia Hill Collins reminds us wisdom has been key to Black women's survival. The lived experiences are the “cutting edge that divides knowledge and wisdom.” The distinction is crucial, as “knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate.”¹² I am deliberate and intentional about citing the stories of Black girls and regarding their knowledge about their own experiences as valid and maybe even more important than the academic theories that surround them. I also acknowledge the importance of Darlene Clark Hines, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women” which offers me the analytical tools “to understand why Black women behave in a certain way and how they acquire agency” but also issue an “implicit call to honor Black privacy while carefully locating black agency.”¹³

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¹⁰Crenshaw, Kimberle  "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex"
¹¹"A Black Feminist Statement: Combahee River Collective; Boston, Massachusetts; April 1977” ; Collins, *Intersectionality*
¹³Roach, "(Re)turning to “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women”, 515
my writing I work to “shield Black female subjects from the inevitable harm of the white institutional gaze.”\textsuperscript{14} “I respect and protect the privacy of the Black girls whose stories I include by allowing them all pseudonyms. I am extending care for these girls and their stories through my own vulnerability. I offer my stories of institutional violence to stand alongside the stories they share. Finally, I again quote the women of the Combahee River Collective in order to summarize my employment of BFT in this project, “We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.”\textsuperscript{15}

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory, coined by Black feminist Scholar and legal scholar Kimberlee Crenshaw, is a theoretical model that recognizes that race and racism are ingrained in the fabric of American society through power structure and institutions beginning in our law and legal system then expanding to other institutions such as school and education. CRT examines society and culture as they relate to race, law and power, thinking critically about border historical and economic context. As I support the claim that school functions as a part of a carceral apparatus CRT is crucial to unpacking how race influences the creation of specific policies and practices within academic institutions that support mimic the criminal justice system.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} "A Black Feminist Statement: Combahee River Collective; Boston, Massachusetts; April 1977"
Methodology

Autoethnography

I undertake this work situated within the discipline of Black studies and employ a Black Feminist framework which affords me the freedom to use autoethnography as a methodological approach. Autoethnography, is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience to connect to wider cultural, social and political understanding. Autoethnographic stories are “artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experiences.” Saidiya Hartman emphasizes “it’s not about navel gazing, it’s really about trying to look at historical and social processes and one’s own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them” (Saunders 2008b, 7) With that I use this as a space for reflection and choose to offer personal accounts and allow myself vulnerability. I weave my personal narrative through drawing parallels where applicable. I offer my experiences as a learning tool for myself and my audience, and as an entryway into the larger discussion of theories, policies and practices I wish to highlight; “my Black queer body both research instrument and research subject.”

Digital Methods: Social Media

Our cyberspaces provide avenues for knowledge, education, community, connections, and incomes. It hosts numerous social media platforms that give us access to quality data and allows for a nuanced way to conduct ethical research. It might be somewhat unconventional to

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17 Shange, Progressive Dystopia. 7.
use social media as a research tool. However I consider the internet to be an extension of the formal education processes. The internet, including social media, is leveraged and utilized by industries, hospitals, schools, and government which bestows a level of authority. I must acknowledge that the internet prioritizes the interest of men, white people and capitalism. It replicates racism, sexist and classist systems that have existed before its creation. It does not respect, protect or care for Black girls as it has historically caused harm to Black girls and women and continues to do so.\textsuperscript{18} As a result the stories I have access to are limited. I do not have access to stories from Black girls without internet or social media access or literacy. Stories from younger Black girls or any other Black girls who do not use social media are missing. I have only the stories from Black girls who are existing in these digital spaces and are choosing to share. I also recognize that the internet is biased; many components go into constructing the search results that I am provided. They are usually not honest or uninfluenced. Finally, I acknowledge that the social media domain consists of people who may have various agendas. I understand social media, including YouTube as a performative space, and so not everything that exists in this world is factor or honest.

With these limitations in mind I am intentional about how and why I use this source. First, as I use Black girls' free thoughts on digital spaces I remained concerned about the privacy of these girls and their stories. I extend a Black feminist ethic of care amd protect the privacy of the girls I include by only stories that are shared publicly. Still I acknowledge that Black girls may not have shared their experiences with the intention to be subject, even if they allow their material, their thoughts and their reflections to the public. Next, I use incognito browsers and do

\textsuperscript{18} Noble, “Searching for Black Girls”, Algorithm of Oppression
not log into any of my personal social media accounts to ensure that my search histories or past internet activity did not influence the search results as drastically. Then, I am trusting Black girls and require my readers to also trust Black girls, that the stories they share are theirs and mostly true, and regard them as experts of their own experiences.

Finally, I decide that social media is a relevant source as I am exploring a generation that has come of age in a media saturated world. Black girls, and other children alike use social media regularly, on these platforms they share their opinions, ideas, and experiences with their chosen audiences. I value that social media holds thousands of channels where people choose to offer their stories and experiences to be enjoyed and taken up by the public. Simple search terms lead me to a wealth of stories and anecdotes regarding the experience of self-identified Black girls in school settings. Social media allows me to access the real voices, stories and reflections of Black girls. while using social media searches as a research method can allow me to gather my data in a way that does not require the same complexities as ethnographic interviews
Chapter II: Background and Historical Context

The Making of Gender, The Meaning of Childhood

Saidya Hartman conceptualized the “afterlife of slavery” to reference the ways in which “Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and political arithmetic that was entrenched years ago” 19 Black girls and women's experiences in the “after life” are influenced by that history. American slavery wrote different gender rules for Black bodies, as the system left no space for Black folks to access hemogenic conceptions of gender. During American chattel slavery, Black women were forced to function in ways indistinguishable from their male counterparts. Black women were required to perform both domestic and manual labor, were not protected from or by men, and had to be assertive and self-reliant in order to survive.

Womanhood, for Black women, has strategically been written to serve as a contrast for white womanhood, “the antithesis of white women's lives, the slur or ‘the nothingness’ that men and women use to perpetuate and control the image of the ‘good girl’ and by extension the good woman.”20 In order for white women to reject images and ideas of "sex, dirt, housework, and badness ", she needed another woman to do the hard and dirty physical labor, to confirm her daintiness and perfection. That woman had to be different from herself; she needed a [B]lack woman. 21

Until the closing of the 20th century, the condition of Black women during slavery sat anxiously waiting to be studied. Even as slave narratives gained popularity and the rigorous study of the institution prevailed, a critical analysis of Black women’s navigation of this peculiar

19 Shange, Progressive Dystopia. 7.
21 Ibid 14
institution rarely entered the conversation. Discourse surrounding slave women was often about sexual promiscuity, and if not that, were concerned about matriarchal status.

Most famously, Daniel Moynihan’s 1965 report *The Negro Family, the Case of Legal Action* argued that, “the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so far out of line with the rest of American society, seriously regards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well”\(^\text{23}\). In other words, it produced the idea that the decline of the Black nuclear family would significantly impede progress toward economic and social equality. This exhibits how power is enacted, gained and sought through the structure of patriarchy even for Black bodies. Hortense Spillers, amongst other Black feminist scholars, refutes this claim by insisting that dominant institutions of slavery challenge subject-positions of “men” and “women” and strip them of their symbolic integrity. Under a system of dominance that defined Black people as chattel and profitable labor units, gender was not necessitated. In that moment and function, slaves might as well be genderless. Spillers argues that enslaved people experience a theft of body, as the diasporic plight and captivity did not allow their bodies to express will or active desires; instead their bodies enact the will and desire of the captor, reduced to a “a thing becoming being for” white domination. Under these arrangements Black women's gender becomes malleable, changing to fit the functions and needs of captor.

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\(^{23}\) Moynihan, Daniel P. The Moynihan Report, 75.
In one function, enslaved women's gender did not function in a way that was directly opposite the gender norms of men. The roles slave women fulfilled were typically the roles American society ascribed to men and were inconsistent with nineteenth century ideology of femininity which prioritized women's roles as gentle nurturing mothers and dolce housekeepers and wives. Though some slave women assumed these roles and operated as cooks, maids or mammy for children in the ‘big house’, as depicted by figures like Aunt Jemima and the Black mammy, most slave women were field workers. Specifically, around the middle of the nineteenth century almost 90% of all slave workers were field workers.  

In another function, enslaved women were locked into exclusive gender roles. Punishment was gendered and acts like sexual abuse were mostly inflicted upon slave women, namely because they were female bodied. Harriet Jacobs uses the genre of slave narrative to highlight how gender was ascribed to her by and for the captor. In doing so, Jacobs utilizes the character Linda, a girl born into slavery. Linda constantly rejects the idea of her body property despite being constantly subjected to her master Dr. Flint sexual violence, and eventually finding resistance through her ability to choose who to have sexual encounters with. She writes,

He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of. I turned from him with disgust and hatred, I was compelled to live under the same roof with him--where I saw a man forty year my senior daily violating the most sacred commandments of nature. He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will.

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24 Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race & Class*, 5.
in all things. My soul revolted against the mean tyranny. But where could I turn for protection?²⁵

Linda contextualizes Spillers assertions that slave bodies enacted a will that was not their own. There is a distinction between body and flesh. It also highlighted another distinction that implied slave women were restricted from access to normative definitions of femininity, as there was no urgency to offer protection for Black women in ways that parallel intentions to protect white women.

Not only did slavery complicate gender for Black bodies, it also added complexities to categories of childhood and adolescence. The category of childhood was legislated for young Black people in very specific ways. Investigation of child labor in colonial Virginia and New York uncovers that the word negro, rather than child, was used to define enslaved Black children. This was another attempt to render them beyond the realm of human and into the category of property instead.²⁶ Virginia legislature declared …

All servants not being Christians imported into this colony by shipping [shall be] slaves for their lives; but [those which] come by land shall serve, if [boys or girls], until thirty years of age, if men or women [twelve years] and no longer²⁷

(477)

Thus this piece of legislature rejects the need to differentiate slave youth from slave adults, strategically negating the possibility of slave children progressing into rights and privileges. As

²⁵ Harriet Jacob, Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl
²⁶ Breslow, Jacobs, “Adolescent Citizenship, or Temporality and the Negation of Black Childhood in Two Eras”, 477.
²⁷ Ibid p.477
the idea of children were “individuals with temporary vulnerability demands care, whose inherent potential demands freedoms” this provision was deemed necessary. To recognize enslaved children as “children” within the legal realm would mean that they would possess potential to “move out of a state of dependency and into the role of consenting adults.” 28 Hence, the legal category of child was erased for Black slaves. This employs that for Black girls not only is gender conflated, but childhood as well.. This indicates a precedent for the adultification of Black children I will later cite as a crisis that influences discipline disparities.

After the Emancipation Era of the 1860s, new institutions sought to uphold the power dynamics that once maintained the institution of slavery. The criminal justice system, convict camps, chain gangs and prison farms became a legal way to continue the work that rendered Black women genderqueer. These systems of labor exploitation and control not only continued to relegate Black women's bodies to enact the will of others, it also continued to place Black women outside of normative gender binary. Ambiguous and contradictory, this wavering position as “genderless” subjected Black women to continuous violence.

In order to uphold white women's favored position Black women needed to be “othered”, needed to serve as a contrast. White women who were sent to convict camps illuminate the function of Black women’s otherness. Black women's perceived capacity for labor were in direct contrast with that of white women. While Black women performed labor that was perceived as normal, white women who found themselves in these camps were always an anomaly met with pity and public outrage, as Sarah Haley writes “to make a white women work with manacles, on the public street and amongst negro hands, is a crime against that chivalrous regard for the sex.” 29

28 Ibid p.478
29 Haley, Sarah. No Mercy Here, 84.
Black women were not treated with the compassion white women were afforded. In fact, the case of Eliza Cobbs illustrates the lack of compassion that Black women were offered. Cobbs was a Black woman who was convicted of infanticide in 1889. She was raped, impregnated, and delivered her stillborn baby on the floor of an outhouse. Though Cobbs insisted that her child was born without a pulse, police and white jury believed Cobbs killed her baby intentionally. She was then sent to DuBois Sawmill Camp to be one of the few female lumber laborers, and then later transferred to Georgia Milledgeville State Prison where she found herself in circumstances that mimicked that of the plantation, controlled by the guns and the lashes in the hands of white power. While Eliza Cobbs, later found not guilty, was denied clemency twice, a white woman, Myrtle Blake (who was sentenced for robbing two men on the street), was given an early release because she was mistakenly sent to an all-Black convict camp and complained about a striped uniform. Life and labor at convict camps were reserved for Black women. White women had no place in this sphere. Black female bodies performed important cultural labor by serving as the symbolic other against which the iconic symbol of white supremacy--the white lady--can be positioned.

A Politics of Respectability

_The first time I heard the term “respectability politics” I was a freshman sitting front row, pen ready, eager, in my first Black Studies course. The phrase was novel, but the concept was not new to me. My parents brought me up under these ideas. My parents made sure to instill specific attitudes and behaviors that would label me worthy of respect from the larger society._

30 Ibid 18
31 Ibid 80
32 Ibid 81
They were sure to discipline out any and all behaviors that would jeopardize that. The choosing of my name alone was respectability politics.

While respectability politics maintains an extensive history amongst Black communities, it is most commonly linked to racial uplift movements in the late 19th century. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined the term “politics of respectability” to describe the work of the Women's Convention of the Black Baptist Church, referring specifically to African American’s promotion of temperance, cleanliness of person and property, manners, and sexual purity. The concept of respectability was part of an uplift politics that emphasized W.E.B DuBois’ “Talented Tenths” mission to “lift as we climb.” It was an attempt by the Black elites to prove to white America that all Black folks deserved to be promoted from second class citizenship. Moreover, it an attempt to urge Black folks to prove themselves worthy of respect and citizenship by refuting ideas about laziness, shiftlessness, and unintelligence, through diligence, demonstrating self-respect, piety, specific mannerism and dress. For Black women who typically embraced these politics, respectability politics also mandated chastity and marriage, and held crucial troupes of motherhood, modesty, and sexual purity.

Politics of respectability were particularly cardinal for Black Women, who’s assumed hypersexuality and deviance from gender normativity marked them undeserving of respect and citizenship and made them especially vulnerable to sexual abuse. The policing of Black women's bodies, and public performance of their sexuality became an objective for Black reformers. Employed as a strategy of resistance, it seemed crucial to preserve Black female chastity and

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33 Harris, Paisley Jane. "Gatekeeping and Remaking", 213.
34 Ibid 219
35 Jane Rhodes, “Pedagogies of Respectability”, 207.
purity in order to escape the stigma and trauma brought by sexual exploitation during slavery, and to refute racist representations of the black female sexuality, character, and intellect. This urgency for Black women to enlist in a politics of respectability behaved as a call for the protection of Black women from rape, physical abuse, poverty, and other dangers white supremacy posed.

While the Black elite sought to protect Black women through a politics of respectability, this practice further policed and politicized the Black female body and sexuality. It faulted Black women's sexual exploitation and sexual reputation to Black women. An article in the *Washington Bee*, a Washington D.C based newspaper primarily read by African Americans, published an issue regarding Black women in prostitution. The writer blamed Black sex workers them for relinquishing their respectability and “disgracing” the race.

“To think that prominent and apparently respectable women would willingly and brazenly bare their bodies, their very souls, their all, before men and thereby sell their honor and virtue of their sex, is almost unbelievable...Women—noble women—are the glory of any race. Black women seemingly have not yet learned that fact”

When Black elites suggest that worthiness of respect is directly linked to sexual modesty, respectability politics becomes a gatekeeping function that decides who has access to the right to full citizenship. This decision is based on the adherence of an arbitrary set of “rules.” For Black bodies, this became another entrance to the position of second-class citizen or “other”. It also became a way to neglect the discussion regarding structural forces that hinder the progression of

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36Ibid, 205.
37Ibid,207.
Black poor and working class. It blames Black folk for their positionality and makes it so white standards are quintessential. It decides that conforming to white standards as law is not only safer but is more important than challenging them.

Moving From The Field To The Classroom: Public Education

Until the 1840s, the American education system was highly localized and only available to wealthy people. Most Americans learned to read and write through parents, and in some cases tutors. In early colonies in New England, such as Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire religious institutions served as preliminary forms of schooling. Political figures like Thomas Jefferson argued that education should not be under the control of the church but should be controlled by the government and available to all people. Marked by a period of rapid political and economic changes, it was difficult to translate this concept to practice. So, until the late 19th century private schools and religious institutions dominated the educational scene. Eventually public schools were introduced, but mainly in the North. The South was slower to offer education through public school, but by 1918 every state required students to complete elementary school.

Census data reveals that in 1850 males were enrolled in school in larger numbers than females. The irony is that women were typically given the role of educating youth before public schools as they were limited to the domestic sphere. As public education became mandatory and wages offered to teachers declined, men moved out of the classroom and women began to take

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over the sphere of public education.\footnote{Katz, Michael B, “The Origins of Public School”} This marked the feminization of public education, which would later be weaponized.

In their arguments for public school Horace Mann and Henry Barnard argued that commons schooling would “create good citizens, unite society and prevent crime and poverty”\footnote{Thattai, “A History of Public Education in the United States Editorial Summary”, 2.} which implied that school was reserved for citizens. At the time when public school was first introduced, The Boston Latin School in 1635, or when the first compulsory school attendance law was passed in 1852, a large majority of Black people were still enslaved and not recognized as full citizens. Enslaved African Americans received education from missionaries to convert them to Christianity or they were taught secretly by knowledgeable overseers, mistresses, or in some cases Masters. Although Many African Americans in New England and the Mid-Atlantic attended school, freedmen, overall, still had little access to schooling\footnote{Gross Roberts, A History in The Book in America, 293.}.

From Kindergarten to the last day of secondary school I attended Public school. For my family and I public school was the only option. It wasn’t until I began to become more interested in educational policy and practice in High School that I learned that other forms of schooling even existed. The student body of the schools I attended never looked unfamiliar as they mimicked the demographics in my Bronx neighborhood. Either mostly low income, mostly Black, mostly Hispanic, or some combination of all three. I knew there weren’t any white students in my classes, and I knew that middle class families were an anomaly. But I never thought of my school as segregated. In college, while doing a midterm assignment that required me to reflect and
analyze my own schooling experiences, I learned that my school was still segregated, years after legislature required desegregation.

The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* U.S. Supreme Court decision upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation under the “separate but equal” doctrine. The ruling allowed public schools to place students according to their race. While these schools were advertised as equal, oftentimes there were disparities in funding, as more resources were given to white schools.

Several court cases were filed against school districts and education boards, the most famous and progressive case being *Brown v The Board of Education* (1954) which concluded with the declaration by the United States Supreme Court.

We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of “separate but equal” has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs [are] ...deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the 14th Amendment ⁴³

*Brown v. Board* marked the beginning of school desegregation, or the reassignment of Black and white students by local government for the purpose of school integration. Though integration was mandated by the federal government, integration did not happen with the striking of a pen. Rather, integration began with Black children as change makers. Black girls, particularly, stood at the frontlines as primary social agents for school integration. Josephine Boyd Bradley was the first Black student to integrate previously all white Greensboro High School (Greensboro, North Carolina) on September 4, 1957. ⁴⁴ She, like the other Black girls

⁴⁴Ibid 24
laboring to integrate schools, learned about Double Consciousness early. Bradley leaves the following reflection…

I learned very early on that there had to be two me’s; there was the me that they saw and the me that was part of my family. The private self becomes the only thing that you have left to hold on to... the only thing that allowed me to stay centered. The public self comes about as a survivalist tool. The private self is always there, if I let that go then there’s no me .....For me the public self is exactly what you see, what I allow you to see. The private self is what I am when I’m with my mom and my family and people at church. So for me the private self is what I showed in church or at home... I could cry at home but I couldn’t cry there, I wouldn’t have dared cried there [at school]  

Bradley like other Black children, understood a “sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of the others, of measuring one's self through soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” In other words, Bradley had the unique burden of having to understand two versions of herself. The version of the “other world” or white folks holds to be true including all the biases, prejudices, troupes, and caricatures as well as the version of herself she knew to be true.

Ruby Bridges was another Black girl who worked to dismantle segregated schooling practices in public schools. Bridges was one of four students who desegregated Williams Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans on November 14, 1960, six years after the passing of Brown V. Board. Being one of the first Black students to integrate the school brought many unique challenges for Bridges. This assignment made Bridge vulnerable to hypervisibility. She recalled her childhood perspective on the first day of school:

45Ibid 30
Once we were inside the building, the marshals walked us up a flight of stairs...

There were windows in the room where we waited. That meant everybody passing by could see us... All day long, white parents rushed into the office; they were upset and urging and pointing at us.  

As an unwelcome and divergent body in a once comfortable space, Bridges was always the center of attention. The role that Bridge, Bradley and other Black student took up exposed them not only to hypervisibility but also to a form of adultification that imitates slavery past. While white children enjoyed grammar lessons in comfortable white schools, Black children performed important education functions and sought to reform education. This was a burden placed on them that would typically weigh adults. They labored physically, psychologically, and emotionally in ways white children did not. Charles Burks, a marshal who escorted Bridges on her first day, remembered precisely that… “She never cried. She didn't even whimper. She marched along like a soldier.”

Though at the mercy of physical violence, threats, slurs and numerous terror tactics Bridges, Bradley and other children as social reformers were expected to be strong and undefeated. Their experiences gave them the perceptiveness and social consciousness of an adult.

Despite the sacrifices these children were making in the name of integration and the laws made regarding the matter, many school districts remained legally segregated. De Facto segregation refers to the separation of groups because of circumstance and individual/group action rather than imposed law. The late 1950s-1970s marked a period of rapid “race specific

48Ibid 25
49Breslow, Jacobs, “Adolescent Citizenship, or Temporality and the Negation of Black Childhood in Two Eras”, 477.
50Ibid 25
Since the end of the Civil War, Black residents were migrating from Southern states to Northern states, out of the suburbs and into the cities in search of jobs and economic advancement. According to the U.S. 1960 census, almost half of the eighteen million Black folks in this country lived outside the 11 states of the Confederacy. Additionally, more than a million Black-Americans resided in New York City, “constituting the largest Negro urban block in the world.” Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit or Los Angeles also had large numbers of Black-American populations, much greater that of southern cities like Atlanta, Birmingham, Houston or New Orleans. White people moved out of the cities and into the suburbs mainly because of racial tension and wanted to practice social isolation from the Black people moving in. The exodus of white residents is referred to as White Flight. This led to high populations of Black people in the city and high populations of white people in the suburbs which reinforced state segregation and school segregation as well. School segregation proved to be true as northern states mandated children to attend schools based on their school district and housing zone. Initially, the goal of zoning was framed as concept to minimize distance students must travel from home to school, make it so students can avoid traffic hazards and topographical barrier, make traveling via public transportation accessible and convenient, to maximize the use of school space to avoid under-utilized schools, and finally to avoidance shifting of students to ensure continuity of instruction. Maslow argued that officials had other intentions and maliciously drew school district lines “to lump Negroes in certain schools and white students in

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51 Frey, William H. "Black In-Migration". 1396.
52 Will Maslow, “De Facto Public School Segregation”, 354.
53 Ibid p. 354
54 Ibid p. 354
55 Ibid p.361.
Collectively, these circumstances created and continued to sustain schools that were segregated by *de facto* segregation, a form of segregation not imposed by the court. Contributing to segregation to a homogeneous racial population, concentrated in a particular neighborhood, the court was under no necessity to pass any law to further integrate schools.

It is nearly impossible to understand the present and think about the future without extensively examining the past. It is necessary to contextualize the issue by considering American history and more specifically Black History. Slavery and its extensions influenced on the creation of gender and production of Black Femininity. It also influenced ideas about childhood and subject slave children to a type of adultification that white children did not endure. In the ensuing era, the Nadir, Black prominent figures attempted to move past second class citizenship by employing a politics of respectability. These politics functioned simultaneously as a tool to protect Black women's bodies from gendered abuse and as a tool to further police their bodies and enforce gender expectations. The same practice of school segregation and integration present unique challenges and trauma to Black girls who were at the forefront of school desegregation. We can contextualize these experiences by considering the original purpose of school. Intended for middle class white men, created during a time where most Black folks were enslaved, school was not spaced that was intended for Black girls. Still, we now understand that White Flight and Black Urbanization created legally segregated schools, even after the legislature sought to integrate. Overall, these crucial historical events and practices dating from 1619 until the early 1970s allow for the contextualization of current research findings.

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56 Ibid P. 344
Spilled Milk

2005: St. Petersburg Police Bind Hands and Feet of 5-Year-Old African American Girl, 57
2007: Kindergartener Charged With Felony Tantrum, 58
2012: Police Handcuff 6 Year Old Student in Georgia, 59
2013: 8-Year Old Arrested, Handcuffed For Tantrum at School
2018: 9 Year Old Black Girl’s Suicide Caused By Schools Indifference to Racist Bullying Allegedly at the Hands of White Male Student, 60
2019: White Cop Slams Black Girl, 11, Over Spilled Milk at School, 61

And whole world carrying on
cuz Ma said
“Ain't no use crying over spilled milk”
Especially no milk that been rotten long as we can remember
We got some Bounty in the closet
For messes like this
Ain't no use crying over spilled milk
Especially when
The cereals stale too
When we don't know who spilled the milk anyway
Especially when

57 Greenberg, B. T., Mother Sues Florida School Board over Police Handcuffing of Her Kindergartner.
58 Goldstein, Bonnie. “Kindergartener Charged with Felony Tantrum.”
59 Campbell, Antoinette. “Police Handcuff 6-Year-Old Student in Georgia.”
60 Kenney, Tanasia. “Lawsuit: 9-Year-Old Black Girl's Suicide”
61 Shaw, A.R. “White Cop Slams Black Girl, 11, over Spilled Milk at School.”
It will all evaporate

Anyway

And whole world carries on

Cause

Ain't no use

Crying over spilled milk
Chapter III: Contemporary Issues

Naming Discipline Disparities Through Statistics

The School to Prison pipeline disproportionately affects and targets Black students, as they are disciplined, suspended and expelled at higher rates than their white peers. Data collected in New York City highlights these disparities, revealing that about 28,000 Black students were suspended in the 2006-07 school year compared to 3,500 white students. By 2016-17, while suspension rates have dropped, Black students were still receiving more suspensions than White students, as 15,500 Black students were suspended compared to 3,000 White students that year. This study conducted over a 11-year period between 2006-2017 shows that Black students have consistently had the highest suspension rates compared to every other group. Other studies conducted within this period show the similar findings. Professor Edward Morris found through a study (2007) that Black students are more likely to be given office referrals than their white counterparts. A data snapshot from the Civil Rights Data Collection (2012) highlights that Black students are “expelled at a rate three times greater than white students.” Finally, a report conducted by the National Center of Education Statistics (2014) published that 13.7 percent of Black students received out of school suspensions, a rate greater than all other students including white students at 3.5 percent.

It is apparent that Black students are disproportionately affected by all methods of school discipline. However, the experiences of Black girls specifically are not represented in these

62 Chauhan, Tracking Suspensions in New York City Public Schools, 34.
63 Ibid
65 Civil Rights Data Snapshot, 1.
66 National Center for Education Statistics, “Indicator 15: Retention, Suspension, and Expulsion”, Figure 15.3.
studies as Black girls and Black boys are counted as one homogenous entity. Fewer reports exist that examine Black girls’ unique experiences with school discipline, but the ones that do exist highlight a more specific problem.

A number of quantitative studies found significantly disparate patterns of discipline for Black girls. In 2008 Wallace and colleagues published a study that uses a large nationally representative sample of students to examine the trend in racial ethnic and gender difference in school discipline between 1991 and 2005. They find that Black girls are over five times more likely than white girls to report being suspended or expelled. A number of quantitative studies found significantly disparate patterns of discipline for Black girls. In 2008 Wallace and colleagues published a study that uses a large nationally representative sample of students to examine the trend in racial ethnic and gender difference in school discipline between 1991 and 2005. They find that Black girls are over five times more likely than white girls to report being suspended or expelled.67 Morris and Perry find through a case study in Kentucky case study that Black girls are three times as likely to receive an office referral compared to white girls, but have the same probability of receiving an office referral as do white boys.68 Data released by the Department of Education revealed that Black girls were suspended six times as often as their white counterparts, and only 2 percent of white females were subjected to exclusionary suspensions in comparison to 12 percent of Black girls in 2011-2012. That same year 90 percent of all girls expelled in New York City were Black, and 63% of all girls expelled in Boston were Black. Zero white girls were expelled in either state.69 Hannon, DeFina, and Brunch se data from two nationally representative data sets and find that African American girls are still more likely to report receiving a suspension than are white girls in 2014 70 as the National Center of Education Statistics find that 9.6 percent of Black girls were suspended versus 1.7 percent of white females.71 In 2014, Black girls were also four times more likely to be arrested in schools and two and half times more likely to be referred to law

68 Ibid 143.
69 Crenshaw, Black Girls Matter, 21
70 Morris, “Girls Behaving Badly”, 129.
71 National Center for Education Statistics, “Indicator 15: Retention, Suspension, and Expulsion”, Figure 15.3.
enforcement than white girls.\textsuperscript{72} All data shows that Black girls are also disciplined more than white boys, Hispanic boys, and boys of any other race. Since Black girls are disciplined more than any other group of girls and all other groups of boys, these disparities are not only racialized, but they are also gendered.

Through Student Stories

While educators, sociologists, and other researchers just began to find disparities in discipline practices Black girls already recognized these existing biases through their own classroom experiences. I wish to feature some of these experiences because I found them particularly useful, as they demonstrate how Black girls make sense of their own experiences in the classroom. Many of these stories and experiences evoke memories of my own personal experiences, so I contribute my stories as well.

Alexis

Alexis is a bubbly and energetic Black girl who uses her YouTube channel to give her audience hair and makeup advice, good laughs with prank videos, and glimpse into her world as a college student and entrepreneur through a series of vlogs. In one video she uses her platform to explain an incident that occurred in 9th grade at her Connecticut public school. She prefaces by explaining that the school she attended was “so strict” (4:45). She uses their policies of cell phone usage and school dress code in order to demonstrate to her audience the strictness. She also makes clear that she is a well-behaved student who has had no previous transgressions, as she reports “everyone who knows me from elementary school, middle school up knows I don't

\textsuperscript{72}Inniss-thompson, “Summary Of Discipline Data For Girls In U.S. Public Schools”, 5.
get in trouble. I never got suspended, the most I got was detention for not turning in my homework. I'm not a troublesome kid” (3:44). Also explaining, she “was quiet” emphasizing, “when I tell you I was quiet I stayed to myself” (3:45).

Alexis then gets into the details of the incident that resulted in a 10 day out of school suspension. Alexis reported getting summons to the Principal's office. Her direct reciliation “I started getting called to the office and they’re questioning me. They told me about some ‘oh we noticed that you did so and so’ or ‘somebody told us that you did something’ “ (7:28) Alexis does not remember what exactly the accusation was for, but she is confident she didn't commit the offense. She asked for proof of the accusation, and states that school officials “would not give me proof of what I did”. She grew tired of arguing in circles and accepted the accusation and the detention.

Weeks later, she reported a similar incident. Alexis tells the story : “It's like the last period of the day and security comes to call me out of my class...so they sent goddamn security after my ass to come pull me out of my class and bring me to house office to interrogate me...I'm calling it an interrogation room because that's what it is” (9:27). In the office Alexis is asked several questions, but she still does not understand why she was pulled out of her classroom, “I'm constantly asking why I'm here” she exclaimed (9:51). She quotes the Assistant Principals, “I have been notified that you and you little boo thang...yall was down there for a good two minutes. What were y'all doing down there” (10:48). Again, Alexis insisted that someone showed her proof. She wanted the Principal to bring up the camera because “they kept saying we have you doing so and so on the cameras” (10:50). Their refusal to do so made it clear to Alexis
that they were “lying like fuck, they don’t got shit on me” (11:09). She later went to inspect the area and confirmed that no cameras existed there.

Even without any solid evidence Alexis was given a ten day out of school suspension (12:01). Eventually, Alexis learned who started the rumor and when comforting the girl left her to ponder the following words: “you know nobody knows me here, you know you had some power, you know if you said something and went back to administration my ass would be gone” (12:20). Alexis understood that she was not trusted, had no power and could easily become disposable in this academic setting.

Heaven

Heaven is a proud Houstian and easy going Sagittate who aspires to travel the world one day. Heaven, relatively new to YouTube and vlogging, uses her second video to share a memorable schooling experience. She describes an incident that occurred in her 2nd grade year while attending an “all Black” school in Texas. She explained that after the primary teacher went on maternity leave, her class was supervised by two other male identified teachers. The first teacher she introduces is Mr. Bert who she described as “fun” and “cool”. The second teacher she introduces is Mr. G who Heaven described as “the worst old guy ever”. Heaven explained that “he was so mean. He was so abusive for no reason” (2:57). She recalled a specific action as she told her audience that “he used to have a rattle in our class and would go over to the little kids head and be like ‘you wanna be a little cry baby? You want to be a little cry baby? Well I’m going to show you something to cry about’. He used to cuss us out” (3:06). After Heaven
provides these descriptions that help contextualize Mr. G she goes into the story that becomes the main focus of the video.

Heaven explains that she had two bullies in elementary school, one of which she named Mikey. She continues her story: “We were coming back to class, and this kid kicked me in my vagina” (3:54)... “I went to tell Mr. G but Mr. G didn’t care, he says we should have been fighting” (5:03)... “So, I’m over there, I’m in pain I’m mad and we get back into class and Mr. G tells Mr. Bert that we're in the hallway talking, that we're being bad kids, this that and the third like how we always talk” (5:15). Mikey had assaulted Heaven. Heaven told the teacher. The teacher did not care and did not try to mediate, but instead blamed Heaven for provoking the assault and then finally wrote them off as “being bad kids”.

Mr. Bert who is now teaching the class warns students that any disruptions or misbehaviors would result in a phone call home. Heaven recalls the words of her mother. Heaven tells her audience “early on before school started my mom told me ‘if you ever get in trouble in school, I’m coming to the school to beat you. I’m coming to the school with my belt’” (5:51). She then explains, “so I was an extra good student, I was doing my work to make sure I didn't get called home” (6:28). Heaven remembers trying hard to avoid any behavior that would cost her a phone call home.

However, Mikey constantly taunted her and made a slick comment to her. At first Heaven was silent and did not respond, “I kind of sat there and stared at him a little bit”. Eventually she felt compelled to offer a response to the boys taunting. (6:45). The teacher heard the interaction and instead of correcting the boy’s behavior his response was directed towards
Heaven. Mr. G said to her, “I was just about to tell you good job for not saying anything back to Mikey, but I take that back now” (7:35). Seeing that the taunting was getting to Heaven and that Mr. G was not going to do anything about its Mikey continued to antagonize Heaven. To Mikey’s comment Heaven responds “whatever” which the teacher heard and assumed was directed at him. Mr. G then proceeds to call Heaven’s mother. Heaven tries to plead her case but the teacher “was not having it at all” (8:20).

Heaven mother showed up to the school with the intentions to discipline her child, like she had promised Heaven she would. Heaven remembers the moment as she retells it, “here comes my mom walking down the hallway, and I’m like “omg”, with a belt in her hand” (10:20). She describes the event after her mother enters the room, “she makes me apologize to my teacher in front of the class and I’m over in trying to act like I'm tying my shoe, getting down so I don't have to make eye contact with no body I was just like ‘well I’m sorry cause...’ and she was like ‘what are you sorry for’... ‘who are you sorry to’ I was like I’m sorry Mr. Bert for like disrespecting you and I'm just scared (10:25).

As she continues to reflect on her emotions during the time, she says “I just felt like it was not fair like why is my mom going to school embarrassing me like that I'm already getting bullied” (13:38). In Heavens 2nd grade experience she is being bullied by a male student. She tries to get the help and support from both her teachers but neither of them offers the support she yearns, neither of them mediates any of the conflict Heaven and Mikey experience. Heaven is left to take matters into her own hands and defend herself. As a result, not only is Heaven
punished by receiving a phone call home, she is also embarrassed in front of the entire class all while Mikey faces no disciplinary actions.

*I resonate with the events that both these students describe. While I listen to Alexis and Heavens stories, I am taken back into my high school principals office. I sit as my leg shakes frantically without my permission, waiting for my turn to talk. It never comes. I was issued a weeklong in school suspension. In my school this meant that I could not attend school during the regular hours. I instead had to report to my principal's office at 3pm where I was expected to stay until I completed all the work for the day. This never made any sense to me, and even now as I reflect the practice is still odd. It also did not make sense that I was suspended for defending myself. Just a few hours prior I had gotten into a physical altercation with a boy in my class over a seat. It was the first period, I was upset that my mom forgot to leave me money for breakfast, and all I wanted to do was be left alone until my classmate came into class demanding that I got up out “his seat. I was not for it. I was not going to move. On a good day I would've just chosen another seat, but that day I was not that day. A screaming match emerged and next thing I knew the chair came from under me and I was on the floor full of rage. A physical altercation emerged, and I was suspended, and the boy got two-day detention because my teacher saw me take the first swing. Like the staff at Alexis’s school my principal did not care to hear my recounting of the events. Like the staff at Heaven school the teacher did nothing to deescalate the situation, and in the end the male student is offered more leeway.*

In addition to YouTube, I explore other social media platforms to find more stories by Black girls about school discipline. On Twitter I came across a thread where the user asked their
Twitter audience to post about “shitty teacher stories.” I suspect most people engaged with the post just to look back and laugh, but valuable stories were shared. Here are some of the stories Black girls left.

**Various Black Girls in the Twitter-verse**

“I got my first period in 5th grade and bled through my pants and tied my jacket around my waist. The teacher tried to forcibly take it off in front of the whole class and wouldn't listen when I tried to explain. [S]ent me to the office…”

“10th grade in a majority white school and I was in history class. It was def the first week because the teacher didn't know our names, but he had a seating chart. He was going around asking for answers to an activity and when he got to me, rather than use my name, he said..."You with the...what *is* that on your head, a rat's nest?" For clarity, I had micro braids in. There was a loud "wow" from one of the other black students, class went silent, and I left the room. I didn't report it, but I was called down to the Assist Principal's office during Second period when I was in Desktop/Multimedia Presentation. She told me that several of my classmates reported it and that the teacher had already had strikes against him for similar incidents…”

So, my grandpa passed last year and I had to go outta town for the funeral. The wake and the funeral were split into two weeks. sis gon ask if I coulda just went to one and not the other in a nasty attitude, no condolences or nothing.

On Facebook, I came across a very similar thread. This user asked their audience a series of random questions, hoping to elicit interesting stories. One of the questions asked other users to recall the “dumbest thing you ever got suspended for” Here is a list of things Black girls recall getting suspended for.

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73 @Roxannewolf, “Lets her some shitty teacher stories, go off”
74 Townsend, “10. Dumbest thing you ever got suspended for”
Various Black Girl Facebook Users

“Talking behind the Principals Back”

“Defending myself”

“Not giving the teacher my phone”

“Being late to class”

“Talking back to the teacher”

“Singing why you gotta be so rude”

“Talking back to the teacher”

“Sitting on my leg”

“Wearing cargo shorts”

“Cheering for my bestfriend at the award assembly instead of waiting until the end”

“Laughing”

“Going to use the bathroom”

“Rolling my eyes”

“Laughing”

“Saying “oh my god””

“Wearing a hot pink shirt”

Many of the phrases on this list resonate. The first time I received a suspension letter I ever received listed the “Talking back to the teacher” as the reason for my suspension. It was 6th grade Social Studies class, about five minutes left in the day so the teacher was trying hard to keep our attention as he continued his mundane lesson. It was probably about Early Civilization or something of that nature because we spent almost the entire year on that topic. My notebook was in my bag, and my coat and gloves were already on when my teacher called me out of
Richardson 44

talking in his class. He proceeded to write a D on our class conduct sheet next to my name. The D stood for disruptive and anyone with a D next to their name had detention after class. I shouted, “that makes no sense” and then I was kicked out of the classroom. The next day my homeroom teacher stopped me at the door and told me to go to the office. There I learned I was suspended. My interactions with that teacher after that day were never the same.

In addition to social media, I found another Black girl autobiographical story on the social journalism platform The Medium.

Dominique

Dominique Matti, a Black writer, editor and mom took the space in her Medium article “Why I'm Absolutely an Angry Black Woman” to talk about her schooling experiences.

Because in 10th grade my group of friends and I were called into an office and asked if we were a gang, or if we had father figures. Because in 11th grade my AP English teacher told me that I didn’t write like a college-bound student (though I later scored perfectly on the exam). Because when I volunteered in Costa Rica that summer, I was whistled at and called Negrita. Because when I asked my host father if that was like being called nigger, he said, no, it was a compliment because black women are perceived to be very good in bed. Because I was a kid. Because I watched from the bleachers while the school resource officer didn’t let my brother into a football game after mistaking him for another black boy who was banned. Because the school resource officer maced him for

75 Matti, “Why I'm Absolutely an Angry Black Woman.”
insisting he was wrong. Because I was suspended for telling the school resource officer he didn’t deserve respect. Because my senior year boyfriend said nigger.

Finally, more traditionally, I explore academic publications looking for the autobiographical stories of Black girls. Latoya Owen does exciting research as she works to uncover the stories of Black girls who attend a predominantly white suburban High School. In her publication of *Unsilenced: Black Girls Stories* she gives several Black girls the space to reflect on their educational experience in their academic institutions. I highlight the stories of Kendall, Dior, Aliana, and Laila.

**Kendall**

Kendall is the daughter of Caribbean immigrant parents and a candid honor student with a powerful voice. In her interview she expressed that Black students in her school were racially profiled by teachers and administrators. She observed that Black students behaviors were excessively regulated. They were called on more in class and were often corrected more than White students for the same behavior. She recalls a personal experience where Mr. Kraft called her out when other students were displaying the same behavior.

“Like they’ll watch Black kids harder—like they’ll call them out more in class. Like if a White kid is doing things and a Black kid is doing the same thing, they’ll say something to the Black kid but not the White kid.”

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76 Ownes, “Unsilenced”, 77.  
77 Owens, “Unsilenced”, 78.
Kendall also expressed reservations with the way her school’s dress code. Although the dress code policy had changed and many of the dress code restrictions were eliminated many teachers still felt compelled to comment on the way girls dressed. Kendall explained that teachers would make statements like: “That’s not a good look” or “That’s not cute”. She described the comments to be inappropriate, embarrassing and out of line. Kendall recognized a racial bias regarding the dress code or lack thereof. She noted “Like the White girls—she doesn’t do it to them, I guess ‘cause the White girls don’t have as much body-ish, but she’ll do it to us.”

Finally, Kendall wrote a narrative that summarized her experiences and feelings about the school she attended.

I really don’t like my school that much, because I feel like I am profiled and get called out for things that other students don’t. Other Black students in the school have told me the same thing. We mainly talk about how they don’t like the teachers that much, because they call them out all the time and are rude. They’ll call Black students out for talking in class, but then not call out White students doing the same thing. And for girls, they are always making rude comments about the way we dress. The school doesn’t have an official dress code, but teachers still make comments. Like my French teacher always asks me to pull down my shorts or put on a jacket, but then a White girl with less body will wear the same thing and she doesn’t say anything. The administration does the same thing, like the principal says rude stuff about other Black high schools trying to say that Black students are being ghetto or are ghetto and don’t fit in at the school. I don’t have a

79Ibid 79.
Richardson

I don’t have a good relationship with any of the teachers or administrators at the school. I still make good grades because I do my work, but I don’t really talk that much in class and I don’t like any of the classes. 79

Dion

Dion is a Black girl who is stylish, athletic, and the older sister to another participant Alaina. Dion leaves the following narrative about her schooling experience, specifically regarding her natural hair.

I was in the office a lot and missed class because the administrators were always calling me in the office and giving me warnings for my headscarves. It was totally unfair because White girls could wear whatever headbands or scarves they want, but when I wear mine it’s a big deal. I think the problem was a mix of my headband and my hair, because I had to wear my headband when my hair was natural and it was really big, like a huge puff. So they always have a problem when my hair is like that because they think it’s dramatic or a distraction, but I have to wear them because my hair would look crazy without them. Now I have less issues with that because this year I started to wear my hair straight more, so I don’t need the headbands. This year I didn’t have to spend as much time in the office and miss class waiting for them to call my mom about my headbands, so I think that helped out with my grades. 80

79Ibid 83.
80Ibid 93.
Alaina

Alaina, a younger sister and Lactose player who “dream[s] about freedom” explains how her and her friends are different from other students at their school.  

I think I’m different because like there is a way you are supposed to act in school that’s like acceptable and then a way you act outside because it’s just you and your friends like no one else is watching you.

My friends and I are just different from the other students in my school. Like everyone else, dresses the same and does the same types of things, and we aren’t like them. We don’t dress preppy and like to live in the country club or anything. Plus as a group of Black girls, I think people look at us differently, like they think we are loud and obnoxious. But I think we are different because we just don’t follow what everyone else does.

Laila

Laila, an outgoing and energetic Brown skin girl who “wants to be successful”, reflects on the unfair treatment she experienced in school.

On the other hand, I had an English teacher who I felt like just picked on me and called me out the whole semester to embarrass me. She called me out for dress code stuff and for class stuff. Even when I was wearing the same things as a bunch of other girls in class she would just give me a violation and send me to the office. This happened a lot during

81 Ibid 80.
82 Ibid 105
83 Ibid 106
84 Ibid 113.
the semester. In class she would also call me out in front of everyone or up to the board whenever she felt like I was struggling. I am not sure why, but it seemed like she was just focusing on me even though I wasn’t really bringing any attention to myself. I guess for dress code she mostly picked on me because I look different in my clothes, like I have longer legs than most of the other girls, but I really don’t know. The whole thing was not really fair because halfway through that semester they got rid of the dress code, but she still would make comments, call me out, and try to send me to the office. I have had to tell my parents about some issues in that class though. To make it through the semester I tried to focus on my work and not say anything in class. Other than that I usually feel more comfortable in class because my sister gives me advice on what teachers to avoid and I usually try to have at least one friend in every class. As long as I have that, then I am fine.85

Michelle

Michelle is a confident Black girl who aspires to help hurting people. She sums up her experiences and the experience of Black girls at the school; “I just think it is hard to be a Black woman in this school because that is like two strikes”86

Whether expressed on YouTube pages, detailed in less than 280 characters on Twitter, listed on a Facebook status, published on a blog, or recorded as part of a university research study the stories these girls share is valuable, necessary, and not anomaly. These stories make the statistics and numbers presented previously palpable and not just hypothetical thoughts about

85 Ibid 118
86 Ibid 133
imaginary or abstract Black girls. These are the real experiences of real girls. We see precisely that Black girls are holding these experiences with them and are giving us access to them. They prove that Black girls understand their positionality in comparison to their authority figures. They already understand and continue to make sense of existing power relations that exist in their schools but also mimic the real world. They evaluate the discipline policies and practices they interacted with to be “stupid”, “shitty” unjust and unfair.

Naming the Source: The Why

Zero Tolerance Policies

The result of a longitudinal study conducted by Edward Morris found that 16 percent of all students will receive an office referral in any given year. A little over half, 9 percent, are for minor Class I rule violations including disruptive behavior, dress code violation, and cell phone misuse; 6 percent of students are referred for Class II such as truancy and disobedience, and 1 percent are referred for major or Class IV violations such as drug, alcohol or weapons possession. Black girls specifically are disciplined primarily for minor but more ambiguous offenses. These offenses typically fall in the Class I violation. The implementation of Zero Tolerance policies makes it so that minor offenses are met with harsh punishments such as suspension. Zero tolerance developed from the “Broken Window Theory” which contend that “criminal activity is the outcome of a disordered environment,” the goal to “send a message” to potential violators by “treating minor and major incidents with equal severity” Zero tolerance policies “mandates the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and

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punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context.”

In other words, it is the idea that all crime or offenses, no matter how minor, deserve punishment.

These policies developed out of a larger conversation surrounding crime and policing. President Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton all lead with “tough on crime” agendas that utilized the concept of zero tolerance. War on Crime President Johnson passed the Law Enforcement Assistance Act in 1965, which launched training and experimental programs for police officers, serving particularly low-income Black and Brown communities. Johnson believed that police officers were “frontline soldiers” as our nation was “fighting a war within our own boundaries.” He also emphasized initiatives that worked towards the goal of combating juvenile delinquency. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and the Department of Labor helped Johnson mission to control and mitigate youth delinquency.

Next Nixon, in 1971 declared a “war on drugs” in which he introduced mandatory sentencing and no-knock warrants. Reagan continued to fight this war and was responsible for rising incarceration rates, specifically because of arrest regarding nonviolent offenses. In 1984, Reagan signed the Comprehensive Control Act in attempts to eliminate drugs and crime. The act had several provisions including the Controlled Substance Penalties Amendment Act which increased the penalties for possession and trafficking of drugs. Following his predecessors, Clinton passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act in 1994. This act authorized billions of dollars for police, crime prevention and prisons. It also banned assault weapons and

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90 Hinton, “A War Within Our Own Boundaries”, 103.
91 Ibid p.103
92 98th Congress, Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984
introduced a “three strikes you're out” provision. 93 Commonly, these presidents named poverty as the cause of crime. Following Daniel Moynihan 1965 report, “The Negro Family,” they also viewed community behavior as the cause of that poverty. 94 So, in turn these acts specifically targeted Black communities which our presidents understood to be the source and center of crime. This led to the hyper surveillance and policing of Black folks and Black communities, and ultimately left many Black people interacting with the criminal justice system.

These ideas about criminality and approaches to crime also manifested in urban schools where zero tolerance policies were taken up and adapted most noticeably. Starting in the early 1990s several school districts developed zero tolerance approaches to school violations; more than 75% percent of public schools implemented some type of zero-tolerance policy by 1996. 95 Now, 90 percent of public schools operate using these policies. 96 Many states and schools adopted the concept and applied it to offenses including possession of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco, fighting, dress-code violations, truancy, and tardiness. 97 Schools began to “crack down” on disciplinary issues and thus more students were given detention, being suspended, and being expelled. With these policies, the federal government also passed the Gun-Free Act of 1994, which “requires states to pass laws that compel schools to expel students for at least one year for bringing a firearm on school grounds” 98 and also required schools to refer students to a criminal or juvenile court. 99 It also mandated that schools had “a policy requiring referral to the criminal justice or juvenile delinquency system of any student who brings a firearm or weapon to school”

96 Ibid p.52
98 Ibid 934
In addition, “twenty-six states require school officials to refer students to law enforcement for incidents relating to controlled substances, fifteen states require referral for offenses involving alcohol, eight states mandate referral for theft, nine states for vandalism of school property, and eleven states for robbery without using a weapon.”

Schools were required to comply with these standards in order to continue receiving federal funding, and several states imposed criminal liability and other punitive actions for school officials who failed to adhere to these policies. These policies influenced the pipeline and persistently do so. Since 1974, there has been “a near doubling of the number of students suspended annually from school since 1974 (from 1.7 million to 3.1 million).”

Zero tolerance policies “translated into more suspensions for offenses that previously hadn't warranted them — talking back to teachers, skipping class, or being otherwise disobedient or disruptive.” In other words the rise in Zero Tolerance policies begin to punish students with suspensions for small offenses that could have been handled with verbal warnings, or other less severe punishment that did not require removing students from the classroom. These policies gave teachers license to consider any simple or subtle behavior as disruptive. Teacher decides whose behavior and what behavior was meant for punishment. These policies affected students of color heavily, as they became leeway to punish students of color for minor and subjectable offenses.

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100 Nance, “Student, Police and The School-to-Prison-Pipeline”, 934.
102 Wald, "Defining And Redirecting A School-to-prison Pipeline", 10.
Police Presence and School Based Violence

Law enforcement officers in school is also an important component that contributes to the pipeline. As police have provided services for and have been present in schools for several decades. In the late 1970s there were fewer than 100 police officers in public schools, but those numbers grew significantly in the decades to come as the War on Crime and War on Drug administration pushed new policies and agendas that inevitably found their way into Urban schools most particularly. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics survey, by 1997 “there were approximately 12,300 SROs [School Resource Officer] employed by local law enforcement agencies nationwide”\textsuperscript{104}. The role of these officers is to enhance school safety. They are expected to patrol school grounds, investigate complaints, minimize disruption and intervene when students are being disruptive or disorderly. They become the “new authoritative agents”\textsuperscript{105} Discipline is taken out of the hands of teachers and school officials who “have advanced academic credentials, receive training in child psychology, discipline, pedagogy, and educational theory” and is given to SROs who “are trained in law enforcement, have little or no training in developmental psychology or pedagogy.”\textsuperscript{106} This criminalizes student behavior and refers students to law enforcement for committing various offenses, including minor offenses that would have previously been handled internally.

In December 2012, the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights held a hearing for the first time in our nation's history to discuss school issues that influenced the Pipeline, including the presence of police officers.\textsuperscript{107} However, two days later,

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid 946
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid 952
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid 952
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid 926
on December 14th a massacre occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School which invoked feelings of fear, panic, and concern for all our nation's schools and now many Americans demanded that lawmakers and school officials increase school security measures and increase the presence of law enforcement officers in our nation's school.\textsuperscript{108} As a result the federal government and several state legislatures passed laws that provided more money to hire law enforcement officers for schools. This was done without adequate research on school safety or consideration for the possible negative consequences, even as research has shown that SRO’s in school have not been proven to deter school shooters and involve more students in the criminal justice system.

The fear invoked by the school shootings is leading us in the wrong direction by encouraging the pipeline. The National Center for Education Statistics found that, after four years of implementation, zero-tolerance policies had little effect at school previously considered unsafe. The center also reports that the current data does not demonstrate a dramatic decrease in school-based violence even in recent years.\textsuperscript{109} The tragic events that have taken place in too many of our nation's schools have led to an influx of SRO officers in urban schools who are policing Black children, even though these events typically happen at schools where white children are the majority.

**Teacher Bias**

Research has found that Black girls are mostly punished for ambiguous infractions that include disobedience, defiance and aggressive behavior and inappropriate dress.\textsuperscript{110} In general

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{108}Ibid 926
\textsuperscript{110}Morris, “Girls Behaving Badly?, ”144
\end{footnotesize}
Black students, irrespective of gender, are more likely to receive referrals for truancy, dishonesty and cheating. All of these behaviors are independently defined and interpreted by school officials.

Educators regard the behaviors of Black students more critically than that of their counterpart indicating an implicit bias. Implicit bias refers to the “preconscious, unacknowledged schemas that distort perceptions of racial outgroup members.”111 These biases can and do influence the way teachers interact with students. Specifically, a 2014 study at Georgetown University, *Girlhood Interrupted* found that individuals hold bias about Black girls so that they perceive them older than they actually are. The bias of adultification is racialized. The study, surveying 325 adults from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and educational levels across the United States, found that many participants believed that Black girls seem older than white girls of the same age. It also found that participants believe that Black girls need less nurturing, protection and support than white girls.

It is likely that teachers hold similar biases which influence the way they interact with and discipline girls of color. For example, Black girls aren't typically given behavior warnings. Because this notion of childhood innocence is diminished by racialized adultification bias, the transgressions of Black girls committed in the classroom are seen as inexcusable and intolerable. This bias holds Black girls at a different standard than their peers. They are offered little leeway to stray from the expectations or make mistakes without being considered delinquent.

111Morris, “Girls Behaving Badly?, ”129
The Hidden Curriculum

Teachers enact personal bias onto Black girls while working to employ a hidden curriculum that further perpetuates racial and gender biases. The Hidden curriculum is a continuum of surreptitious lessons that schools teach students about behavior, perspectives and attitudes that are internalized through observation and participation in the classroom. The curriculum targets already marginalized groups, and aims to mold their perspectives about race, class, and gender while training students to be obedient and docile. I argue that when schools unintentionally implement Hidden curriculums, especially in Urban schools they are implicitly motivated by the idea that, the closer to whiteness via normative body language, language, speech, emotion, and behavior the more acceptable members of the institution these students become, thus a more acceptable member of a larger society. Since schools, as institutions, mimic and recreate the larger social dynamic of society, the teacher's disciplinary actions are motivated by a seemingly innocent assumption that Black students lack the necessary cultural capital to be successful members of society. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu asserts that “social status in various fields, or social settings, is strongly tied to certain cultural tastes, skills, preferences, and knowledge.” The embodied state which “implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, is how capital is embodied or personified.” This can exist through language, vocabulary, ideologies, impressions, dress, and appearance. Cultural Capital is important because it “represents the immanent structure of the social world...inscribed in the very reality of that world, which governs its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for

112 Martin, "Becoming a Gendered Body", 495.
113 Ibid p.496
115 Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital”
Richardson 58

practices.”116 People who possess cultural capital recognize and accept the cultural norms held by those in power and thus begin to have more access to this power themselves. Students have different abilities to understand these social norms depending on their upbringing, and so schools implement a curriculum to help these students access capital.

Research in education has confirmed Bourdieu’s version of reproduction theory is evident in schools. The teachers at Matthew Middle School, a school where students and staff are predominantly Black, participates in reproductive theory through the hidden curriculum. In an interview between Morris and Mr. Kyle, the teacher explains his beliefs, “[Students] have to learn to follow the rules—like coming to class late, I won’t tolerate that. Or tucking in the shirts. . . . [I]t’s a rule and you have to learn to follow it. I teach them to say, “Yes Sir” and “Ma’am.” It’s a way to model good behavior, so that way they’re not just book smart—if they go for an interview for a job, they’ve got to learn how to talk to someone. . . . [I]f you know how to be respectful, you can get a job.”117 Schools reproduce and exaggerate inequalities of race, class and gender, especially in demonstrating how various forms of cultural capital result in success.118

Schools understand that the meeting of this goal necessitates student practice of bodily control, evident throughout the insistence of mandatory hallway lines, quiet classrooms, upright posture, and focus at the front of the classroom. One way the hidden curriculum manifests details in the way schools regulate students’ bodies. The hidden curriculum of bodily discipline is heavily gendered. It serves as a way to reinforce dominant, middle class standards and formula

116Ibid
117Morris, “Tuck In That Shirt”, 34.
118Ibid 26
for success, and discourage divergent behaviors. In this way schools produce students who learn how to embody race and gender expectations through discipling racial and gender transgression.

School uniform was a specific way Mathews attempted to assimilate and inculcate ideas about dress, presentation, and respectability that mimic those of 20th-century respectability politics. Students at Matthews Middle School were expected to wear school uniforms. A school document states that the purpose of the dress code was to “ensure a safe learning environment” and “promote a climate of effect discipline that does not distract from the educational process”.119

There was extra emphasis on tucking in the uniform shirt, in fact Morris records ” Tuck in that shirt!” as one of the most used phrases by the adults at the school. Adults were quick to spot students who were out of dress code (including untuck shirts) and these students were disciplined into compliance. Appropriate ways of dress were constantly reiterated and reminded to students. The principal called an assembly to instruct how students should dress for an upcoming event. A Black administrator warned a group of Black girls, “Don’t come in here with no hoochie-mama dress all tight up on your butt!”120. It wasn't uncommon for school officials to critique Black girls clothing. In another instance, a Black woman staff member ask Black girl student , “why you wearin’ that hoochie mama skirt? I can almost see your butt in that!"121 Black girls clothing style was always seen as overly sexual and inappropriate, not only by white adults, and not only by white women, but by all adults particularly Black women. Here we see the hidden curriculum has particular functions and implications for Black girls.

119 Morris, “Tuck In That Shirt”, 32.
120 Ibid 32.
121 Morris, “Ladies” or “Loudies?”, 507.
Black Femininity as Not Normative

While Black girls are disciplined for racial transgression, they are also disciplined for gendered transgression. Because Black girls are the minority in both categories their transgression becomes more salient or visible. Black girls experience a unique form of discipline that aims to inculcate white normativity, and white normative femininity. Black girls are always evaluated according to white gender standards, especially within dominant institutions. In school, Black girls are expected to adhere to normative gender expectations, and those who fail so do so face punitive repercussions. Teachers exercise disciplinary measures against Black girls to force them to adopt more acceptable forms of femininity. School becomes about learning gender. As veteran teacher Ms. Taylor puts it, “Some [girls] come in here as young ladies already, but some have to learn.”

Overwhelmingly teachers and staff consider silence and passiveness to be crucial elements to femininity. In Edward Morris field work at Mathew Middle Schools he found that “the most common description and criticism of African American girls at Mathew was that they word too loud.” A first year teacher Mr. Neal reported “the [B]lack girls here--they lack social skills. The way they talk, its loud and combative” Another teacher, Ms. Boyd expressed this perception:

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122 Morris, “Tuck In That Shirt”, 34.
123 Morris, “Ladies” or “Loudies?”, 505.
124 Morris, “Tuck In That Shirt”, 34.
The boys here are always quiet and the girls are real loud. Girls are loud at this age; they have an attitude. They won’t want to do something, or think something is stupid, and move their heads back and forth and click at me.\(^{125}\)

Though Boyd speaks about girls in general, it is important to note that she was describing stereotypical Black female behavior in her description of clicking and head movement. Morris also provides specific examples of teachers correcting this particular gender transgression. Mr. Taylor calls one Black girl “unladylike” and the proceeds, “You are a young lady, you shouldn’t be screaming—speak in a normal tone.”\(^{126}\) She then called the girl over and attempts to discipline her by threatening to call the girl’s mother. In another interaction Morris records,

As I walk by the classrooms a Black girl who is among a group of Black students standing out in the hall [of a White woman teacher’s classroom] says, “Hi Matthews Visitor!” and asks my name. I say I am Mr. Ed and ask why she is in the hall. She tells me she got in trouble for being loud.\(^{127}\)

In this scenario, a Black girl was removed from the classroom because of her perceived loudness. These statements from staff and these particular calls for discipline allow us to locate these ideas and connections about loudness within this specific school. Loudness is a behavior that is deviant from dominant cultural norms (especially in regard to gender) and thus not accepted in this institution which operates around the norms of the dominant culture. In other words, Black girls who were perceived as “too loud” were really being “too Black” and “to

\(^{125}\) Morris, “Ladies” or “Loudies?”, 505.
\(^{126}\) Ibid 506.
\(^{127}\) Ibid 506.
masculine” for this white institutional space. Discipline became a way to reteach the hidden curriculum.

As I explore earlier, the experiences and histories of Black girls and women have been immensely different from the experiences of white girls and women. As a result the way femininity was shaped, understood and exhibited by Black women differs from the feminine norms of white women. Race has created space for alternative femininity which allows Black girls more leeway to challenge gender structures. Punishment has become a way to enforce and instill normative gender behaviors. Schools either lack the cultural competence to understand the identities and cultures of Black girls, or simply don't value or respect it, so oftentimes Black girls are misunderstood. What some Black girls would consider normal behavior in their households, community and other spaces is not accepted as normal in schools. Even the behaviors that Black girls see demonstrated by the Black women in their school send conflicting messages to Black girls navigating a space where they are alien. Black girls are expected to leave their authentic selves at the door when they enter schools and if they do not they will be punished. Black girls are expected to be able to code switch in academic institutions and if they have not yet mastered the art of code switching they will face repercussions as hidden transcripts still decide that white middle class womanhood is the quintessential female-ness, as it is often rewarded and celebrated in academia.

Unfilled Basic Needs

Black girls are intentionally challenging power dynamics existing around them in efforts to assert that their fatigue of abiding to authoritative commands, rules and expectations they don't
understand or agree with. Glasser’s Control Theory (1986) works to explain my contention. This theory maintains that “we always choose to do what is most satisfying to us at the time” determined by five basic needs: to survive, to belong and love, to gain power, to be free, and to have fun. The behaviors exhibited by both students and teachers/administrators more than often are enacted to satisfy these needs. When teachers and Administrators cannot satisfy these needs they respond. Specifically, when schools struggle to gain power they attempt to do so more efficiently by creating more rules and issuing more disciplinary actions. When asked about the emphasis on tucking in uniform shirts, a staff member at Mathews responded:

Because it’s an easy battle. You might not be able to get them to sit in their seat and do their work, but you can make them tuck their shirt in. It’s an easy way for teachers to assert their authority over the kids and make it look like they have control.”

Another reason so much stress was placed on uniforms at Mathews and other schools alike is that creating and enforcing this policy is an easy way for schools and teachers to assert their authority and power.

Similarly when students’ needs cannot be satisfied they react. They establish control by skipping class, creating diversion, playing power games, and exhibiting disruptive behavior. Disruptive students may be attempting to satisfy many of these basic needs, but I want to highlight a sense of belonging. I argue that Black girls are venturing to make apparent their disconnection from their classrooms, school and curriculum and demonstrating that they feel no sense of belonging. Sinclair and Ghory found that marginal young people often feel disconnected from school and classroom environments as curriculum, instruction and overall school

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128 Strahan, “Disconnected And Disruptive Students.”, 2.
129 Morris, “Tuck In That Shirt”, 42.
organizations do not reflect the needs and desires of marginalized students. Discipline problems are often symptoms of marginality. Students are strategic about the classes they misbehave in. It is likely for a student to consistently misbehave in one class while having no reports in another. Students typically exhibit positive behavior for teachers, activities or subjects they enjoy. This pattern underscores that positive behavior is fostered when students feel connected. The opposite is true when students feel disconnected. Students will not follow rules that do not understand or agree with. Students are not going to respect teachers who have splintered the possibility for connection. Black girls are exhibiting willful defiance to make it clear that they do not feel a sense of connection or belonging. These girls spend hours in a school they don't feel like they can belong to. This basic need is not being met. It is evident that frustration lies there

Our nation has not yet resolved its tensions with Black girls and institutions such as schools bear witness. Consistently Black children have faced marginalization and have had their educational experiences obstructed, but Black girls, persecuted at the intersections of race and gender experience this with a uniqueness. When most recent data Black girls we learn that are four times more likely to be arrested in school it is necessary to explore the casualty of these facts. Steadily Black girls have been suspended, expelled, kicked out of class, and arrested at a rate that is immensely different from their white counterparts. Numerous Black girls who experienced different schools, in different settings, with different teachers and school policies have all expressed school discipline experiences that resemble each other. They have all regarded these experiences to be unjust. It is crucial that we ask why. It is crucial that we ask who spilled the milk, what spilled the milk, why was the milk spilled. Are incorrigible Black girls just
behaving badly? When researchers, educators, and policy makers explore the what and the why, we find that there are different policies and practices responsible for the “spilled milk”.

Cleaning Out The Closet
Finds a purple marble notebook, and out falls skeletons
Can still see the tears on the page, still fresh like 7th grade
Finds blue ink letters, can read the sorrow in the margin
  She feels like 2nd period Math class
  Like legs shaking in front office
  Like crying in the bathroom
She remembers hands moving steady
  Across pages heavy, like her chest.
Remember how smooth that pen wrote?
  How fast those words flow.
Never stopped for a spell check.
  No glitches, no typos.
She remembers for the first time
  She reads the first line
Longs for the second, but first line stuck on rewind
  “I'm planning to runaway, or to commit suicide”
  So busy trying to keep this me afloat
  Almost forgot that girl drowned
Trauma built up and that girl broke down.
  Now I wear a life vest for her
    Strapped up
    Learned CPR for her
    Lifeguard for her
    For girls like her.
    For trauma like hers.
    2nd period hurt
    And so did the third
Never understood what they wanted from a girl like her
    But now that, I learn
Chapter IV: Implications

A couple of months ago, I discovered a notebook while cleaning out my closet. It was my 7th grade Math notebook. I flipped through the pages curiously and came across a diary entry. I expected it to be about 7th-grade crushes, but instead, the first line was my raw emotions. My thoughts of ending my own life at 12 years old. The third and fourth line explained my frustration with constantly getting in trouble in school for "bold face lies teachers be telling" It went to explain how what was happening in school was also affecting my happiness at home. I was hurt, confused, frustrated and angry, rightfully. I never spoke about this experience. I never had the place or space to.

I know that I had complicated relationships with school and school discipline that held consequences that extend beyond an immediate phone call home or 5-day detention. I know that I am not alone in this experience. Discipline policies have severe implications for Black girls that need more space in both academic and public discourse.

First, discipline policies, directly and indirectly, push Black girls out of school and point them in the direction of prison facilities. While Black girls are suspended and expelled disproportionately, they are also disproportionately represented in federal prisons and correctional institutions when compared to their white counterparts. We understand that in school arrest and the overwhelming presence of school resource officers can lead to immediate and future incarceration for Black girls. We also learn that suspension and dropout rates increase the likelihood of imprisonment for Black girls. In this way, schools share the blame for Black girls' overrepresentation in prison. This connection is what discourse around school discipline
and the school to prison pipeline seems concerned mostly. But schools' current approach to
discipline has further implications for Black girls.

School discipline practices such as suspension and expulsion are physically removing
Black girls from the classroom, while other practices cause these students to disconnect,
withdraw, and drop out of school. This disconnection from the classroom severely impacts Black
girls' opportunity to learn and acquire the necessary academic skills needed for matriculation and
other means of upward mobility. Not only do the ways schools regard Black girls affect their
attitudes about school and affect Black girls' opportunity to learn, but they also affect Black girls'
perception of self. Finally, Black girls leave with traumatizing experiences that are either created
by their relationship with their school community or past traumas are exacerbated because of
schools' negative responses to Black girls' behavior. That trauma not only sustains a
trauma-to-prison pipeline, but it also affects Black girl's mental health. If the disparities were not
reason enough to believe that we need to reform school discipline policies and school cultures,
allow my analysis of implications to make it more apparent.

**From School to Prison: Direct Interaction**

In New York, a 15-year old Black girl was arrested by police for using a student
MetroCard that is only valid for students 19 and younger. The arresting officers did not believe
the girl’s claim that she was 15 years old. He did not believe her parents when they were reached
by phone. It was only until her mother brought her birth certificate to the police stations that the
officer believed that the girl was actually 15 years old. The girl was treated at a hospital for the
damage the handcuffs inflicted on her wrists. Though this story can detail Black girls' experiences with adultification, I utilize it to highlight that Black girls, too, have a tampered relationship with law enforcement. Black girls' relationships with law enforcement do not stray from the Black normal. Black girls face traumatizing encounters with police officers, not only on the way to school but also while in school. Schools function as carceral apparatuses that send Black girls to direct paths to prison with campus arrest and referrals, and the excessive presence of school resource officers.

In the same breath of the #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName movements, and well before, Black girls were making their way into news headlines. "Police handcuff 6-year-old girl in Georgia" one headline read in April 2012. At the center of the news report is a Black girl who was placed in handcuffs, arrested at school, and was charged as a juvenile with "simple battery of a schoolteacher and criminal damage to property" for her "combative behavior." The kindergartener later went home to her family. The charges did not hold as a result of her young age. She instead, was suspended and could not return to school until four months later. In March 2013, an eight-year old Black girl with special needs was arrested at school, thrown in the back of a police cruiser, and was taken to the police department. When her guardian arrived at the station, he found the 8-year-old handcuffed at the hands and feet with a belt tied around her wrist. In February of 2020, body camera footage showed a six-year-old Black girl pleading to arresting officers. Her story is not that much different from the two other girls.

131 Campbell, "Police Handcuff 6-Year-Old Student in Georgia"
132 Ibid.
133 Washington. “8-Year-Old Special Needs Student Handcuffed”
134 Zaveri, "Body Camera footage Show Arrest by Orlando Police"
These stories hit the media quickly, likely because the girls were so young at the time of their arrest. The idea of childhood innocence sparked empathy from the folks who believe Black girls were afforded this privilege in the first place. Many other Black girls are arrested in schools every year, some as young as the girls who make headlines, but many are older. The stories of older girls who are arrested almost never make headlines or even trending hashtags on social media.

Again social media proves useful for finding missing Black girl voices. Jasmine is a goofy makeup guru and college student who uses her YouTube vlog to express her creativity and to share her life stories. In one video, she recalls being arrested at her San Francisco middle school (0:05). She explains that after she returned to a classroom after a failed attempt to skip class, she and her teacher had conversations that left Jasmine wanting to leave the class again. Her teacher attempted to stop her from leaving the classroom. In her own words, "Mr. Ester tried to stop me from getting out of the class and then he grabbed me. He grabbed me like this," she says while demonstrating it to her audience (5:15). She continues, "I'm like 'let go of me.' He's like 'no, sit back down in your seat,' and he's gripping my arm. I'm like this, 'let go of me" and he flew back…”(5:30).

The teacher kicked Jasmine out of the classroom and told her to report to the office where she remained until well after school was dismissed. While waiting impatiently, Jasmine was informed that the teacher decided to press charges, so the police were on the way (6:35). Eventually, she was taken down to the police station, where detectives asked her questions about what transpired at school (8:56). Jasmine tells us that though she was able to go home with her aunt that day, the arrest went on her permanent record and she was expelled from the entire
school district (10:04). In the end, she had to move cities because she could not attend any school in San Francisco, where she originally resided. Jasmine is an older girl who has been arrested at school, though we do not hear stories like hers often. I can imagine plenty of other Black girls share similar experiences.

School resource officers and police in school are another direct way schools force Black girls to interact with law enforcement and correctional facilities. Studies have found that the persistent presence of SROs not only increases school-based arrests, but it also “increases the number of students who will be involved in the justice system.” Being arrested increases the likelihood of students dropping out and also increases the likelihood that they will be involved with the criminal justice system later on in life. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey reveals, "a first-time arrest during high school almost doubles the odds that a student will drop out of school, and a court appearance associated with an arrest nearly quadruples those odds" (Nance 956). In school arrests, police presence and SRO programs lead students to the prison directly.

School to Prison Indirectly: Academic Performance

In addition to directly sending Black girls to prison, schools are also indirectly directing leading Black girls into prison. Using research conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2003, I recognize a parallel between academic failure and incarceration, not only for Black girls but for all groups of color irrespective of gender. The majority, sixty-eight percent of inmates, have not received a high school diploma, and the number of prison inmates without a high school education continues to increase. Of that sixty-eight percent, forty-two percent were females,

135Nance, "Students, Police, And The school-to-prison Pipeline", 953.
136Ibid 968
forty-four percent are African-American, and sixty-six percent have learning disabilities.\textsuperscript{137} BJS found that 1 in 6 inmates reported dropping out of school because they were convicted of a crime, sent to a correctional facility, or otherwise involved in legal activities. Over a third of jail inmates and one sixth of the general population reported that the main reason they dropped out of school was because of “academic problems, behavior problems, or interest lost.”\textsuperscript{138} This was the most responded reason for dropping out of school. I observed that most inmates had at least a high school education, while fewer had education levels that were 8th grade or less. This pattern is consistent even when race and gender are accounted for. This indicates that high school is where the pipeline peaks, and so this the final chance for school intervention. What transpires between students up until and throughout high school can pilot students on a prison trajectory.

\textbf{School to Prison Indirectly: Trauma}

Through my analysis of Black-American history, I understand that Black women and girls have experienced racialized and gendered violence and trauma. Through the stories I highlight regarding Black girl's schooling experiences, I will continue to demonstrate how Black girls experience racialized and gendered violence in the contemporary moment. Research on childhood experience has found that girls, regardless of racial difference, suffer from higher levels of a traumatic experience than their counterparts.\textsuperscript{139} Social disadvantages make one more vulnerable to trauma. Thus, Black girls, rendered in a second-class citizen position, are even more susceptible to trauma and have lower rates of mental well-being.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{137} BJS, \textit{Education and Correction Population}, 1  
\textsuperscript{138}Ibid 3  
\textsuperscript{139} Quinlan, “Girls Coping with Trauma”  
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid
While education levels correlate to incarceration, abuse and trauma are also common themes among Black female inmates. This pattern is known as the “trauma-to-prison pipeline,” a term that “refers to the phenomena particular to women who grow up in abusive homes or experience trauma, sexual violence and domestic violence at some point in their lives.

A girl's attempts at coping or surviving abuse often lead to an increased likelihood of incarceration later in life. Girls are more likely to be incarcerated for offenses such as truancy, curfew violations, and running away. These are all responses to abuse. Bureau of Justice Statistics found that nearly sixty percent of women in state prisons had experienced physical or sexual abuse in the past; sixty-nine percent reported that the assault occurred before age 18. Recent data indicates that over two-thirds of young people in the juvenile justice system have histories of complex/developmental trauma, including abuse and neglect, family and community violence and broken relationships with their primary caregivers. Girls in a juvenile justice facility showed increased exposure to traumatic events, interpersonal victimization, PTSD, and other mental health problems. They had substantially higher levels of suicidal ideation, depression, anxiety, and a history of traumatic experiences. The criminal justice system does not see girls' delinquency as a response to trauma and abuse. Therefore, girls' violations are met with punitive measures instead of intervention.

The same pattern occurs with Black girls who experience trauma in public schools. The consequences of an early trauma experience can manifest differently as young people grow older and can articulate themselves more verbally and physically. A student who has experienced

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141 ABS Staff “The Trauma of the Prison Pipeline” 1
142 Bureau of Justice Statistic, Education and Correction, 3.
143 Citizens for Juvenile Justice, “Shutting Down the Trauma to Prison Pipeline”, 10
144 Ibid.
abuse and neglect has experienced enough trauma to have behavioral health needs already. The realities of Black girls who have experienced violence and trauma do not disappear when they enter school grounds. Black girls may still be coping with trauma while in school. Their responses might present through behavior that adults interpret as disruptive, depressive, anxious, or aggressive.  

This complex trauma can show up in behavior that becomes increasingly difficult for adults to manage or tolerate. Then, Black girls receive punishments for behaviors that might be a direct response to their traumatic life experiences.

Schools lack the competence necessary to identify trauma and coping students. Schools turn to strict discipline practices instead of getting Black girls the emotional support they need through counseling. With existing negative stigma about Black girls, teachers, and administrators are less likely to see their behavior as cries for help. Black girls are always under surveillance; however, their pain and suffering is neglected. Crenshaw articulates, "in environments in which discipline is emphasized over counseling, girls who struggle with trauma and other unmet needs may come to the attention of school personnel only when their behavior leads to punishable offenses."  

In the end, Black girls who may be responding to experiences of interpersonal violence feel misunderstood, uncared for, and unsupported. This neglect makes it more difficult for them to adopt a sense of safety and belonging necessary for future positive school behavior and academic achievement. If schools ignore the signs of trauma in young girls and mark their responses to trauma as needs for discipline as opposed to helping them, they help to push Black girls into prisons. This creates a hostile environment for Black girls, which only exacerbates that
trauma. Schools can also create experiences that are traumatic for young Black girls. A Black girl's transgression can be a response to the institutional violence happening inside the classroom itself.

Black girls who have been arrested in school or have had other negative interactions with law enforcement while in school wear scars. These students deal with emotional trauma, embarrassment, and trauma from being handcuffed and taken away from schools. For a good deal of students, the adverse effect is still felt irrespective if the case was dismissed due to a lack of evidence or seriousness. The presence of police officers and SROs on school campuses also have an impact on how Black students feel about their school community. When 131 students were asked, “Do you feel your school is made safer by the presence of school police officers?” 35% indicated that they felt protected, but 65% indicated that they felt something other than protected. They instead felt feelings closer to intimidation and harassment. Students went on to recall experiences where they saw their peers handcuffed or watched police enter their classroom to make an arrest for a minor incident. It's more than likely that these students developed their opinions based on these experiences. In another study of Black and Latino high school students in Chicago, researchers found that students who had been stopped by the police and felt disrespected during the interactions were less willing to aid police and less likely to believe that the police cared about their neighborhoods. This highlights how students feel about schools once discipline is prioritized, and they understand that they are always seen as criminal. Schools become unwelcoming, unsafe sites of trauma that students are legally mandated to attend. They are left to navigate a trauma inflicting school carceral apparatus on a daily basis. Recognizing

147 Advancement Project, "Education on Lockdown", 36.
148 Ibid. 39
149 Ibid. 39
140 Shed, Unequal Cities, 89
This is an important step in understanding the large percentage of Black girls and women who end up in serious trouble in school and/or who end up in prison.

In these ways, schools, directly and indirectly, send students to prison. On campus arrest and the presence of SRO officers directly refer students to criminal facilities. Students’ sense of belonging and schools’ responses to trauma indirectly lead students down a path that leads to interactions with corrections facilities. Aside from leading students onto a pathway towards prisons, school discipline policies affect students in other ways that expand beyond the prison conversation.

Thinking Beyond Prison: Thinking About Interrupted Education

When I graduated high school in 2016 my school had a 65 percent graduation rate, a figure mirrored the statewide graduation rate for Black students that year. Each year I watched my peers contemplate whether or not it was worth completing the journey. By my senior year, I had friends who did not finish high school, some who decided to take the GED exam, and others who found jobs instead. I never thought much of it. I never thought about it at all. Maybe I was desensitized from all of the "they don’t expect you to graduate" supposed to be motivation speeches or the Bronx dropout rates that we were constantly reminded of. I'm not sure. Nonetheless, I never thought critically about why my friends were sitting in class one day and then gone forever the next. In those moments, I did not consider the circumstances that pushed these students out of the school doors in the first place.

Now that I reflect, rigid school cultures, boring class material, complicated and frustrating class assignments, strict and unfriendly teachers and staff would make school an unpleasant experience for anyone. I understand that school discipline policies and practices limit
a student's opportunity to learn or diminishes their motivation to learn, and in the end, students
decide to drop out. This is particularly true for Black girls. Black girls who experience excessive
school discipline are less motivated, have lower rates of achievement, and higher dropout rates.

While all forms of discipline can contribute to these outcomes in some way, research
indicates that there is a negative relationship between exclusionary discipline, specifically, and
positive school outcomes. For Black students, disparate suspension rates are a leading factor
hindering academic progress and maintaining the racial achievement gap. Excluding students
from school even for a small period interrupts the students' education experiences. Various
studies indicate that "a suspended student is less likely to advance to the next grade level or
enroll in college and is more likely to drop out…" Emily Arcia (2006) quasi-experimental
study followed two groups of similar students over time. One group of students had previously
been suspended, the other had not. After two years Arcia found the suspended group was “nearly
five grade levels behind the non-suspended group” Another study from Morris and Perry
found supplemental evidence that suspension was a predictor of poor academic performance.
Indicating that “having a suspension in a given wave is associated with significantly lower
performance on reading evaluations at the end of that academic year relative to other years,
comparing each student to him or herself.” Similar finding existed in math performance, “a
student who is never suspended has a linear growth in math performance that is reflected in a
six-point increase across the three measure...lower baseline scores than never-suspended
students, on average, possibly reflecting other unmeasured mechanisms of student success that

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151 Perry, “The Punishment Gap”, 82.
152 Nance, "Students, Police, And the School-to-Prison Pipeline.956
154 Ibid 79.
are correlated with suspension. Finally, students who have been suspended score substantially lower on end-of-year academic progress tests than those who have not, and even students with a propensity to be suspended perform worse in years where they are suspended relative to years when they are not.

It is most likely that these differences exist because exclusionary discipline strategies such as suspension significantly limit students' opportunity to learn as it limits the time they spend in the class and the quality of education they receive when they are not. A study conducted at an elementary school found that students who are suspended collectively miss 462 hours of instructional time in one year, and students who received office referrals lose 203 hours. For some students missing even a small number of days or moments in class can significantly disrupt a student's learning. Students who are struggling academically or who attend schools or classes that have policies that do not allow students to turn in or makeup late assignments because of exclusion may be particularly affected.

One of the most severe forms of exclusionary discipline is superintendent suspension. These suspensions are issued for serious transgression and may result in a suspension period that lasts at least one school week but can be more long term. Elementary school students are expected to serve their suspension at "buddy school" where students receive full instruction and middle and high school students complete their suspension at an Alternative Learning Center, program and schools. I have been at least vaguely aware of this practice.

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155 Ibid 79
156 Ibid 82
158 NYC DOE, “Suspensions”
Every high school morning I had casual conversations as I walked past the trailer that sat parallel to my school. I watched students enter and exit. Their faces I could never recognize. I knew nothing about them other than they must have done something really bad to have ended up with this suspension trailer. I had small thoughts about the students who spent time in the trailer. I wondered what they did. Were they violent? Did they get suspended too many times? Were their schools tired of dealing with them? I wondered if they had to go through metal detectors like us. Was suspension school fun like my friend had told me? Do they really get to color and watch movies after they finish their worksheets? The more years that past the more unanswered questions I had. What I now know is that these students were there for various different reasons. I know that the trailer was an alternate instruction site where students went to superintendent suspensions. These suspensions are the most serious form of suspension. I know that what my friend told me about coloring and watching movies as opposed to learning might very well be true.

All students who are suspended or expelled have the right to access education services. However, states have leeway in deciding how this opportunity is granted. Some states have alternative Centers, alternative schools or Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs). These programs can be different but are mostly the same. They are designed to serve students who have trouble functioning at their home campus. While alternative schools are typically thought of as permanent placements, alternative centers, and DAEPs are "aimed at correcting or managing the behavior of disruptive students" with the hope that the students will eventually return to their home schools. ¹⁵⁹ These schools and programs are all typically located

¹⁵⁹ Booker, “Patterns in Recidivism and Discretionary”, 193.
in trailers or aging buildings may be taught mainly by computer, and have little opportunity for extracurricular activities or even counseling services. They usually lack academic rigor, are staffed with poor teachers, and often lack resources. There is an observable change in the quality of education that students receive once they have temporarily or permanently been removed from their home schools. Temporary suspension placements derail students’ learning so significantly that some students begin or continue to struggle academically after their time at the alternative site is complete. Others never catch up to their peers after returning to their home school. Many students become discouraged and drop out. A ProPublica analysis of alternative schools found that nearly half of the alternative schools have graduation rates below 50 percent.

It can sometimes be the students who are in the most need of academic intervention that have had fewer opportunities to learn because of disciplinary actions taken against them. Empirical studies observe that low performing students often misbehave because they are frustrated or embarrassed about having trouble with academic material. Also, students who identify that the educational process is not working for them have fewer incentives or motivation to obey school rules. High suspension and expulsion rates are markers for poor school climates and resource deficiencies. Schools may also be exercising extreme forms of discipline in attempts to "save the school. Schools serving large numbers of struggling students are more likely to rely excessively on discipline, punishment and control. School officials may push low-performing students out of their schools by suspending them, expelling them, or referring them to the juvenile justice system to avoid having their low scores count against them. Instead

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160 Vogell, "How Students Get Banished to Alternative Schools.", 4.
161 Ibid
162 Ibid
163 Nance, "Students, Police, And the School-to-prison Pipeline." 941.
164 Ibid 945
of providing students with academic support and intervention, they are instead advertently and inadvertently pushing vulnerable students out.

In this way, a cycle or revolving door may very well be created. Students do poorly, are pushed out, return to their home schools significantly behind, do poorly again and are pushed out again. In a Texas DEAP sample, 80 percent of students were placed there by their school officials for reasons related to discipline, of that 80 percent, 53 percent were recidivist, meaning re-offenders.165 Students who enter DEAP were “likely to return for subsequent assignments in the same academic year”.166

Removing students from the classroom and school building is supposed to deter unacceptable behavior. But when students were asked if the suspension would prevent or resolve their behavior, students who served out of school suspensions most commonly responded "not at all" and the students who received in-school suspensions said "a little bit."167 The academic derailment that takes place or that is exacerbated when suspended has lasting effects that predict a trajectory of poor performance even if the student is never suspended again.168 Students who are suspended start a cycle of suspension and poor academic performance. Students who act out because of poor academic performance do not get the support they need, and students are likely to complete the same transgression that got them suspended in the first place. Students are likely to become discouraged, disconnected and drop out. This demonstrates how exclusionary discipline pushes out Black girls.

165 Booker, "Patterns in Recidivism and Discretionary Placement in Disciplinary Alternative Education", 199
166 Ibid 202
167 Ibid 197
168 Perry, “The Punishment Gap”, 82.
Other forms of discipline and attitudes towards Black girls also pushes Black girls out of schools. When Black girls are over-disciplined or don't have strong relationships with their teachers or connections to their school communities, they are pushed out. In the end, Black girls make negative associations with school, are less engaged in the process of school, loss motivation, and potentially drop out.

Cassie

Cassie, an unapologetic YouTube vlogger, explains the circumstances that led her to dropping out of high school. She starts the video and gets straight to the point "Basically school really just was not for me, I wanna say I really probably started being bad in elementary school ". (0:19), She explains that she never really enjoyed school because of the rules that existed and disliked the way teachers and staff attempted to enforce them. She explains "I didn't like for people to tell me what to do, I never stood for that shit. I never was the type of student to let you talk to me any kind of way… teachers be fucking with kids" 0:40. She goes on "I have been through shit growing up and I told myself "bitch" nobody else is gonna talk to you or treat you like that" 1:09. She realized that she no longer wanted to attend school through reflecting on her discipline experience beginning in 3rd grade. She tells her audience, "So that's how I just knew school wasn't for me because I stayed getting in trouble, they stayed calling my parents… I don't know what the fuck was wrong with me, why I was so fucking bad but I was horrible" (1:20). She was first motivated to start skipping school in 9th grade when she realized that she was not learning anything from her "Ignorant ass teachers" (2:08) She reiterates, "that's when I started skipping class, I was getting in trouble… I just stopped going to school for like three months" (2:30). Eventually, after missing several days during her senior year, Cass attempted to go back
Richardson 83

to school. Her counselor informed her that she would have to finish off the rest of the school year and then complete summer school before she would be about to get a diploma (2:35). Cass did not think that would be the best path for her, so to her guidance counselor she responded, “I'm not finna do that shit” (2:41). Cass was aware what this decision meant and the stigma it brought, she explains to us “For a good minute everyone thought I was going to do shit with my life but I knew good and dam well I wasn't gonna sit my ass there and get no type of diploma or something” (2:50). She eventually took the GED exam, passed, and now has a High School Equivalency Diploma.

Cassie was a student who constantly got in trouble in school, starting as early as elementary school. Though she does not get into specific details about her experiences with school discipline or her interactions with teachers, it is still clear that these factors contributed to her attitude toward school and later became the reason for her inconsistent attendance in high school. These are the factors that prevented her from graduating on time and eventually influenced Cassie to get her GED instead.

In *Unsilenced: Black Girls Stories*, Kendall explained how her attitudes about school have been affected, stating, “I really don't like my school that much because I feel like I am profiled... I don't really talk that much in class and I don't like any of the classes.” Another girl, Dion, explained how office referrals affected her educational experience, disclosing, “I was in the office a lot and missed class because the administrators were always calling me in the office and giving me warnings for my head scarfs...I started wearing my hair straight more so I don't need the headband. This year I didn't have to spend as much time in the office and miss class...so
I think that helped out my grades.\textsuperscript{169} Fortunately, Cassie was able to get a High school equivalency diploma, Kendall states she was still able to get good grades, and Dion’s grades are improving. However, their experiences are still evidence that discipline practices, negative school culture, and poor student teacher connection leave Black girls with unenthusiastic feelings about school that can and sometimes do prevent them from finishing school.

BJS prison statistics refute a common misconception about students who do poorly academically, students who have poor behavior, and students who don't finish high school. Some teachers, staff, parents, other students, and even researchers believe that these students do poorly because they do not care about learning, gathering more knowledge, or acquiring educational certificates or degrees. While this may be the case for some students, it is not the case for the majority of prisoners. BJS research finds that “about 52% of State prison inmates, 57% of Federal inmates, 14% of jail inmates, and 23% of probationers” report taking educational programs since their most recent prison admission or sentence to probation.\textsuperscript{170} Prisoners who have dropped out are the leading participants in educational opportunities presented in prison, and are more likely to have taken classes since their admission. Specifically, “54% of State inmates who had not completed the 12th grade and 61% with a GED reported that they had participated in educational programs since being admitted to prison”\textsuperscript{171} The fact that many inmates have taken advantage of educational opportunities while incarcerated shows that they not only are capable of learning, but they are eager to learn, acquire knowledge and gain educational credentials such as a high school diploma.

\textsuperscript{169} Owen, “Unsilenced”,93.
\textsuperscript{170} Bureau of Justice Statistics, Education and Correction Population, 4.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid 5.
Beyond Prison: Possibilities for Upward Mobility

In the end, all these things work together to create circumstances that further impact students who are affected. For one, a criminal record significantly reduces the likelihood of a callback for a job by almost 50 percent. The impact of a criminal record is twice as significant for Black applicants. A criminal record not only limits Black girls’ access to jobs and careers but also their access to college. A large majority of colleges and universities require students to report criminal history on their application, which suggests that “criminal history could be a significant impediment to accessing the benefits of higher education.” Just as jobs are less likely to hire Black folks with criminal records, schools are also less likely to admit Black students with criminal records. A modified experimental audit conducted by University of Minnesota sent out same race pairs of sample applications to non-elite four-year colleges. Some pairs applied as Black and others as white. Within each pair, one application indicated a previous low-level felony conviction. They found that the rejection rate for applicants with felonies was two and a half times the rate of those who did not indicate felonies. They also found that Black applicants with criminal records were specifically penalized at colleges with high campus crime rates. Students with criminal records who do apply and get accepted to college can also run into trouble while trying to fund their education, as it may limit scholarship and government grant availability. Criminal records also may stand in the way for students considering enlisting in the military. Finally, in some places, criminal records can make Black girls and their families ineligible for qualifying for publicly subsidized housing. Women are also more likely to be

172 NAACP, “Criminal Justice Fact Sheet”
174Ibid
175Ibid
homeless than formerly incarcerated men. This makes it harder to comply with probation and parole, potentially leading to reentry.  

Being in prison or having a criminal record could also impact Black women's ability to vote in elections. This is important because it can shift the future of American democracy, as Black women are a demographic group with one of the largest voter turnouts. The consequences of a Black girl’s behavior in school follow them into adulthood and can limit their opportunity for social and political advancement.

For students who do not find themselves in prison but struggle academically as a result of discipline practices face similar lasting effects. For the many students who do not receive a high school diploma finding employment presents a challenge. Students who struggled academically and received lower grades are not favorable candidates for competitive colleges and universities. Those students who receive a GED or complete high school and decide to go on to college with suspension or expulsion on their record are also at a slight disadvantage. Just as many schools require students to indicate criminal background, they also require students to indicate past disciplinary history such as suspensions and expulsion. So, in this way, previous transgressions or disciplinary actions follow Black girls beyond K-12.

School & Identity Formation

Finally, school discipline policies, practices, school community, and hidden curriculum play a role in Black girls understanding of self. Schools, amongst other institutions, is a place where identity formation occurs. Identity formations regard the process in which one establishes a distinctive view of self. The center of identity formation is the development of one's personality.

177 Kajstura, Women’s Mass Incarceration
The term also includes an increased understanding of one's identity categories such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. Socialization, or learning to behave in a way that is acceptable in society, is a process that influences the formation of these identities. School practices, policies, and cultures are specific socialization processes that develop identity formation for Black girls, as schools act as the "stressor" or context to which race and gender-based messages can be understood. School impacts the way young people understand the centrality of race and the operations of gender.

School & Understanding the Public Regard

Black students develop a private regard, their feeling about their own Black identity, and a public regard for their perceptions of societal views about their Black identity. School plays into the development of public regard specifically. Studies have found that African American girls who experience school-based racial discrimination believed that society as a whole viewed their racial group less favorably.178 Black girls who experience or even witness repeated disciplinary actions taken against students like them for "no reason" or who recognize these practices to be unfair begin to learn that the public views them as inherently bad or guilty. 18-year old Cassandra explains what she understands about the public view of Black youth, as she states "[T]hey view us as a certain stereotype. We're known for dealing drugs, having guns, killing each other and just not being very intelligent people."179 Though her statement was in regard to perspectives of the Baltimore Police Department, I argue it can extend to other institutions that police Black bodies including schools as I have long argued that they are comparable in many functions. Alexis, earlier scenarios highlight how her school experiences

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178 Butler Barnes, “The Importance of Racial Socialization”, 443.
179 Kerrison, “Your Pants Won't Save You”, 12.
influenced her public view. When accused of doing the wrong thing in a locker room she attempts numerous times to plead her case, she even goes so far to prove that there is no substantial evidence on her by pointing that surveillance camera footage was not possible. She states, “They lying like fuck, they don’t got shit on me” (11:09). Even still she was given a 10-day suspension. She learned that the school did not trust her, wanted a reason to punish her, and that she had little power to change what was thought about her or the consequence those perspectives had.

In another instance, uniform policies that argue for respectability politics teaches Black students that in order to be taken seriously in the public view they need to have a specific appearance. I think specifically about Dion's headband story. She explained that when she wore her nature which required her to wear a headband, she often got in trouble because it violated the schools dress code and by being "dramatic" and "distracting". The next year she reported wearing her hair straight and as a result had less issues in school. We don't know if Dion made the decision to start wearing her hair straight as a result of her school response to her natural hair, but I think it is fair to say that by this experience Dion learned that her school believed that her natural hair was not welcomed in a school setting, especially because the school did not punish white girls who wore similar hair accessories. I wonder how Dion brings this realization into other public spaces. In the future will Dion decide that she needs straight hair to find a place in corporate America? Does she or will she see her hair as a hindrance? I believe there is a possibility for truth. Policing of dress and other aspects of appearance with the spoken or unspoken mission to prepare Black students for larger society usher them into adapting a false sense of security. A plentiful history of respectable dress and appearance have not spared Black
folk from seemingly inevitable racial violence or discrimination. Plenty of Black women with straight hair are still struggling for opportunity. Respectability politics only underscores the environments that Black students navigate are violent and reinforces that public spaces are not welcoming to Black students as their authentic self.

Hidden curriculums which attempt to socialize Black students is another way public regard is developed in school. As stated earlier, schools often perpetuate and enforce white middle-class norms of femininity, and if Black girl's behavior exists outside these norms, they are labeled deviant and punished. In schools, Black girls "must often navigate through a landscape that reinforces multidimensional stereotypes and debilitating narratives that negatively impact how Black femininity is understood". Black girls are constantly reprimanded for not "acting like a young lady" when they transgress traditional gender norms. This practice is teaching Black that the way they experience, and express femininity is wrong or deviant. Regulating the way Black girls express themselves perpetuates the idea that their femininity is inherently bad, and exhibiting it sanctions the need for punishment. So Black girls learn that being loud, asking questions, wearing certain forms of clothing and other ways that Black girls may express themselves should be avoided here.

Learning Double Consciousness, A Culture of Dissemblance

Black girls learn how to exist in public. They learn that their public self must be different from their private self. Alaina, who attends predominantly white school, summarizes in her own words: “I think I’m different because like there is a way you are supposed to act in school that’s

180 Anderson, “The Black Girl Push Out"
like acceptable and then a way you act outside because it’s just you and your friends like no one else is watching you”

In 8th grade my family moved, and I changed school. I got into too much trouble at my former school, so my parents didn’t think the 30-minute commute was worth it. I had also grown tired of sitting in detention and the principal's off. I used this change of school as an opportunity to reinvent myself. I vowed that I would be different that year. I took pushed back the attributes and behaviors that I knew teachers didn't like and tried to do the opposite. Specifically, I remember telling myself that I would not make many friends. That way I wouldn't get in trouble for being too loud, being disruptive or too "crazy". In school I was quiet Victoria, but at home, I was the loud, playful, and assertive Queen of the empire Victoria I loved being. Quickly, I realized that this strategy had worked. It was then that learned something important about myself and the school setting.

Alexis, Dion, Alaina, I accepted that society has perceptions and expectations of us based on our identity. We recognize that they must have two versions of ourselves, one version that works to refute common negative perceptions of us and that conform to mainstream standards and expectations, and another version that is our "true self". This concept appears consistent with W.E.B Dubois, double consciousness. We understand ourselves both through the eyes of the outsider and through our perceptions and realities. Our school experiences help us to construct or sharpen these consciousnesses.

We can begin to use double consciousness to understand the experiences of Black girls at schools, but W.E.B Dubois speaks to the Black experiences without regard for gender difference. The interactions of both race and gender are essential to the analysis. Darlene Clark Hines offers us the concept of "the culture of dissemblance" or a "cult of secrecy that twentieth-century Black women developed to protect the sanctity of inner aspects of their lives in their lives". In a hostile white, patriarchal, middle-class American society, where Black women become hypervisible as the "other", Black women create an alternative self-imagine. This alternative self-image protects Black women empowering private self from constant scrutiny.

Black girls learn to employ a culture of dissemblance through their experiences in hostile public-school environments. Some girls allow their understanding of public view to determine how they navigate public spaces. For Black girls specifically, this means conforming to white middle class standards and navigating away from Black traditional norms of femininity or androgyny and towards more traditional forms of femininity. Fordham asserts that one-way Black girls navigate public spaces where conformity seems necessary is by silencing. Fordham observes Black girl students at Capitol Hill and comes to an observation that pursues this assertion. Fordham learns that high achieving Black girls at the school achieve success by "becoming and remaining voiceless or silent." The silence is a mandatory component for academic success for Black girls at Capitol Hill, as they are “taught to be silent by their parents, teachers and other school officials, and male peers—both explicitly and implicitly, in order to allay the perception that they are just women, that is, that they will behave in ways typically associated

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183 Hines, Rape and the inner lives of Black women in the Middle West, 916  
with women and femaleness.” Black girls then become “active participants in their own exclusion”, marking their silence as an unconscious yet intentional act of defiance, a refusal to conform to the image of “nothingness” and to surpass downward expectations of African American womanhood. It is important, however, to note this silence as learned behavior as Fordham comes to understand that silence has not always been the script for these girls. Most of the academically successful girls at the school explained that their silence represents a change from the way they once behaved in school, as each of them can remember a time where her voice did not compromise her academic success. Fordham notes “some of them attribute their growing, evolving silence to parental controls that are increasingly directed toward limiting both their extrafamilial activities and the fulfillment of their female sexuality. Others are unable to articulate why they have come to be silent. They only know that, for some reason, they are learning or have learned not to speak, not to be visible”.

Some girls learn to display these traits, such as silence in public, but do not necessarily do these things in private. They allow themselves to be their true self in private places such as home, church, during play and non-academic extracurricular activities. Here there is more leeway to be loud, aggressive and carefree. Here they can challenge dominant standards.

Dubois would argue Black mobility and overall black folk’s survival depends on one's ability to understand both realities. Double consciousness is necessary for Black folks to coexist with the "other world". Aime Cox, explains what the ability to hold onto multiple versions of one's selves means for Black girls by using metaphors of chorography and the body. She

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185 Ibid 18
186 Ibid 10
187 Ibid 18
explains, "staying in the body asks that the dancer move from a place of intuitive knowing that allows movement to both feel and look organic. It also means moving from the center of your body and extending outward rather than allowing your extremities or the technical demands of the movement to finally dictate your body's journey in space." Black girls are aware that if they rely on socially determined assessments to define their self-worth, they would be exiled from their own bodies and any home spaces they might establish for themselves—a state of eternal homelessness. Young Black women propose the possibility that the body may be the space to which we may finally come home, or where we make a new one.  

While the formation of the public self is vital for Black girls' protection, it is equally as important to have a home in the private self—Black girls can come back to. Some Black girls keep their public views separate from their private views. They don't allow public perspectives of Black girlhood to influence their own opinions about their identity or to influence their private actions. These girls typically benefit, as it can allow Black girls to do well in school and can avoid getting in trouble. Black girls at Capitol Hill who presented a public self-based on public perspective and expectations end up receiving better grades and doing better academically. However, Black girl's silence in the classroom came with an unspoken price. It subjects them to a "ghostlike" existence and status and creates the appearance of an erasable persona. The high achieving girls at Capitol Hill read their parent's and teacher's insistence on silence and invisibility 'as a lack of support for what they dream of doing.' They genuinely do become invisible once they have learned to become silent. Fordham gives a specific case to demonstrate the ways Black girls at the school are ignored and forgotten about once they learn to be silent and

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188 Cox, Shapeshifters
achieve academic success. Fordham leaves us a transcript of the following conversation with the
guidance counselor about scholar Katrina...

‘[Ms. Yanmon] does not talk about Katrina unless I [allude to] her [first]. When I
mentioned that Katrina made a perfect score on the LSE, her response startled me. She
[lamented the fact] that although Paul wants[s] to be the valedictorian [of their class], her
guess is that Katrina will be the valedictorian ..., and Paul will be the salutatorian ....
"Capital has not had a male [valedictorian] in about 10 years," [she mourned]... "The
girls do better." . . . She then asked to see the copy of [Katrina's] performance on the Life
Skills Examination. I told her that [Katrina's] perfect score was the only one I had seen so
far. ... I was flabbergasted! This counselor had not talked with [Katrina] about her
outstanding performance. [Ms. Yanmon acknowledged that she had not talked with
Katrina about her exam results] and said, after looking at her performance sheet, . . . "I
must talk with her about [this]” (21)

Katrina received no acknowledgment or celebration for her academic achievement. The
counselor is more concerned with the performance of the male students at the school. It wasn't
until the Fordham mentioned Katrina that the counselor made a note to reach out to the student.
Silence creates this reality for Black girls.

Black girls who understand the importance of having a public self and private can expect
to do well, they can also expect to forfeit something in the process. Black girls who allow public
views about their Black girl identity to inform their views about self (their private view) forfeit
far more. Buckley's study found that girls who adopted pro-white, anti-Black attitudes or who
Richardson 95

had the highest scores on pre-encounter racial attitude tests had low levels of self-esteem.\footnote{Buckleys, “Black Adolescent Girls”, 657.} Black girls who relied on white standards, perspectives, and expectations to define themselves felt negative about being Black. These girls not only reported low total self-esteem, but they also felt poorly about their physical appearance, reported low levels of happiness and satisfaction, did not regard themselves as popular, had poor intellectual and school performance.\footnote{Ibid 657.} The opposite pattern was true for girls who had scored high on internalization racial identity attitude tests. These findings suggest that Black racial identity status was related to self-esteem. While Black girls who hold a separate public and private self to do well academically and in terms of self-esteem. Black girls who allow public perspectives to influence the development of their private self may or may not do well academically and have lower levels of self-esteem.

However, Black girls who reject the idea of two selves have a different process for identity formation and therefore have different experiences. So far, we understand the racial identity hypothesis suggests that positive feelings about one's racial group is associated with high self-esteem. We learn that Bem's (1984) gender schema theory proposes that people who do not conform to dominant cultures-imposed definitions of masculinity and femininity are more psychologically healthy than those who subscribed.\footnote{Ibid 650.} Black girls who endorsed an “androgynous gender role” that included both masculine and feminine characteristic reported high levels of self-esteem and intellectual school status. A study at Mathews middle school found that Black girls stereotypically masculine behavior seemed to benefit Black girls in the classroom. Mr. Wilson said while describing the top performing Black girls in his class, “they’re
loud, but they’re a sharp bunch and do their work”.

Black girls who adopted an androgynous gender role were also able to better define their own standards of beauty, had positive body images and were more likely to be satisfied with their sexuality. Meaning, Black girls who reject messages sent out by the hidden curriculum reap benefits that girls who internalize these messages do not.

While there were implications for high achieving Black girls at Capitol Hill who learned discourse of silence and became invisible, there were different, unique implications for under-achieving girls who fit neater into the category of 'loud black girl' than they did the category of "good girl". Fordham came to realize that these girls had striking visibility and presence and were typically known by everyone at the school. Their parents practiced unconditional support for their daughters' self-defined academic plans and goals. Finally, these girls obtained and maintained support and nurturing from peers and adults. Adults may think that they are helping Black girls by policing their gender expression and discipling them into "acting like ladies". But in reality, they are curbing the very behaviors that typically lead to positive self-esteem and another avenue to success in the classroom.

Black girls learn early on that there is a public view. There are specific perspectives and expectations of the outside world based on their racial and gender identity that might be different from their perspective and expectations. Black girls can decide to accept the idea of two-self, a public self and a private self. For some girls this leads to academic success, and upward mobility. These girls are usually able to follow the script required, stay under the radar and thus avoid

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getting into disciplinary trouble in school. For some these girls this means they gain a "ghost like persona" and don't receive the attention or care they require in school, but as long as they can hold their public and private self separate, they can do well in the academy and institutions alike. But for girls who allow the public view to become their dominant view they have the potential to do well because of their ability to follow scripts. Still, their self-esteem and negative opinions about themselves can get in the way of not only their academic potential but also their overall happiness and sense of security. Girls who endorse the idea of two self understand that separate is inherently unequal, they privilege themselves over the other. Some might decide that their private self is inferior because it is not welcomed in school. In contrast, others might render their private self superior because it is the identity, they and their models around them are able to find the most pride in. Either way these two selves do not exist as equals. School systems make this obvious in the fact they two selves are required in the first place, and by the rejection of Black girls' private self. Finally, Black girls understand that a public view exists but reject the idea of having two versions of themselves. They offer their private view to the public, can choose not to follow scripts and therefore aren't necessarily under the radar in the way other girls might be. These girls might get in trouble in schools for their refusal to follow norms set by a culture and belief different from their own. They may sometimes confirm racial and gender stereotypes (i.e being loud or aggressive), but this authenticity usually leads to their emotional well-being and academic success when disciplinary practices do not stand in their way. These girls rely on their private self for their upward mobility. There is no right way for Black girls to exist in academic space and institutions that do not require them to make sacrifices.
School discipline policies and practices affect Black girls in numerous ways. We have begun a conversation regarding school discipline and prison. We think critically about school-based arrests, school response officers, and school suspensions that introduce Black girls to larger carceral systems immediately and in the future. While all of this is important, the implications of school policing, even in its simplest forms or unarchived, goes beyond barbwire fences and jail cells. This policing Black girls physically limits Black girls' opportunity to learn, which stunts their academic growth and therefore, may obstruct their upward mobility. When policing is not physically limiting Black girls' opportunity to learn it may weaken their connection with the school and school community. Girls may decide to disengage. This disengagement is especially true for girls who experience undocumented, less severe forms of discipline. These policies are also a way schools both ignore and exacerbate the trauma that Black girls already experience while creating new sources of trauma. For some Black girls' schools are not welcoming space. Finally, school policing and hidden curriculums influence how Black girls understand their racial and gender identities. Schools are sites where Black girls continue to learn how they were viewed by society. Schools either reward or punish Black girls based on how they respond to this understanding of their public view. This enforces the idea that white normativity and white femininity as the default and everything else is deviant. This all leads to Black girls silencing, Black girl internalization of negative ideas about their identity, and in some cases constant punishment and punishments repercussions, and finally an understanding that there is no way of existence in academic institutions without constant sacrifices.
“We want to reimagine what this thing looks like by recreating educational spaces in a way that says come as you are and be brilliant as you are...once you create these spaces for young people, they believe it. They hold onto if. These things shape their identity, they shift your confidence, they move something in the depth of your soul, and they help you to reimagine yourself to be in a way you have never seen before.” -Christopher Emdin
Chapter V: Conclusion

Various research studies show that Black girls are disproportionately affected by the discipline policies and practices as they are subjected to both racialized and gendered forms of policing. The coexistence of these two identities leaves Black girls with an extra set of implicit rules they are expected to follow, and thus simultaneously allows for more modes of transgressions. In the era of evolving Zero-tolerance policies Black girls are receiving office referrals, detention, suspension, and explosions at rates that differ from their white counterparts quite significantly. These girls are receiving serious disciplinaries repercussions for minor offenses. These offenses are often gender transgressions or behavior that do not align with the teaching of the hidden curriculum, which attempts to socialize students into adhering to white middle-class standards. These behavior transgressions can also be responses to trauma that schools ignore and punish instead of providing support service. They are left to deal with trauma alone and/or experience new trauma from their schools. In the end Black girls are directed towards the prison. The imprisonment rate of Black women is twice that of white women. Black girls are four times more likely to be arrested in school than their white counterparts. Black girls are physically removed from the classroom not only by campus arrest but by out of school suspension, expulsion, and referral to alternative schools. Discipline practices limit Black girls' opportunity to learn, and as a result, they fall behind their peers and may eventually drop out.

Traditionally unarchived forms of discipline and policing lead students to develop negative associations with school buildings and to form poor relationships with their teachers, which can also lead to dropping out. In the end, all these things work together to create
circumstances that further impact students who are affected. The consequence of K-12 discipline follows Black girls into adulthood not only by increasing the likelihood of incarcerations, but also by limiting future academic and career opportunities, limiting housing options, and even political engagement. Finally, school policing and hidden curriculums influence how Black girls understand their racial and gender identities. Schools are sites where Black girls continue to learn how they are viewed by society. For Black girls, participation in academic institutions comes with a price.

**How We Can Move Forward**

The first step to fixing the problem of racial and gender-based over-policing is acknowledging that there is one. We must recognize that Black girls are too vulnerable to the school system that creates and sustains a carceral continuum. We must think critically about the role of race and gender and continue to use Black Feminism Thought as a lens to explore these intersections.

Then, I argue that the demilitarization of schools is crucial. Obsessive police presence, metal detectors, and other policing agents immediately make schools unsettling and unsafe for Black students who have a long-complicated history with over-policing. Instantly a level of distrust is created, and that can easily manifest into the classroom. There is no substantial evidence that proves that these devices make schools safer. I also suggest schools eradicate zero-tolerance policies that allow for students to be suspended or even expelled for minor or subjectable defenses. Some school districts have already started to make these changes. New York City recently proposed to overhaul its school discipline code, so that school principals will have to get the city Department of Education's permission to suspend any student for
"insubordination," or for any suspension of a student in third grade or younger. Also, it would no
longer be possible to give "superintendent's suspensions" to students involved in "minor physical
altercations." These changes are steps in the right direction, but more can be done. Removing
students from the classroom is almost always doing more harm than good; schools need to find
alternatives to school suspensions, expulsions, and office referrals. These alternatives can look
like restorative justice programs.

Restorative justice is "techniques for de-escalating and resolving conflicts and
strengthening bonds between students, their peers, and their teachers" Restorative justice
programs allow schools to be more thoughtful and creative in the way they discipline youth.
These programs find alternative ways for students to rectify their infractions instead of being
removed from school grounds and allows teachers and faculty the opportunity to resist and
dispute the carceral continuum directly.

These alternatives can exist in multiple formats and can be as simple as pain as an
apology or as complex as creating a project for the community. It can also exist as "counseling,
peer mediation, peer courts, bullying prevention, social and emotional curricula" Despite the
format, a successful restorative justice program combines practice with intervention based on
social and emotional development such as counseling or peer mediation. One element reminds
the student that their behavior warrants some form of consequences and the other "builds their
internal capacity to address conflict in productive ways. Restorative justice programs also
place a value on relationships. It focuses on “creating them, sustaining them and repairing them

10 Nelson, “The School to Prison Pipeline Explained
10 Scott, "Developing the Prison-to-School Pipeline", 43.
10 Ibid
Classrooms where teachers and students have a robust dynamic leave little room for misunderstandings and wrongful behavior. When transgression or misunderstanding do occur, strong relationships make it easier to communicate and work through said issue. Urban students already have a level of distrust from authoritative figures in institutions like schools so finding ways to create strong relationships within the classroom can mitigate distrust and introduce a new level of comfort, trust and respect.

When restorative justice programs exist in schools, it is likely to affect student suspensions. In fact, "a Denver school district that has adopted restorative justice as the central framework to its school disciplinary practices experienced a reduction in student suspensions by 44% in 2011". A different report from The International Institute for Restorative Practices found that schools that practice restorative justice in 2013 also "decreased suspensions rate by 61 percent and 67 percent. Also, students in these schools reduced aggression by 26 percent and improved their social skills by 20 percent." Restorative justice policies build social capital and a sense of community. These programs establish connections between students and hold them accountable for their collective learning. It empowers students to come up with their own learning activities in a way that zero tolerance policies and suspensions do not. So, in all, students do benefit from restorative justice practices as they reduce suspensions, teach students value social skills, and validates their experiences.

The demographic of teachers working directly with low income students in 2016 did not represent the student body. As 92 percent of teachers were white, 3 percent were Hispanic, and

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200 Ibid(10)
201 Scott, Dewitt. "Developing the Prison-to-School Pipeline", 43.
202 International Institute for Restorative Practices. "Improving School Climate."
Moving forward, I suggest that teachers and school staff need to be working toward cultural competence in order to move forward in caring for Black girls in educational spaces. Cultural Competence is “the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than ours...it entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, developing certain bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching.” Cultural Competence calls for teachers and other school faculty to accept and respect the cultures of their students. It urges teachers to understand that the way that other cultures operate in ways that are different than their own. It requires them to respect the language, mannerism, values and beliefs of other cultures. Cultural competence insists that teachers understand the historical circumstances of each culture and the way that history has played a role in shaping the identity of other cultures. When teachers are culturally competent, they make an effort to be conscious about the biases, stereotypes and assumptions they might have about other cultures.

Culturally competent teachers understand that “students are not solely the products of their cultures and they vary in the degree to which they identify with them.” They understand that the cultural narratives that have been given or adapted to a specific culture don't hold true to every member of the culture. They understand the existing stereotypes and understand that they are not always true, therefore they do not expect their students to enact the given stereotypes or narratives.

When we have teachers, who are making efforts to remove their biases about Black girls and understand and respect the ways in which Black girls may exhibit their femininity, then

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204 Van Roekel, “In Promoting Educators Cultural Competence”
205 Ibid.
Black girls will not be disproportionately punished for subjectable reasons. When cultural competence exists and other cultures outside the dominant white culture are respected then students who fall outside the dominant culture will not be punished when aspects of their cultural identity is misunderstood. Therefore, it should be our mission to bring teachers into the classroom who are always working to be culturally competent. I suggest that we ask, better yet, require our teachers and school faculty to be working towards a robust understanding of their students' culture, historical background, languages, mode of expression and etc. before we allow them to enter the classroom. Having culturally competent teachers are essential to the success of Black girls in school and will most likely have an impact on discipline and policing practices.

Cultural competence is the basis for implementing culturally relevant pedagogy, which I argue is an essential step in moving forward. Gloria Ladson Billings, coined the term culturally relevant pedagogy as a "pedagogy of opposition" committed to collective empowerment. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) relies on three critical criteria: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. It requires that teaching strategies and practices allow students to maintain cultural integrity while striving for academic excellence. Schools and teachers work to create an atmosphere where Black girls can be themselves without compromise. In this way they do not endorse respectability politics and challenge the notion of double consciousness. Black girls do not need to privilege one version of themselves over the other for the sake of academic achievement. In these imagined spaces Black girls do not need to construct separate identities.

\[^{206}\text{Ladson Billings, “But That's Just Good Teaching”, 160.}\]
Teachers can do this by using students’ cultures “as a vehicle for learning.” In this way students also develop a broader social-political consciousness that encourages them to critique the norms and values that institutions have marked as normal.

I argue that we can even take things a step farther and adopt approaches to reality pedagogy. Reality pedagogy builds on culturally relevant and critical pedagogy by removing the focus on academic deficiencies of youth and moving towards approaches that support both the teacher and the student in improving classroom experiences. Reality pedagogies provides teachers with the specific tools that they need in order to demonstrate culturally relevant pedagogy, engage students, and establish a sense of belonging necessary for changing Black girls' trajectories. The author offers us five tangible tools (The Five C’s) that students and teachers engage in together to improve teaching and learning. These tools exist as Congestive Dialogue, which mimics the Hip-Hop cypher and allows students to discuss what is going on in the classroom with their teacher and a small group of students. Co-Teaching, which allows the student and teacher to physically swap places and positions. This exchange allows the student to reach their peers in a way the teacher couldn't. It also allows the teacher to learn from the students. Next, Cosmopolitan, integrate the way youth communicate with each other and hold outside the classroom and use that to communicate inside the classroom. It starts with the teacher “identifying the nontraditional roles and responsibilities of the student role of learner but that support the smooth operation of the classroom.” Next, context includes bringing articles or artifacts from the physical spaces students inhabit, articles that would not traditionally have valued an academic setting, and bringing them into the classroom. The final step is context.

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207Ibid 161.
208Emdin, “Moving Beyond the Boat Without A Paddle”, 290.
Context refers to the academic work that a teacher is expected to cover. This upholds the goal of academic excellence. It is important to understand that this last step cannot be done with the greatest level of success in urban classrooms unless the initial four are taken seriously. These tools are specific ways that teachers can begin to engage students, create the sense of belonging in academic spaces, and minimize school discipline.

I really wish to highlight the cogenerative dialogue, the importance of having conversations with young people. Culturally relevant pedagogy or reality pedagogy cannot be achieved if teachers are using their own perspectives to determine what the dominant culture is. The way teachers understand student culture can be very different from the way students understand their own culture, even when the teacher is the same race as his or her students. We cannot give students what we think they need and expect things to change. We need to hear from and ask them what they want and need. The first step can look like teacher feedback forms where teachers can get feedback about how students are feeling. This can be feedback about how a lesson went or about what students want to see in the future. This could also be a conversation with students in small groups after class or casual conversations during recess. I believe that conversations with students that don't necessarily have to do with academic skills are especially important. Students need to know that teachers care about them, their well-being and their interest. How are students feeling today? What is your favorite song right now? Why? How did your sports team do at your game last night? I'm looking for a new show to watch, any suggestions. These questions are very simple ways to get insight into young people's lives.

In addition to this, student voices needed to be centered in decisions made about them. If school discipline policies at school are being revisited young people should know and have a
say. I'm not only talking about the formation of school leadership teams or the electing of student unions, but all students should have a voice say they wish. Students are the experts of students, so it only makes sense that we not only listen to their feedback and suggestions, but we also center their feedback and suggestions when making decisions.

I think dialogue is especially important not only to foster a community that sustains student cultures and evokes a sense of belonging but in dealing with matters of discipline. This is an important part of restorative justice programs. In many of the stories shared throughout we see Black girls often don't feel like they have a chance to explain themselves and be heard, as a result they are punished for being misunderstood. If we listened to Black girls and gave them the space to take space and be heard, then disciplined statistics wouldn't exist as tangled as they are. Here I cosign Black girls demands to be heard in academic spaces especially when it pertains to their supposed transgressions.

In the end, however, in order for this strategy to be successful teachers need to be intentional. If teachers want honest feedback from students or if teachers want students to be open and honest about their realities, their wants, and needs then authentic relationships are required. When students feel connected to their teachers’ hard conversations become easier, students are more willing to allow these teachers into their worlds.

With listening to Black girls, we also need to provide them with resources to help them process possible trauma and provide them with information and services to support mental health. It is common in affluent communities for schools to offer full time mental and behavioral health support, providing social and emotional learning tools that benefit all students. New York, however, passed a new law that would require mental health to be taught as part of K-12 health
education in all public schools. The goal of the law is to change attitudes and decrease the stigma associated with mental illness in order to increase the willingness to seek help. It also hopes that from this knowledge students will be able to recognize signs and symptoms in themselves and others and immediately know where to find help. It gives students the tools they need to understand what they or their peers are going through and how to handle it. This is a step other states can take. In addition to educational services students should have access to culturally diverse counseling services through their school. We know that therapy has been recommended for students dealing with trauma and other emotional and mental health needs, but sometimes it can be hard for Black girls and their families to find a therapist, to find a therapist that looks like her, and to afford to pay for sessions. If the federal government could endorse the creation and/or expansion of counseling services in school Black girls’ emotional needs can be addressed.

Finally, I argue that all of these things fall short if love is not present. Teachers, school staff, and school leaders need to operate from a place of love. Love for Black girls as their authentic selves, love for their vocation, and love for the school and the community to rest in. Love is a motivating force. When you love young people, you do what it takes to care for them. You are patient, you are resilient, you critique instead of criticizing, you compromise oppressive power, you give power, and you make space, you listen. This is what we need from our schools if we want to reimagine what educational and school discipline looks like for Black girls.

Schools need to be sites of love.

As I move forward, after tracing my experience in academic institutions I am grateful for my resilience and resistance. I move from a Black girl learning about her identity through traumatic experiences in school. I move forward from my rejection of my own identity and fear of academic spaces in becoming an unapologetic Black queer girl college graduate. I have conquered elite institutions that did not know love, in some ways reliving institutional violence, in order to become an educator who teaches with love at the center. Moving forward for me
means a life-long commitment to hearing, seeing, and loving Black girls in all spaces.

Next Steps

I hope that we continue to explore Black girls’ experiences with school discipline, extend a discourse regarding Black girls schooling and the carceral continuum, and extend discourse regarding the implications of it all. As we move forward, I hope that we can continue to make space for Black girls, really highlighting the voices that would not have traditionally found themselves in academic literature. I urge us to continue to think more broadly about school discipline and to consider examining more closely unarchived discipline that takes place in school. Finally, we should push a conversation that thinks Black girls’ educational experiences beyond K-12. In the end we should keep Black girls, Black women and Black feminist methodologies center as we continue to explore the livihoods and experiences of Black girls.
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