"They Wanted Me To Be This Way Instead Of Who I Am Already."

A Case Study Exploring the Perspectives and Experiences of Black Girls Attending a Public Charter Middle School in Washington, D.C.

A Capstone Presented

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Acknowledgments

To the Black girls at Charter X., I admire your brilliance, resilience, and resolve. Thank you for sharing your stories. Continue to do so *unapologetically* so that the world understands your why.

To the teachers, staff, and leadership team at Charter X., This capstone began on a hunch. Thank you for welcoming me into your school and trusting me to tell the story of your students. You have already started the "work," and I look forward to hearing more of your learnings as you move forward.

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I offer you my relentless praise because of your provision and protection, grace, and mercy. I will bless you at all times; your praise shall continually be in my mouth. Psalms 34:3

Executive Summary

During the 2019-2020 school year, Black girls at Charter X[1], a public school in Washington, D.C., had more "negative" reported incidents than any racial or gender group. This capstone study aimed to understand better why this occurred and provide information to Charter X to prevent this phenomenon from happening in the future. Literature that illuminated Black girls' school experiences was explored to support this capstone's inquiry. By situating the problem of practice within the review of literature, the following research questions were used:

- What are teachers saying about Black girls who attend Charter X?
- What are the perspectives and experiences of Black girls at Charter X?
- What navigational practices do Black girls at Charter X use?

This capstone used a mixed-methods approach to gather data to answer this capstone's research questions. Three conceptual frameworks: Respectability (Higginbotham, 1995), Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018), and Interior Homeplace (Quashie, 2018 and hooks, 1990), were used to interpret what teachers said and to understand Black girls at the school.

A few findings are mentioned below but explored more expansively within the research. Some teachers said that Black girls at Charter X:

- Demonstrate prosocial behavior.
- Are constantly disrupting the learning experiences of themselves and others and do not demonstrate a willingness to change.

[1] pseudonym

Of the Black girls included in the study, some:

- Believe that there is an ideal girl who is accepted (or rejected) by their teachers and peers, and it does not always include them. This belief causes internal tension for them.
- Do not always feel emotionally safe at school, which contributes to their feelings of mistrust of adults at school.
- Use friendships as a navigational practice in school. However, these friendships are nuanced and not permanently stable.

Based on these findings, this study offered recommendations to Charter X to improve the experiences of all students, especially Black girls. An excerpt of the recommendations is provided below.

- Provide ongoing implicit bias and restorative justice professional development for all staff members to build their self-efficacy to see and respond to racial and gender oppression.
- Create safe spaces for Black girls to frequently share their perspectives and feelings about their school experiences and require teachers to facilitate these ongoing conversations.

Black girls presented in the literature and Charter X have always experienced tension between what others expect of them and what they want. The choices they make within this tension, historically and presently, have consequences—either meet the expectations of others and possibly erase themselves or be true to themselves and risk severe consequences. This study shared Black girls' experiences to help readers see their

humanity, the complexities of their identity development, and their resistance in schools. This capstone also contributes to a larger conversation necessary for the collective progress of our nation and the future of educational institutions to create safe and affirming spaces for all students.

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Introduction

According to an internal student culture incident reporting tool compiled by teachers and staff, in the 2019-2020 school year, Black girls attending Charter X had more "negative" incidents than any other gender or racial group (Charter X, 2019). This anecdote influenced this capstone project's inquiry. While many studies examine the disparities in school policies, practices and their impact on the lived experiences of Black boys (Roderick, 2019; Monroe, 2005; Monroe, 2006 & Dancy, 2014), there is evidence that researchers and practitioners are focusing their much-needed attention on Black girls, too (Wun, 2016; Annamma, 2017; Hines-Datri & Carter Andrews, 2020; Zimmermann, 2018 & Morris, 2016).

The evidence of the "negative" behavior incidents involving Black girls at Charter X sits within the larger context of America's well-documented devaluation, dehumanization, and resulting oppression of Black women and, by proximity, Black girls (hooks, 1990; Collins, 2000). Oppression involves the "attitudes, behaviors, and pervasive and systematic social arrangements by which members of one group [nondominant/target groups] are exploited and subordinated while members of another group [dominant/agent] are granted privileges (Bohmer & Briggs, 1991). As such, this capstone study aims to understand what might be causing the Black girls to have more "negative" incidents than other racial or gender groups to stop it and prevent it in the future. The perspectives and experiences of Black girls at Charter X, as well as their educators, are illuminated to help readers understand what is happening at Charter X. This capstone also contributes to a larger conversation necessary for the collective progress of our

nation and the future of educational institutions to create safe and affirming spaces for all students.

Organizational Context

Charter X[2], a public charter school, educates kindergarten through eighth-grade students in Washington, D.C. (Charter X, 2021). Located east of the Anacostia River, Charter X is situated in a community according to D.C. Health Matters, where 26% of residents have a bachelor's degree (2021). Concerning the racial and income demographics of the residents, Black residents make up over 55% of the community and have a median income of $61,000. White families are the other significant group in the community. They are 31% of the residents and have a median income of $151,000. Based on students' performance on the annual standardized assessment, PARCC, and the school's results on the School Quality Report conducted by the D.C. Public Charter School Board, Charter X is considered "high performing" (Charter X, 2021).

Before this study, but relevant to the problem of practice, as common practice for many K-12 schools, Charter X administered a school climate survey to its students, parents, and staff members (Charter X, 2021). In response to the school climate survey, Charter X adopted a social-emotional character education program to promote positive interactions and experiences between students and their peers. Almost a decade later, and during this capstone study, this researcher procured an internal student culture incident reporting tool that provided evidence of the impact of the social-emotional character education program. The internal student culture incident reporting tool, a

[2] pseudonym

cloud-based spreadsheet, was used by middle school teachers and staff members to report positive and negative student behavior incidents during the 2019-2020 school year. However, teachers and staff only reported incidents between September 2019 and March 2020 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which halted in-person learning for the school. During the 2019-2020 school year, there were 147 middle school students across racial identities such as Asian, Black, Hispanic, Multi-Racial, and White. Black students were the racial majority (105 students) of the students. However, Black boys were the racial and gender majority (58 students). Figure 1 provides a breakdown of Charter X middle school students' race and gender. During September 2019 and March 2020, over 3500 positive and negative incidents were reported (Charter X, 2021) by teachers. The "negative" and "positive" incidents were the highest between October 2019 and January 2020. However, they began to decrease in February 2020. Figure 2 summarizes behavior incidents by each month between September 2019 and March 2020.

Figure 1: Charter X Middle School Students by Race and Gender during the 2019-2020 School Year

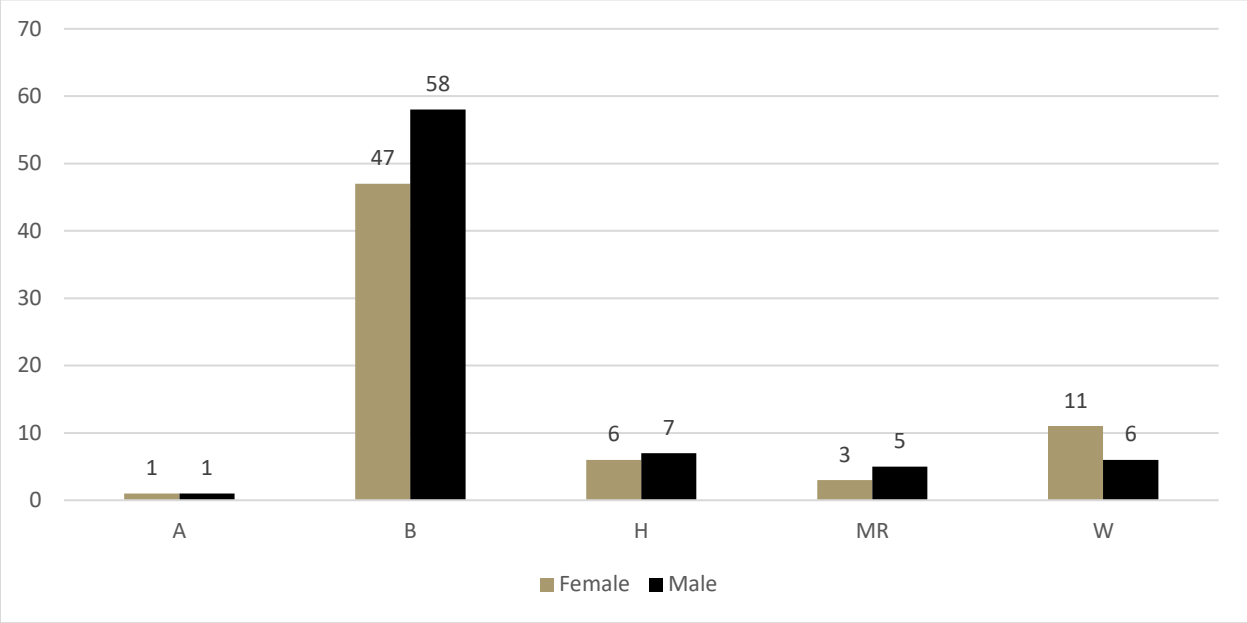
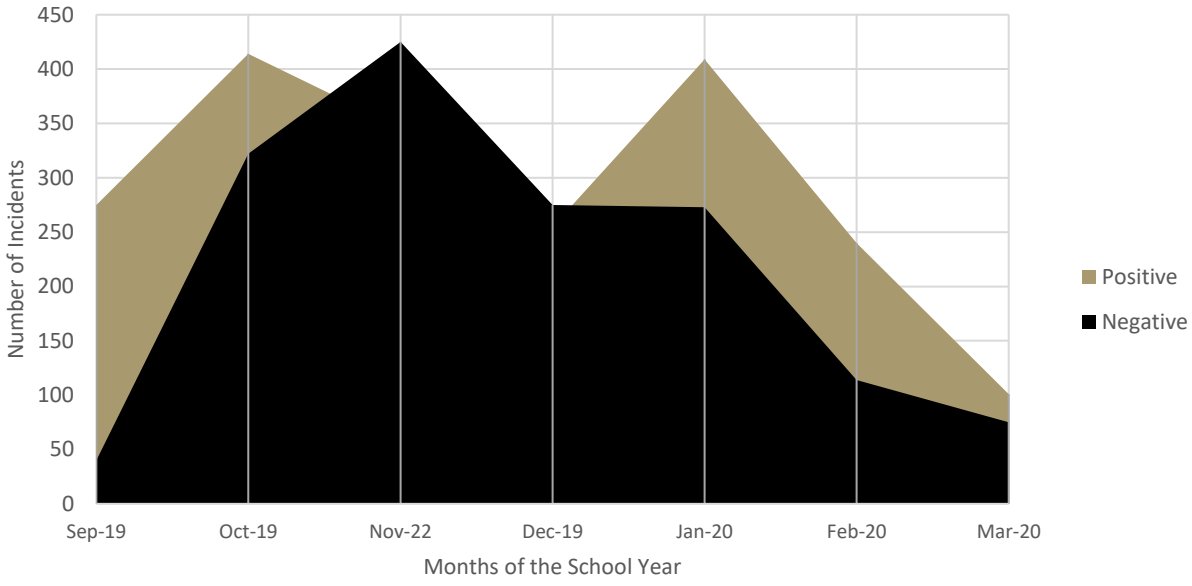


Figure 2: Charter X Student Behavior Incidents Between September 2019 and March 2020



Problem of Practice

Although Black girls were 32% (47 students) of the middle school student population at Charter X, they had more "negative" incidents than any other racial or gender group during the 2019-2020 school year. Figures 3 and 4 summarize incidents. The implication for the "negative" Black girl incidents is the correlation to the loss, on average, of 341 instructional hours in comparison to White girl middle school students (11 in total) who did not lose any instructional time (see Figure 5).

Figure 3: Summary of 'Positive" and "Negative" Reported Incidents

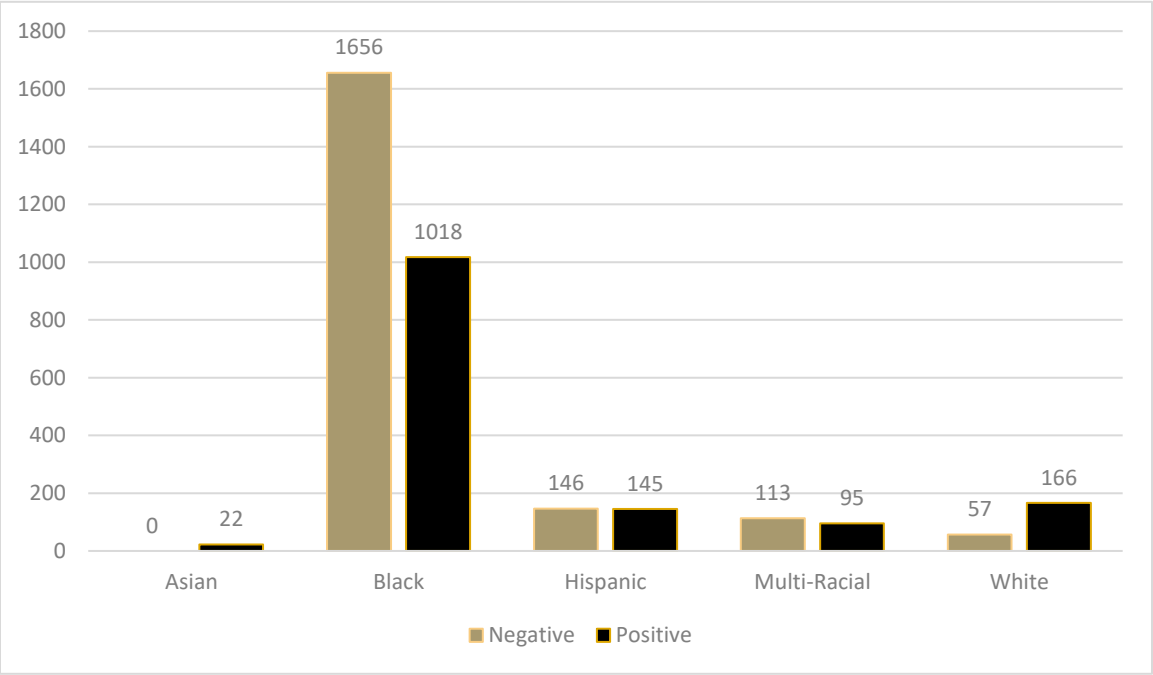


Figure 4: Summary of "Negative" Student Behavior Incidents by Student's Race and Gender

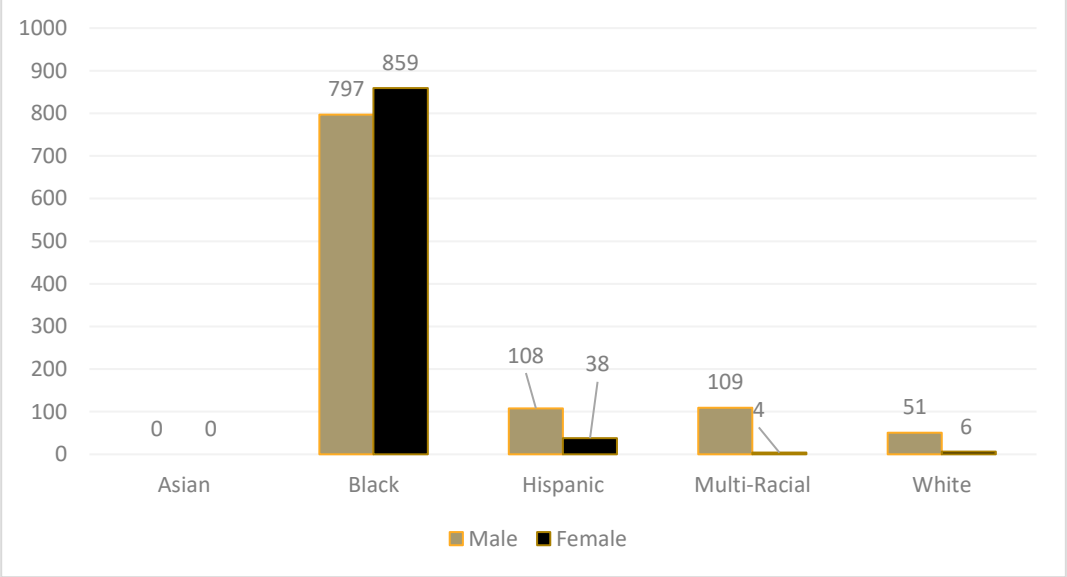
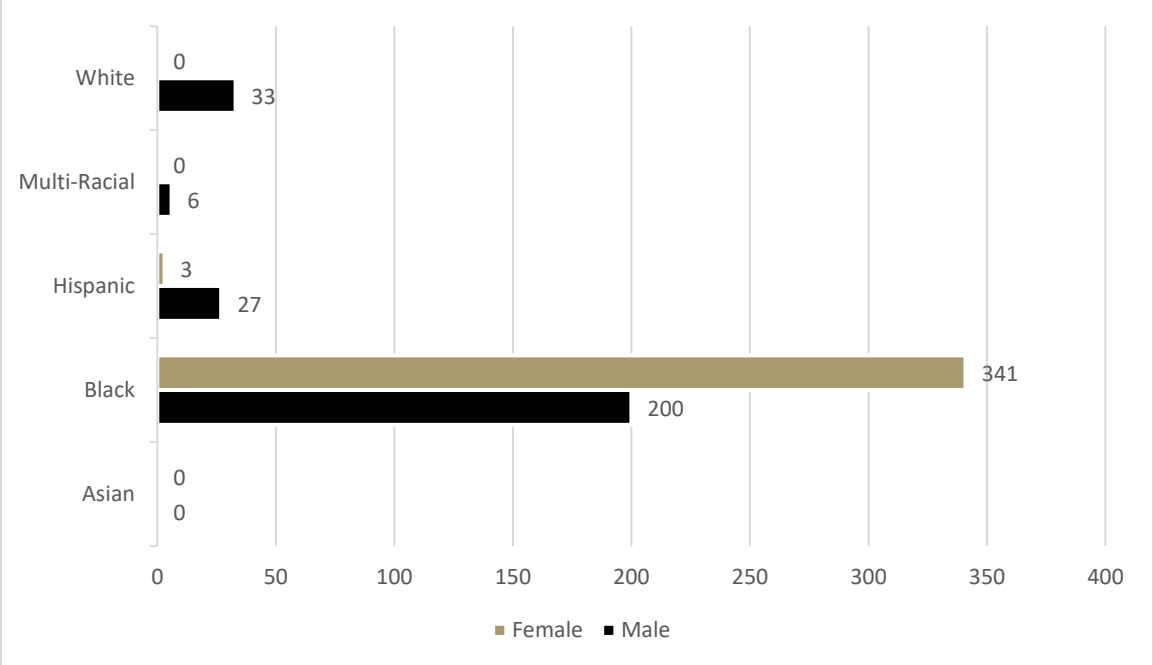


Figure 5: Average Instructional Minutes Lost by Student's Race and Gender



This problem of practice is situated in the larger context of the Black girl experience, where researchers concluded that Black girls are disproportionately disciplined due to a

myriad of reasons, including subjective school policies that criminalize Black girl's behavior (Evans-Winter, 2011; Blake, Butler, Lewis & Darensbourg, 2011; Wun, 2016). As a result, in the last ten years, the suspension rates of Black girls have increased faster than any other racial and gender group (Losen & Skiba, 2010). Middle school is a pivotal time in the matriculation of all students because as they mature, they begin to question themselves and the world around them (Mims & Kaler-Jones, 2020). Since Black girls spend so much time in schools during their middle childhood years, schools, teachers, and peers are critical to the girl's identity development and how they perceive themselves in the larger context of the world (Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman, 2019). The implications of Black girl discipline during the middle school years have consequences, which include the increased likelihood of school dropout, the probability of incarceration, and even lower achievement later in life (Wald & Losen, 2003; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008). Therefore, this capstone aims to understand better what might be causing Black girls at Charter X to have more "negative" incidents than any other racial or gender group.

Literature Review

Given the organizational context and the problem of practice at Charter X, the following literature review explores research that helps readers understand Black girls' experiences, especially within the context of schools to understand better what might cause Black girls to have more "negative" incidents than any other racial or gender group. This research is sometimes organized from a micro to a macro lens, or vice versa (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to understand the Black girl and her experiences from several

viewpoints. This literature review is not a comprehensive summary of the Black girl experience. However, it includes research pertinent to understanding what is happening at Charter X. Attention is first given to scholarship, which describes the Black girl and how she comes to be from those who choose to intimately know her: people in her community (broadly defined) and her family. The Black girl's community is not limited to those who live in proximity to her. Her community also includes those who know her experience because of their positioning as former Black girls or their intention to illuminate the experiences of Black girls through their research. This literature is then placed in comparison and juxtaposition to how she is perceived by those who *do not* intimately know her and the implications of these perceptions. In organizing the literature in this way, readers understand the Black girl from several viewpoints and the rationale she employs as she navigates the school context and how the school receives and interacts with her. In doing so, readers come to understand the experiences of Black girls in schools and what may contribute to her having more "negative" incidents than any other racial or gender group. Within this literature review, pronouns such as "she" and "her" are used interchangeably to refer to the Black girl.

First, it is vital to establish that the Black girl's racial and ethnic identity is nuanced (Yates, 2020). When referring to racial identities, the term Black is often conflated to signify race and ethnicity. Specifically, one can identify ethnically as African American and racially as Black. The challenge here is that when race and ethnicity are conflated, there is a false assumption of a monolithic Black identity (Yates, 2020). For instance, despite being born in the United States and racially identifying as a Black person, this researcher is ethnically identified as Jamaican because of the birthplace of her parents

and extended family members. Consider that this Jamaican American researcher was born and raised in the Deep South of America. The experience of a Jamaican-American, born and raised in the Bible Belt may differ from a Jamaican-American born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. This intraracial ethnic diversity is true for other people who may identify as Black. For instance, the experience of a Nigerian born in Nigeria but who immigrated to the United States is different from a Nigerian-American (Yates, 2020). Not to mention that there are subgroups within Nigeria, such as Igbo and Yoruba, which have different customs and ways of being. Therefore, before exploring literature on the Black girl, establishing the cultural diversity within her identity helps readers situate her experiences within a geographic location, familial ancestry, cultures, and value systems.

Despite the nuances in the Black girl's racial and ethnic identity, many former Black girls agree that the Black girl is oppressed and faces erasure just like the Black woman (hooks, 1995; Collins, 2000; and Crenshaw, 1989). Realizing the negative impact of the courts' interpretation of the discrimination claims presented on behalf of Black women plaintiffs and the resulting erasure of harm, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), a Black woman and attorney, pushed the courts to refrain from looking at identities such as race, gender, and sex in silos. Instead, Crenshaw's intersectionality concept forced courts to see the relationship with social identities and how they might intersect with power.

Sojourner Truth likely influenced Crenshaw (1989) to see this erasure because she is mentioned in Crenshaw's writings. Expanding upon Crenshaw's mention of Truth, at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, Truth (1851) publicly criticized the erasure of the Black woman from the definition of womanhood and the assertion that women were weaker than men. In her famous "Ain't I a Woman" speech, Truth said,

> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, lifted over ditches, and have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Truth illuminated that both the definition of womanhood and the treatment of women did not include the experiences of the Black woman, some of whom were enslaved. hooks (2015) agreed, citing that Truth could refer to her own life as "evidence of [a] woman's ability to function as a parent; to be the work equal of man; to undergo persecution, physical abuse, rape, torture; and to not only survive but emerge triumphant contrary to the experience of white women" (p. 160). Truth's challenge to the absence of Black woman experiences in the definition of womanhood foreshadowed the erasure of young Black girls.

Black girls fall outside of normative ideals of girlhood for the same reasons that Truth declared, "Ain't I a Woman?" In the United States, normative standards of femininity center on the aesthetics and experiences of White women and white girls as a racialized, cultural, and gendered framework (Collins, 2004; Deliovsky, 2008; Welter, 1966; Handau & Simien, 2019; hooks, 1995). In the United States, being "slim" with blonde hair is the ideal woman (or future woman) aesthetic that influences beauty norms reinforced through media (Deliovsky, 2008) and conceptualized through a hegemonic femineity defined as "middle class, heterosexual, white, weak, not like men (in appearance and behavior), beautiful, submissive, and married..." (Collins, 2004). Building off the work of Welter's (1966) *Cult of True Womanhood*, Handau & Simien contribute

understanding to this white girl racial, gender, and cultural framework by including tenets of "purity, piety, and domesticity." However, other research argues that viewing the experiences of all women and girls through this lens appeals to patriarchal beliefs of modesty, virtue, innocence, and fragility (hooks, 1995). As a result of viewing all women and girls through this lens, Black girls and women, who historically are viewed as the exact opposite, are erased.

However, there is literature (Goodwin, 1990, Gaunt 2006 and 2020; Robinson & Ward 1991, and Scott, 2003) intended to disrupt the erasure of Black girls, which helps readers to see her as community-oriented, socially aware, playful, yet strategic in her interactions with her peers, and academically successful. In Goodwin's study observing the informal negotiations of Black children within their Philadelphia community, they found that Black girls engaged in community-oriented speech activities while interacting with their peers. Goodwin examined how Black children engaged with one another, noting directives, arguments, and instigation. In her research, Goodwin concluded that Black boys and Black girls use different messages, which she believed to be directly connected to the social construction of their collective peer group: boys were hierarchically organized while girls were more organized in an egalitarian way. While boys used directives that recognized differences amongst peers, using words such as "sucker" or "big lips," Black girls' ways of speaking did not recognize these differences but were more community oriented. The Black girls relied on words such as "we" and "let's" when engaging within their peer group. Goodwin concluded that the Black boys' directives displayed distinctions between participants and stressed issues of individual

rights; by contrast, the Black girls' directives emphasized the connectedness of girls to each other (p. 117).

As Goodwin establishes, the Black girl is community-oriented; further research asserts that she is also socially aware and playful. For instance, Gaunt (2020) calls attention to the Black girls' handclapping, songs, and ability to use their bodies as instruments employing rhythms and cadences with other Black girls.

Consider the following from a New York Times article:

> Mailman, Mailman, do your duty
> Here come the lady with the African booty.
> She can do the wah-wah.
> She can do the splits.
> She can do anything to make you split, so split.

In this chant, Gaunt (2006, 2020) pushes readers to see that Black girl games are the Black girls' "algorithms" for creativity and playfulness, but also demonstrating her social awareness. For instance, the [Black] lady with the African "booty," the antithesis of European beauty standards, is revered instead of erased. This lady is positioned as a knowledge bearer who can do the wah-wah, a dance connected to the 1962 Rhythm and Blues song by the Orlons, and she is an influencer of others. Not only can she do a split, a highly challenging gymnastic feat, but she can use her power to make you do one too. Although simplistic, this song is a method the Black girl uses to negotiate herself in community with her peers. In doing this, the Black girl situates herself in a collective to resist individualism, Robinson, and Ward (1991) argue. Also, this resistance is strategic in building community in the service of others. In one racially heterogeneous school, Scott (2003) discovered that although white girls influenced the norms and expectations in interracial play, it was the Black girl who used her perceptions of the racial and gender

dynamics in the group to stealthily gain entry and disrupt peer group culture in ways that served them and others.

As Gloria Ladson-Billings (2017) reminds us, Black girls are more than "magic." Black girls are brilliant. While literature surrounding Black girls' academic achievement is limited, there is evidence of Black girls' achievement compared to Black boys (Young, 2019). Black girls consistently outperform Black boys in all academic domains (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Friend, Hunter, & Fletcher, 2011). For instance, Black girls have outperformed Black boys in mathematics (Young et al. 2017; McDaniel et al. 2011). Some research concludes that Black girls have higher grades and test scores than Black boys resulting in higher graduation rates (Cornwell, Mustard, & Van Parys, 2013; Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley, & Cortina, 2010).

In summary, the literature in this section reveals that the Black girl is not only nuanced in her racial and ethnic identity, but she is also socially aware of herself as playful. She is also strategic in her interactions with her peers as she tries to cultivate and maintain a strong community and is academically successful.

While literature speaks to who the Black girl is, it is also essential to explore how the Black girl comes to be. In this section, the literature examines the gendered racial socialization of the Black girl as influenced by those in her community, specifically her mother/motherly figures (Stevenson et al., 2002; Brown et al., 2017; Stokes et al., 2020; Anglin & Wade, 2007; Brown & Tylka, 2011; Fischer & Shaw, 1999; Demo & Hughes, 1990; Frabutt, Walker, & MacKinnon-Lewis, 2002; Collins, 2000; O'Connor, 1997; Hubbard, 1999 & Hanson, 2000; Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein, 2012). Racial

socialization is conceptualized as a "set of communications, interactions, and behaviors between parents and youth regarding how Black Americans ought to decide about their cultural heritage and how to respond to racial hostility, empowerment, or confusion" (Stevenson et al., 2002).

Regarding the role of mothers/motherly figures in the process of socialization, gendered racial socialization is "a form of dual socialization designed to address the realities of the African American female experience and teach them how to cope with gendered racism (Brown et al., 2017). According to Stokes et al. (2020), gendered racial socialization messages communicated between mothers and daughters are different from racial socialization messages because they are intersectional and call attention to the realities of being both Black and a girl or a woman. A child's age is influenced when his/her parents choose to engage in socialization conversations. Hughes et al. (2008) attribute this to a belief that older children can handle more complex conversations than younger children. Together, these socialization methods, whether racial or gendered, are beneficial to Black girls because they have been linked to increased positive well-being and mental health, resilience, academic persistence, and academic achievement (Frabutt et al., 2002; Stevenson et al., 2002; Brown & Tylka, 2011; Fischer & Shaw, 1999, Anglin & Wade 2007, and Neblett et al., 2006).

Because of the intersecting discriminations that Black mothers or those within a motherly role experience, researchers found that they were more likely to have gendered racial socialization conversations with the children in their care than fathers (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Frabutt, Walker, & MacKinnon-Lewis, 2002). Given the historical truths of

slavery and a women's movement without the Black women's experience and voice, Black women have always had to navigate a sexist, racist, patriarchal society to survive (hooks, 1999). Collins (2000) argues that this causes Black women to construct a Black womanhood that is assertive, confident, and self-efficacious. Black women, who have Black girls in their lives, pass these orientations on to them through socialization conversations.

This section of the literature review calls attention to how Black mothers/motherly figures help cultivate core values such as self-awareness, self-advocacy, persistence, and resilience in Black girls and, in doing so, helps shape the Black girl's experience in schools.

O'Connor (1997) calls attention to how Black mothers/motherly figures help to develop self-advocacy and self-awareness in Black girls. Double-consciousness is a social, philosophical construct (Dubois, 1903) that refers to an inward "twoness" experienced by Black people as a byproduct of racially based oppression in a white-dominated society. Black girls and Black women must activate this double consciousness as they navigate people, policies, and spaces that hold negative and stereotypical beliefs about them. For instance, the O'Connor (1997) study explored how Black adolescents' awareness of their race and class positions impacted their academic achievement. One participant, Mia, discussed the importance of Black people standing up for themselves. She said, "My sister be saying, you know, you can't let Whites beat you down—they be ready to eat you alive. You got to fight back... by voting, protest, you know, whatever (p. 618)" Cher, another

participant, shared how her mother taught her that she could advocate for herself when interacting with men. She said,

> Then she [her mother] start telling me how you get pregnant. And what to do and what not to do and if you going to do it use condoms. And don't take no boy telling you he don't like the feel. It's your body. You can't have a man control you or your choices— 'cause they going to try (p. 617).

Finally, Sharon, another participant, discussed her aunt's experience with gendered racism.

> My aunty wanted a job in construction. But she had went to some company, and they told her there wasn't a need or something for her and she suing now for discrimination. 'Cause she went with my uncle. And my uncle got the job. But my aunty had better education, more experience than my uncle, but my uncle got the job (p. 617).

Through these examples, O'Connor concludes that the Black girls learned that Black women should not relegate themselves to subordinate positions but use the self-awareness of their gendered race and class positions and self-advocacy to disrupt their marginalization. Furthermore, within the concept of double consciousness (1903), the examples also illuminate that self-awareness is present as Black girls navigate various academic, personal, or professional contexts.

The following three studies show how Black mothers/motherly figures' use of gendered racial socialization messages helped Black girls be more resilient and persistent within their educational experiences.

Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein's (2012) study discussed the role that school policies, practices, adults, and Black girls' own academic and racial identities played in their academic success. The Black girls attributed their persistence in the face of

challenges in their educational experiences to their mothers. In discussing family support, Trina, a participant, shared, "I am able to do well in school because of my mom. She checks every day to see what's going on with me and in school, if I have homework (p. 211)" Although her mother was not familiar with the college application process, she helped Trina stay on track by collaborating with guidance counselors and reminding her of impending deadlines. Karima, another participant, spoke to her mother's resolve for her to receive a college scholarship. Her mother told her, "You're not going to give up, you are going to stay up, and you're going to write the essay and keep looking (p. 211)." Then, Karima shared that her mother modeled this persistence by spending a significant amount of time on the internet researching scholarships for which her daughter should apply. As a result, she acquired three scholarships (2012). In these two examples, the girls' mothers encouraged them to have a strong sense of self, work hard, and remain invested in their academic success.

Hubbard (1999) explored Black adolescents' gender-specific strategies for academic achievement and revealed that participants' mothers were influential in the Black girls' resilience. While most of the participants had parents who attended college, the Black girl participant's motivations for attending college were connected to academic and career goals encouraged by their mothers. Savannah shared that her mother wanted her to go to college after revealing that she had only completed one year. Not only did Savannah's mother want her to go to college, but she wanted her to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Kaylee revealed the economic and social challenges experienced by her mother, a divorcee with three children. Kaylee believed that her mother did not want her to make the same decisions she had made – marrying young,

quitting school, and not acquiring a career that would have made life easier for her children. In sharing the struggles experienced, Kaylee and Trina's mothers socialized them to see the potentiality of their futures as Black women. They encouraged them to stay committed to their educational aspirations through resiliency by illuminating potential challenges that they might face similar to their own experiences.

Finally, Hanson (2000) attributes some Black girls' success, but specifically, in the field of science, to their Black mothers/motherly figures. When discussing the influence of their family on their science experiences, a participant shared, "I was always encouraged to do the things I wanted to do and was told by my grandmother that I could be whatever I wanted to be, if I committed myself to and did not lose my focus on the objective (p. 25)." One participant who revealed that she was struggling at times with the subject shared, "Even when I was struggling, they encouraged me and told me I would get it and overcome (p. 25). Readers learn that Black mothers/motherly figures indoctrinated a resilient girlhood into the girls' lives through these examples. In the face of challenges, in schools, the Black girls could possess a strong sense of self and self-control, enabling them to be agentic.

In summary, this section establishes that the Black girl comes to be, based upon the process of gendered racial socialization, which is influenced by her mother/motherly figures in her life and often based on their own experiences. As a result, the Black girl learns how to be aware and cope with racism and discrimination. The literature reveals that because of her mother/motherly figures, the Black girl can cultivate core values such as self-awareness, self-advocacy, persistence, and resilience, which are helpful to her as she matures.

The following literature establishes a comparison and juxtaposition between who the Black girl is and how she comes to be within her community and the negative perceptions that those, sometimes within and outside of her community, have of her and the implications of these perceptions. In contrast to the first section, a macro to the micro lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is used to illuminate the historical experiences of Black girls, sometimes outside of the school site, to support this section's following thesis: People outside of the Black girl's community who may not intimately know her perceive her as a deviant that is not innocent, but culpable and, as a result, worthy of social control, albeit physically or psychologically (Wright, 2016; Delvin, 2018; Owens, 2016; Nunn, 2016; Collins, 1999; Cox, 2019; Stevens, 2002; Windsor, Dunlap & Golub, 2011, Watson, 2016 & Hill, 2017).

Blanchett (2011) refers to social control as a technique used to control disruptive students. Milner (2013) states that disruptive students are viewed through a binary that sees them as deviants or not. As mentioned in this literature review, the Black girl falls outside of normative ideals of girlhood where white girls and white women are the standard race, cultural, and gendered framework (Collins, 2004; Deliovsky, 2008; Welter, 1966; Handau & Simien, 2019; hooks, 1995).

This researcher looks to three historical periods, two of which are not within the school setting, to establish that the Black girl is viewed as a deviant that is not innocent but culpable and worthy of physical control.

First, during chattel slavery, Black girls were considered property (hooks, 1999). While their responsibilities varied, many did not have a typical childhood and began

working early (hooks, 1999; Hurmence, 1997). Readers learn of the experiences of the formerly enslaved children through the research of Hurmence (1997), who interviewed and recorded the accounts of formerly enslaved people. For instance, Mary Island of Louisiana remembers washing dishes when she was four years old, and then, at the age of six, she carried water around the plantation. She worked in the field between seven and eight, cutting sprouts and picking one hundred pounds of cotton. Buying and selling enslaved people was a reliable source to increase the plantation owner's agricultural capital (Wright, 2006). So, it was common for Black girls to be traded and sold (Berry & Gross, 2021). In their book, *A Black Women's History of the United States*, researchers Berry and Gross share the reflection of a person who witnessed Black girls in chattel slavery auctions. Specifically, Black girls were forced to march around the auction space with their clothing above their knees. In doing so, the slave traders could see the movement of their bodies and mark them for further personal sexual exploration and expected childbearing. As such, Black girls, who were viewed as property, were influenced by the social control of chattel slavery, and any deviation would result in physical harm and even death (hooks, 2015).

After chattel slavery, oral behavior codes were used as a method of social control to transform Black girls into respectable women. Nazera Saddiq Wright's (2016) book, *Black Girlhood in the 19th Century,* a genealogical synthesis of archival research (newspapers, novels, and journals) from the 1800s, reveals how Black girls were positioned during the antebellum era. According to Wright, the narrative of the enslaved Black girl shifted from serving the interests of plantation owners to serving the interests of a patriarchal system. Published journals were used to communicate moralistic behavior

codes to a Black subscriber audience. In one article, a writer admonished young Black girls, stating,

> "Young ladies, have you tongues? Beware how you conduct them. You were made to soothe that oils, and cares of man's laborious life, to be his partner in affliction, his comforter in trouble, not the destroyer of his happiness and the ruin of his hopes" (pg. 36).

Black girls were encouraged to be mindful of how much they talked and not challenge the family unit's natural order (Wright, 2016). If the Black girl spoke too much, they rationalized, it would cause her not to be chosen for marriage; she would become an old maid and not enjoy the markers of womanhood – marriage, and motherhood. This idea that Black girls should comport themselves in a way that would deem them suitable for marriage was rooted in a patriarchal belief system that to receive the social protection of a Black man (formerly almost impossible under the institution of slavery), the Black woman and girl had to deny her voice (hooks, 2015). These behavior codes demonstrated a belief that the Black girl would reasonably understand her position and follow suit.

Thirdly, readers find an example of the social control of Black girls during the period of the desegregation of schools when Black girls were some of the first students to integrate schools with all-white student demographics. Historian Rachel Delvin, author of *A Girl Stands at the Door: The Generation of Young Women Who Desegregated America's Schools* (2018), argues that some believed that Black girls were in a better position to serve as the face of the desegregation movement because from an early age, they were conditioned to be, "self-possessed, poised, polite, diplomatic, [and] to smile" even though their daily lives were full of insults, surveillance, and harassment from white people. Ruby Bridges, a young six-year-old Black girl, walked past crowds of screaming individuals,

some holding tiny caskets with dolls in them. She entered the all-white William Frantz Elementary School to integrate it racially (McRae, 2018). One void of emotion, Bridges' demeanor was lauded because it communicated a resiliency and nonviolent approach that Black Americans wished to demonstrate in response to racist, sexist, and economic oppression (Owens, 2016). Owens goes on to contend that if Bridges could survive the angry white mob and even stop to cite prayers for them, Black girls, though not considered a part of the dominant ideology of white childhood and girlhood, could strategically make themselves legible as vulnerable and innocent in the Civil Rights Movement.

The previous research establishes that people hold perceptions that Black girls can be physically controlled; in this section, this researcher presents literature to argue that people advance stereotypes to control the Black girl psychologically. Stereotypes such as the Mammy, Matriarch, the Welfare Mother, and Queen, Jezebel (Collins, 1999), and modern-day categories, such as the video vixen and diva (Cox, 2019), are used to represent the Black women and, by proxy, the future Black woman, as a method of social-psychological control. Next, this literature review presents a summary of these stereotypes. The Mammy (Collins, 1999) is a "faithful, obedient domestic servant" with a "harmless" persona and is revered, especially in White spaces, because she accepts her subordination and position. While the Mammy image is typified as "good," the Matriarch (Collins, 1999) is considered "bad" because she is "overly aggressive" and "unfeminine." Her emasculating persona disrupts the natural order of the family, where the man is the protector and provider. She is the direct opposite of Mammy because she is not submissive, hardworking, or passive. She is disruptive. She is sassy. Stevens (2002)

defines sassy as "willful forthright in demeanor that expresses a spirited behavioral expressive style of boldness, independence, and courage. Yet, this is stylized presently as "loud, ghetto, or reckless." The Welfare Mother (Collins, 1999) contrasts that of the Mammy and the Matriarch. The Welfare Mother's controlling image labels her as "not aggressive enough" and not willing to be relegated, in a nod to Zora Neale Hurston (1986), as "de mule uh de world." Instead, according to Collins (1999), she is "content to sit around... and avoid work." Although she may reject work, in contrast to the Mammy, the Welfare Queen stereotype advances ideas that she is deceptive, mischievous, and will take advantage of goodwill (Windsor, Dunlap & Golub, 2011). Finally, the Jezebel controlling image and modern-day version of it, the "video vixen" and "diva" personas, represents a sexually promiscuous and sexually aggressive with uncontrollable lust (Collins, 1999; Windsor, Dunlap & Golub, 2011), Black woman and by proxy, Black girl. Together, these controlling images are used to control the Black girl's behavior through stereotype threat socially. Stereotype threat is a situation in which there is a negative stereotype about a person's group; concerned about being judged or treated negatively based on this stereotype, this person may adjust his or her behavior or underperform in certain situations (Spencer, Logel & Davies, 2016).

Stereotype threat is evident in Watson's (2016) exploration into the perspectives and experiences of Black girls attending a high school. Christine, a study participant, shares her reflection, which speaks to her awareness of stereotypes about Black girls. She revealed,

> You come from a world that stigmatizes Black people, and then you come to a school where some of the people carry that stigma, like, "Black girls are this," or "Black girls are loud," or "Black girls are ratchet." That stigma that Black girls are

> supposed to be loud and ratchet and ghetto and don't have any class or manners and things like that, I feel that stigma is what holds us back... (p. 245).

Christine's interpretation of the stereotypes that people have of Black girls influences the tension in her decision to confirm or reject these stereotypes because, as Hill (2017) writes, "to be a Black girl is a daily rejection of either/or in the name of survival and self-love." While Christine demonstrated an awareness of the stereotypes, she must choose between what people expect of her and what she wants for herself to move forward.

In summary, the literature in this section advances the argument that some people believe the Black girl can be socially controlled, whether physically or psychologically. As a result of this belief, in schools, the Black girl is viewed as one that is deviant, not innocent, but culpable.

This final section of the literature review discusses this viewpoint and the negative implications of these viewpoints on the experiences of Black girls in schools. Finally, the literature review provides examples of how Black girls respond to this viewpoint and the negative implications.

Within schools, Black girls must navigate complex school relationships amongst racial, gender, sexual orientation, age, and class identities and must "prove their humanity, cultural production, intellectualism, and political significance" (Owens, Tammy, 2016).

Murphy et al. (2013) illuminated several factors that influence Black girls' school experiences, including a hostile school environment, teacher and administrators' presumptions of guilt, miscommunication with students, and even peer conflicts. Although not central to this research, most of the research studies on the experiences of Black girls in schools (Murphy et al., 2013; Deliovsky, 2008; Lei, 2003; Hines & Wilmot,

2008; Losen &Martinez, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002; Blake et al., 2011; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Arcia, 2006; Noltemeyer et al., 2015) did not include the connection between peer conflicts and adolescent development in the experiences of Black girls. However, this connection is relevant because it provides additional context to the Black girl's experience. In the Murphy et al. study (2013), the girls shared that their peers often instigated conflicts that resulted in a response of retaliating or vindicating themselves. For instance, Cynthia shared, "I could be sweet sometimes, and then just be out of control (p. 548)" and often felt overwhelmed by these emotions. While the study did not reveal what triggered Cynthia to feel overwhelmed, the study noted that other girls felt the same. Zimba explained that some students often react to their peers who "[boost] their head" and influence them to fight. Cynthia mainly shared that she has fought girls who "run their mouth," or in the case of Hyacinth, she fought peers who "rolled" their eyes. Also implicit in this study was the Black girl's desire to just be accepted by their peers for their individualized identities. Nichole shared that she believed that her peers held expectations of her as a loud student, but this was different from her expectations of herself, and as a result, she was fearful of being herself, not always loud. Samantha affirmed this by sharing that her loud demeanor became more pronounced in the sixth grade because her friends were loud. The Black girls in this study felt pressured to protect themselves from their peers or fit in with their peers. Although the Murphy et al., 2013 study participants had high academic aspirations, they believed that some teachers mistreated them because they thought they were deviant. Cynthia explained her relationship with Mr. Houghton, a teacher. "I don't listen to him. I just [do] my work. Once I'm finished. I'll go sit in the hallway, or I'll come back in here, and he'll

be like, "Stop talking." And [I'll say], "I don't care, you stop talking (p. 597)" Samantha agreed and shared that sometimes when a teacher tells her to stop talking, and she was not talking, it results in a back-and-forth argument between her and the teacher. Mikala, another participant, also called attention to a similar experience in her reflection of her interactions with her teacher, Ms. North. Ms. North told Mikala that she should not come to class "loud and unladylike." Confused, Mikala shared, "I'm not acting like a dude. I'm not walking around with my pants sagging, so how am I not acting like a lady? (p. 601)" This question causes researchers to explain that Ms. North attempted to cause Mikala to believe that "being quiet is tantamount to being a good girl" (Murphy et al., 2013).

Mikala and Samantha's interactions with their teachers and their responses are examples of student behavior often labeled as deviant from the white girl racial, cultural, and gendered framework discussed earlier (Collins, 2004; Deliovsky, 2008; Welter, 1966; Handau & Simien, 2019; hooks, 1995), where passive and compliant student behavior is expected of girls. Pivoting for a moment, Lei's (2003) study is instructive in situating the experience of the Black girls in the Murphy et al. study in the broader context. Lei (2003) explored how gendered and racial identities were constructed by and for Black girls attending a high school. Specifically, Lei called attention to the dichotomy in how school administrators labeled Black girls' use of their voice as loud. Still, the Black girls viewed their voice as assertive and necessary tools to navigate school contexts where they felt misunderstood and positioned as the "other." However, as the Murphy et al., 2013 study noted, this positioning of the Black girls as the "other" began long before. For instance, in Samantha's first-grade report card, a teacher wrote that she had difficulty controlling Samantha's behavior. Specifically, she noted that" She yells out in class, argues with

teachers, and gets up from her seat without permission...." Also, Mikala's third-grade teacher said that she was "very loud and fidgety [and] She needs to be busy at all times." In these two examples, Samantha and Mikala were positioned as deviants. In the Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein (2012) study previously mentioned, Black girls demonstrated their awareness of the differential treatment between themselves and non-Black girls providing further evidence of their "othering." One participant said, "...they have different rules for us [African American girls] than they do for White and Asian girls. White girls and Asian girls can wear anything and get away with it, but they will send us to the dean for wearing the same thing. That's ghetto man" (p. 208).

The Murphy et al., 2013 study also discussed examples when they believed some of their teachers and school administrators assumed that they were not innocent but culpable. Nichole shared a situation where a teacher referred her for something she knew that she did not do. Citing to researchers in an interview, Nichole said, "She pulled out a referral. I was like, "For what?! And she...said, "for saying this." The teacher pulled out a paper and showed it to Nichole. Responding to the teacher, Nichole recounted her response, "I said, I didn't even say that! (p. 598)" The researchers noted that this blame and assumption of guilt weighed heavily on the participants and contributed to their feelings of separation from the school environment. Mikala explained, "They think because I'm already loud and stuff that I just go around messing with other kids, and I don't. That's not me. I don't do that (p. 598)." Haley and Samantha shared that an administrator also assumed that they were troublemakers. In one instance, the rationale was, "Well, I can't believe you because you've got so many referrals (p. 598)." Given these anecdotal examples, one can reasonably conclude that Black girls face often

insurmountable odds in schools because some teachers, administrators, and even peers, as the research provides, perceive her as a deviant who is not innocent but culpable. Collins (2000), referring to Hawthorne (2009), writes that "the Black girl has been taught to feel guilty. She wears the condemning "A" on her chest, but unlike Pearl in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the Black girl's shame is not adultery; her "A" stands for apologetic" (p. 271). Lei (2003) suggests that when the Black girls refused to adjust their behavior to conform to the normative standards of femininity, they directly violated the school's discipline policies.

This section of the literature review provides an example of Black girls who have positioned themselves in direct violation of a school's policies and the implications for doing so. In 2015, Shakara, a 16-year-old Black girl, was assaulted by a staff member during her removal from a classroom at Spring Valley High School in South Carolina. In an incident partially captured on video, Shakara's high school math teacher asked her to put away her phone; refusing to do so, the teacher called on Ben Fields, a white male School Resource Officer. Fields placed his arms around Shakara's neck, flipped over her chair, and forcibly grabbed and dragged her to the floor. This incident, recorded by Niya Kenny, another Black girl student, resulted in both Shakara and Niya being arrested and charged under the South Carolina Disturbing Schools Law. In doing this, the consequence of Shakara not "complying" and Niya as a perceived "accomplice" resulted in a delay in their academic journey as they faced criminal charges. Hines and Wilmot (2018) contend that Shakara's very being as a Black girl was a threat to the normalcy of the classroom. It was not Shakara's reluctance to put away her phone. Instead, "her criminalization was spatially situated, was a political act, and was an anti-Black micro-aggressive act."

Furthermore, the researchers assert that Shakara's body became a site of criminalization. Fields forcible removal of Shakara and arrest of Niya enacted a racialized and gendered violence based on an unjustifiable fear of justifiable Black resistance to White supremacy (2018). Both Shakara and Niya were not viewed as innocent children, often considered within the white girl racial, cultural, and gendered framework (Collins, 2004; Deliovsky, 2008; Welter, 1966; Handau & Simien, 2019; hooks, 1995), but through their defensiveness and, in the words of Hines and Wilmot, "resistance to White supremacy," they were viewed as not innocent, culpable, and worthy of harm whether physical or psychological.

As foreshadowed in the stories of Shakara and Niya, when people in schools view Black girls as deviants that are not innocent and culpable, there are negative implications for Black girls. There is well-established research that Black students are disproportionately recipients of exclusionary discipline compared to White students (Losen &Martinez, 2013; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002). While much of the research has centered on the experiences of Black males, the statistics for Black girls are just as alarming, especially in comparison to White girls. While Black girls received infractions for comportment and dress code such as defiance, profane language use towards other students, and physical aggression non-Black girls were disciplined for violations such as tardiness (Blake et al., 2011). Referencing data from the U.S. Department of Education, in the 2015-2016 school year, nationally, Black girls were 8% of the student population. Still, they represented 14% of students who received an out-of-school suspension. Out-of-school suspension is students' most common form of discipline (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003). This type of consequence, known as exclusionary discipline, refers to in-

school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion that remove students from the learning environment (Noltemeyer et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2014).

In the 2015 report, *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected*, in one year under study, Black girls in Boston made up 61% of all girls disciplined compared to White girls, who were only 5% of the discipline population. Black girls were also 11 times more likely to be disciplined than white girls. (2015, p. 19). Of all the girls expelled that year, 63% were Black, and no white girls faced expulsion. That same year in New York City, Black girls represented 56% of all girls' disciplines, in comparison to 5% of white girls. Black girls have been disciplined ten times the rate of white girls (2015, p. 19) and made up 90% of the expelled girls. No white girls were expelled that year (2015, p. 21). In Washington, D.C., the location of this capstone study, The National Women's Law Center released the report, *Dress Coded: Black Girls, Bodies, and Bias in D.C. Schools* to call attention to the discipline experiences of Black girls in the nation's capital. Researchers found that Black girls are 20.8 times more likely to be suspended from D.C. schools than white girls (NWLC, 2019). The implications of exclusionary discipline on students, but especially Black girls, is well-documented and conclude that when Black girls are not in school due to exclusionary discipline, pre-existing academic skill deficits are exacerbated, leading to poor academic performance and an increased likelihood of not completing high school (Arcia, 2006; Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

In the closing section of this literature review, this researcher calls attention to research that connects how Black girls in schools use the gendered racial socialization messages of self-awareness, self-advocacy, persistence, and resilience from their

mothers/motherly figures to navigate school environments that often hold opposing viewpoints of them as deviant, not innocent, but culpable. The research reveals that Black girls respond to opposing external viewpoints through an avenue of practices that include but are not limited to participating in community-oriented relationships such as friendships, service-learning, engaging reliable adults in schools, and self-advocacy, although there are risks.

Black girls use community-oriented relationships to respond to school environments with negative viewpoints. Many Black girls place a high value on female connections, especially friendships since they serve as places of empowerment and resistance to oppression for marginalized populations (Goins, 2011). Friendships help validate their sense of self and feed their soul (Collins, 2000). Furthermore, in friendships, Black girls can talk freely, build their spirits and share stories that reaffirm their identities as Black girls. Henry (1998) calls attention to the use of "womanish" speech by Black middle school students in an Afrocentric charter school to illuminate a practice that Black girls employ within their friendships. Womanish is described as "determined, focused, assertive" speech that is intentional in its use. The Black girls in the study used the womanish speech to address and solve problems that they often encountered as resistance to the sexual harassment and objectification that they experienced in schools. These behaviors, Henry notes, were more likely to occur in "girl spaces" where each participant was able to "speak and write from their subjectivities" and to "authentically learn about [and] express themselves in subjective ways" (p. 166).

Black girls also engaged in service-learning to respond to school environments with opposing viewpoints. Black girls in the Garcia et al., 2020 study deliberately engaged

in activities that challenged group stereotypes about them. "I want to break the stereotype that Black girls have the worst attitudes and aren't good for much," one participant, Amber, explained, "because that is far from true." As the researchers note, Amber's use of the phrase "break the stereotype" illustrates her understanding of harmful views of Black girls' identities and, by extension, her own. Amber responds with a counternarrative to this opposing viewpoint about Black girls that highlights her involvement in community improvement efforts: "I was part of a group, and our main focus was to improve the quality of our community." We planted a garden, cleaned up areas, picked up litter, etc." Her participation in the community improvement projects counters the dominant narrative that Black girls "have the worst attitudes."

Another way Black girls respond to school environments with opposing viewpoints of them is to seek reliable adults. However, readers should first consider the question: What does it mean to be a reliable adult to Black girls? Hill (2017) contends that being a reliable adult to Black girls requires three essential criteria. First, reliable adults must create spaces that "must be or working toward being expansive, imaginative, and thoughtful enough to celebrate all Black girls." These spaces must be affirming for all Black girls to "sustain intergenerational relationships, evolving self-definition, and the endless potential." Secondly, being a reliable adult to a Black girl requires a level of intimacy which Hill (2017) defines as an "affinity and empathic sentiment with and toward" and is careful to note that "time and relationship labels do not predetermine intimacy but rather the depth of presence and intention" do. Intimacy is important in the dynamic between Black girls and their reliable adults in schools because it distinguishes "research on versus with," "giving voice versus making space for Black girls to speak," and

"conducting research versus creating collaborative teaching." Finally, being a reliable adult to a Black girl requires that reliable adults see themselves in Black girls and vice versa. Hill notes the complication in some being able to see Black girls in their own lives, implicit if they are not Black. However, she pushes readers to consider that if individuals (scholars, advocates, cultural workers, and others) believe that Black girls matter, then seeing Black girls "requires more than rhetoric," but demands individuals to remember their own experiences and how they might relate to the Black girl experience. Hill names her memories, such as when she was twelve and hated the sound of being called a young lady or when her mother reprimanded her for dancing provocatively. In doing this internal memory work, Hill asserts that she can see and empathize with the stories of Black girls who experience similar reprimands in schools. Through this framework presented by Hill (2017), her research calls attention to the Black girls in the Murphy et al., 2013 study, who discussed their interactions with adults in their school building. Hyacinth revealed her relationship with her teacher, Ms. Jennings, who she believed listened more than other teachers due to her willingness to sit down and talk to her about her schoolwork. Other students agreed with Hyacinth and shared that when peer conflicts occurred in the classroom, instead of relying on an exclusionary discipline such as removing the student from the classroom, Ms. Jennings would separate the students, seek to understand the issue, and talk to them about a resolution in their conflict. As a result of this relationship, the researchers concluded that Ms. Jennings could hold the Black girls accountable when their behavior was perceived as disrespectful and be emotionally supportive and affirming. In one example to illuminate this point, Zimba was sent to the office by Ms. Jennings. Later, she returned to the classroom, and Ms. Jennings

welcomed her back into the classroom with "warmth and humor." In doing this, Ms. Jennings humanized Zimba by giving her the space to regulate her emotions and not criminalize her behavior. As a result, the Black girls in this study spoke highly of their interactions with this teacher compared to other teachers and administrators.

Finally, although there are risks, Black girls respond to school environments with opposing viewpoints through their self-advocacy. Also, in the Murphy et al., 2013 study the researchers asserted that Black girls believed that the teachers and the school environment specifically disregarded their need for movement and illuminated their disdain for staying in their seats all day. In response, some participants connected their walking out of the classroom to this resistance. For instance, as a point of self-advocacy, Cynthia and Hyacinth left their classrooms to go to the restroom even though their teachers forbade them. When asked why, Cynthia shared, "When I tell her, I gotta use the bathroom, she'll [be] like, "Nope, you're not allowed to use the bathroom. And I don't care if you walk out," so I walk out (p. 598)" However, Cynthia also noted that the teacher could have given her a pass. When affirmed, Cynthia revealed that the teacher's tone changed into one that was perceived as talking "sweet," to which Cynthia responded, "Don't try to talk sweet to me now 'cause you should have written me a pass. If you don't want to write me a pass, then make me take chances, you know, I'm going to walk out (p. 598)." The chances that Cynthia refers to is the possibility of receiving an external consequence for not having permission in the hallway. Cynthia decided to take this risk even though she felt "teachers intentionally make her choose between compliance and noncompliance," an unfair predicament. When students do not believe that adults are reliable, they often make intentional decisions around their compliant behavior. For

instance, Hyacinth shared that she does things for specific teachers, and it depends on whether she feels respected by them or whether they helped her. The researchers concluded that the Black girls in the study were not "defiant and emotionally charged" as perceived. Instead, their behaviors were in response to teachers and administrators who put them in a position where "they must assume the role of self-advocate as a way to reject inequitable treatment and assert their presence."

Conceptual Frameworks

A conceptual framework results from bringing together related concepts to provide a broader understanding of a problem (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Three concepts are used in this capstone study: Respectability (Higginbotham, 1995), Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018), and Interior Homeplace (hooks, 1990; Quashie, 2012). This research will first explain each concept independently and then explain how and why the concepts work together to help understand this capstone's inquiry into what is happening at Charter X with Black girls.

Respectability

Brooks Higginbotham (1993) coined the phrase "politics of respectability" to describe the political maneuvers used by Black women within the Black Baptist church during the 1920s. The women sought to distinguish themselves from women whom they viewed as unrespectable. They stressed the importance of "adherence to temperance, cleanliness of person and property, thrift, polite manners, and sexual purity." Despite regard for their decorum, this "politics of respectability" also influenced the Black community's behavior. Higginbotham (1995) asserts that it "demanded that every

individual in the Black community assume responsibility for behavioral self-regulation and self-improvement along moral, educational, and economic lines." The Black Baptist women that Higginbotham studied engaged in social conformance and behavioral policing to oppose a hierarchically structured social order because they wanted to reject "white America's depiction [of them] as immoral, childlike, and unworthy of respect or protection"(Higginbotham, 1993). However, the driving force behind the "politics of respectability" was the presence of the white gaze and the surveillance of Black people, which had the power to "refute or confirm stereotypical representations and discriminatory practices" (1995).

In schools, the "politics of respectability" can be found in character education programs (Bair, 2009) that promote sound character principles such as "caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others" (Lickona et al., 1997). The character principles themselves are not the issue, but how the school chooses to define them, often informed by white-centric core ethical values (Leonardo, 2009), is the issue and connects them to the "politics of respectability." As previously mentioned in this research study, the Black girl is often in juxtaposition to the white girl, racial, cultural, and gendered framework (Collins, 2004; Deliovsky, 2008; Welter, 1966; Handau & Simien, 2019; hooks, 1995); therefore, in this capstone study, using respectability as a framework helps this research to notice when respectability may be present, whether from the structure of the school environment or the ideas of the teachers, to understand why it is occurring, and to determine how it may be influencing the experiences of Black girls at Charter X.

Black Girl Cartography

Researchers empathize with the critical recognition that schools operate as a microcosm of a racist and sexist society yet egregiously continue to be "portrayed as impartial, good and safe spaces for all students" (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). Black Girl Cartography is the "study of how and where Black girls are physically and socio-politically mapped in education" and provides the tools to see how the Black Girlhood is "informed, reformed, stifled by the geopolitical space of the school" (Butler, 2018). Through this lens, Butler centers the intersectional identities (race, class, gender, and sexuality) of Black girls. By extending it to include spatiality, Butler helps readers activate a transdisciplinary intersectional analysis of the Black girl's lived experiences to identify the connections between the multiple axes of oppression that Black girls experience and their socio-cultural and geopolitical locations in education (Butler, 2018).

Schools, Butler articulates, become places that "may or may not welcome Black girls" (2015), and this, in turn, influences how Black girls negotiate themselves in the school environment. Hence, Butler introduces readers to navigational practices, which Black girls use in schools.

In schools, Black girls often engage in "temporal and spatial acts of intentional resistances, innovative products, and creative engagements" to disrupt "heteronormative, racist, sexist, and ableist ideologies," which threaten their girlhood (Butler, 2018). As mentioned throughout this capstone study, Black girls must decide between meeting the expectations of others and possibly erasing themselves or being true to themselves and risking severe consequences. Black Cartography and the navigational practices

introduced help this research study pay special attention to Black girls' decisions as they traverse the school environment.

Interior Homeplace

Black feminist, bell hooks (1990) shares with readers her memory of traveling to her Black grandmother's home, a place where "all that truly mattered in life took place," where bodies were fed, souls were nurtured, and her family "learned dignity, the integrity of being, and faith." On this journey to her grandmother's home, or "homeplace," as she names it, hooks named the fear that encapsulated her body as she traversed past the "terrifying whiteness" in the neighborhoods. White faces, hooks believed, stared her and her family down in contempt. Such contempt that even the porches, in the absence of the white faces, hooks said, seemed to say, "danger," "you don't belong here," "you are not safe."

While hooks wrote of the physical homeplace, in her study, it is essential to establish the argument, like Boylorn (2016), that the homeplace exists not only in kitchens and living rooms prepared and protected by Black women, but the homeplace exists within the subjectivity of the Black body. An example of the homeplace being in the subjectivity in the Black body can be found in an excerpt of the song, "I Am Not My Hair" (Arie, Sanders, & Ramsey, 2006).

> I am not my hair
> I am not my skin
> I am not your expectations, no (hey)
> I am not my hair
> I am not this skin
> I am the soul that lives within.

Arie repeatedly denies that her hair and skin do not define her or other people's expectations of her, a Black woman. Instead, she draws attention to her inner self, precisely, the "the soul that lives within" her. The "soul" is what Quashie (2012) refers to as the interior of the Black subjectivity, a place that challenges the dominant understandings of Blackness as only being expressive, public, and loud. Quashie explains that the interior of the Black subjectivity cannot wholly be defined or described. However, he attempts to define it, stating that the "inner reservoir of thoughts, feelings, desires, fears, ambitions" shapes the Black individual. To provide an example of the interior, Quashie (2012) looks to Zora Neale Hurston's, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and calls attention to Janie, whom readers come to know through the writer's representation of her internal consciousness and dialogue. After Jody, her husband, slaps her for ruining his dinner, Quashie draws attention to this excerpt of the story, "Janie stood where he left her for unmeasured time and thought. She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then, she went inside there to see what it was." In this interior, Quashie (2012) calls attention to a place impacted by an external environment, Janie's husband, but where one can make sense of thoughts and words that are complicated and dynamic without judgment from others. The "place" in Quashie's research, the interior of the Black subjectivity, refers to what this study establishes as the interior homeplace, an emergent concept developed by this researcher and based upon the work of hooks (1990) and Quashie (2012). Some argue that homeplace exists in community (Player et al., 2021; Payne, 2020; Okafor, 2018 & Garcia, 2017), and this researcher agrees. However, the interior homeplace is the spatiality of one's secrets, dreams, fears, and desires. It is the place within which a person can freely be him or

herself, without external control, judgment, blame, and suspicion, and is found in the physiological space of the Black body. In that case, the interior homeplace concept will also help this researcher pay attention to the Black girl's subjectivity manifested through an expression of her thoughts and feelings as she responds within the school environment.

Respectability, Black Girl Cartography, and Interior Homeplace

All three concepts: Respectability, Black Girl Cartography, and Interior Homeplace form a multi-dimensional critical lens to understand what is happening with Black girls at Charter X. Already, throughout this capstone's literature review, the research has established how the Black girl comes to be, how those who do or do not intimately know her and the implications for the misalignment in these two viewpoints in her experiences in schools. The research has also established that the Black girl faces

insurmountable odds in her school experiences. As such, the relationship of the three conceptual frameworks follows.

Respectability and Black Girl Cartography are aligned with the school environment to see how the Charter X school environment might privilege respectable behavior and how this behavior may or may not align with Black girls' intersectional identities. Respectability is placed beneath Black Girl Cartography and Interior Homeplace to represent that it is everywhere. Black Girl Cartography and Interior Homeplace are placed around respectability to represent its relation to each other and the Charter X school. The navigational practices or decisions within Black Girl Cartography will help this research see how Black girls respond to their positioning in the school environment. Then, concerning Black Girl Cartography, the Interior Homeplace concept will help delve into the depths of her subjectivity to reveal her awareness of her positioning in the school and her relationship with adults and peers within the school.

Project Questions

A set of questions was proposed at the beginning of this capstone study to understand why Black girls at Charter X had more "negative" incidents than any other racial or gender group during the 2019-2020 school year. However, the questions were refined due to the emerging themes in the data.

For instance, the two questions which follow were initially proposed:

- RQ1: How do students and their teachers describe teacher-student interactions?
- RQ2: How are themes of race and class present in the ways that students and their teachers describe their interactions with each other?

However, since the questions were broad, this researcher used an inductive approach at the beginning of the data collection. As a result, the questions and the data collection methods described later became more refined and better aligned with the Respectability, Black Girl Cartography, and Interior Homeplace conceptual frameworks.

Therefore, the following research questions guide this capstone study:

- RQ1: What did **teachers say about** Black girls at Charter X?
- RQ2: What are the **perspectives and experiences of Black girls** who attend Charter X?
- RQ3: What **navigational practices** do Black girls use in their experiences at Charter X?

Project Design

This research collected different data types to understand why Black girls at Charter X had more "negative" incidents than any other racial or gender group during the 2019-2020 school year. Data collection included classroom observations, focus groups with Black girls, a student survey for the focus group participants, and a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the internal student incident culture reporting tool, which included teacher's written descriptions of incidents during that school year (see Figure 6 and Table 1).

Figure 6: Overview of Data Collected

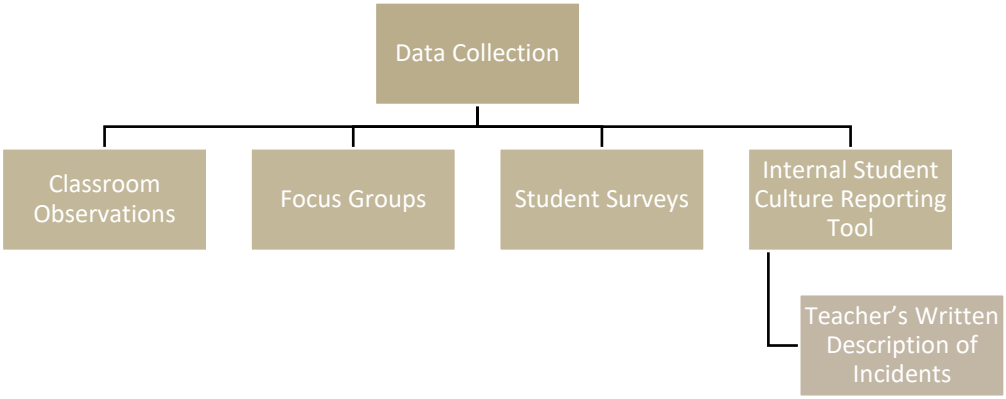


Table 1: Summary of the Data Collection Plan

Research Question	Connection to Conceptual Framework	Method	Participants
RQ1: What did teachers say about Black girls at Charter X?	Respectability (Higginbotham, 1995)	Analysis of Teachers' Narrative Description of Student Behavior Incidents during 2019-2020 School Year	N/A
RQ2: What are the perspectives and experiences of Black girls who attend Charter X?	Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018); Interior Homeplace (hooks, 1990; Quashie, 2012) Respectability (Higginbotham, 1995)	Classroom Observations Focus Groups Student Surveys	Students (Black girls in the 8th grade)
RQ3: What navigational practices do Black girls use in their experiences at Charter X?	Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018); Interior Homeplace (hooks, 1990; Quashie, 2012)	Focus Groups	Students (Black girls in the 8th grade)

Classroom Observations

This research included classroom observations in its data collection methods. As health and safety guidelines allowed, classroom observations occurred in person at Charter X, but only in 8th-grade classrooms. Focusing only on 8th-grade classrooms was important because these students were in the 6th grade during the 2019-2020 school year,

and some (not all due to attrition) were represented in the internal student culture incident reporting tool.

At the start of this capstone study, the Charter X Principal made mention of a phenomenon occurring with Black students at Charter X, but without much context. As a result, an inductive approach influenced by this capstone's conceptual and theoretical frameworks was used to gather data. Initially, this researcher visited classrooms to document the interactions of Black students with their peers and their teachers. Each observation lasted an entire class period, about 60 minutes, and this researcher sat in the back of the classroom and made notes of interactions objectively. Attempts were made to record interactions as they occurred. For instance, if a student entered the classroom, it was noted. Each interaction was given a timestamp. Although each observation was audio recorded, the recordings were not transcribed but used as a backup if the observation notes were lost. After the classroom observation, this researcher reviewed the observation notes and identified trends that led to additional data collection methods, including purposeful sampling in the focus groups and survey questions.

Focus Groups

After the classroom observations and the immediate analysis of the classroom observational notes, a purposeful sampling method was used, and only students who met the following criteria were invited to the focus groups: 1) self-identified as African American/Black, 2) female/girl, and 3) attended Charter X during the 2019-2020 school year. The Black Girl Cartography conceptual framework was influential when

determining focus groups because, as mentioned previously, it is the "study of how and where Black girls are physically and socio-politically mapped in education."

Before the focus groups occurred, consent notifications were sent to the parents via the school's internal communication methods. In alignment with previous research conducted at the school, passive consent was used. Parents were provided with information about the research study and the opportunity to opt their child out of the focus group. Then, a Charter X administrator grouped the participants whose parents did not opt them out of the study and created a schedule for this researcher to meet with them in small groups.

The in-person focus groups followed appropriate health and safety guidelines, such as sanitizing the space, use of facial masks, and social distancing. A light snack was provided to the participants, and they were encouraged to bring their laptop devices. Each group meeting lasted approximately one hour, and participants engaged in a semi-structured interview.

Although some patterns emerged during the classroom observation, an inductive approach was also used with the focus groups. Questions selected for the focus group were intended to be broad, and participants were told that the research was about the experiences of Black girls attending Charter X.

Students were asked the following question (s):

- What is it like to be a student right now?
- How would you compare this school year to last school year and the previous year?

Student Survey

At the beginning of the focus group, before the two questions were asked, participants took a 15-minute survey to understand their experiences at Charter X better. A sample of the survey questions can be found in Table 6. There were two sections of the survey. The first set of questions from the survey was developed by researchers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in collaboration with Panorama Education to measure students' perceptions of teaching and learning (Panorama Education, 2021). Concerning reliability and validity, the research team used a development process that included multiple rounds of survey piloting and refinement, cognitive interviews with students, literature review, and feedback from experts around the country (Panorama Education, 2021). Although the comprehensive Panorama Student Survey covers 19 topics from pedagogical effectiveness and school climate to student engagement and growth mindset, this research only focused on five areas which included students' perceptions of teachers' rigorous expectations of them, self-efficacy, their sense of belonging, self-management, their perseverance, and their satisfaction with the school experience. The selection of these five areas is a similar method used by the DC Public School system in its schools (DC Public Schools, 2021).

The second set of questions was taken from the Respectability Politics Scale (Jefferson, 2019). When originally designed and tested for reliability and validity, the purpose of the scale was to understand the role that respectability plays in structuring the politics of

Black Americans. However, the utility of the Respectability Politics Scale for this study was to understand better the perceptions of Black girls attending the Charter X School.

Table 2: Excerpt of Student Survey Questions

Question Source	*Theme*	*Survey Question*
Panorama Student Survey (Panorama Education, 2021)	Sense of Belonging	How much do you matter to others at this school?
	Rigorous Expectations	How often do teachers at your school make you explain your answers in class?
	Perseverance	When you feel like giving up on a difficult task, how likely is it that your teachers will make you keep trying?
	Self-Efficacy	How confident are you that you can do the hardest work that is assigned in your classes?
	Self-Management	How well do you get along with students who are different from you?
Respectability Politics Scale (Jefferson, 2021)		How important is it that Black people act responsibly in public?
		How important is it that Black people have the freedom to behave however they want, even if it means being judged negatively by other racial groups?
		How important is that Black people avoid being unreasonably loud in public?

Student Culture Incident Reporting Tool

After conducting classroom observations, focus groups, and administering a student survey, the researcher of this capstone study also procured an internal student culture incident reporting tool that housed student incidents, both positive and negative, which occurred during the 2019-2020 school year. It is important to note that the Charter X Black girl phenomenon was discovered during the internal student culture incident reporting tool analysis, which occurred after the classroom observations, focus groups, and student survey. The internal student culture incident reporting tool affirmed what this researcher saw in the classroom observations and supported the purposeful sampling of Black girls for the focus groups and student survey.

The reporting tool included both qualitative and quantitative data. Over 3500 entries were present and included the student's name, date of the incident, incident types, rewards and consequences, and instructional time lost. The reporting tool also included

teachers' descriptions of the incidents, which this researcher primarily relied on to understand what teachers said about Black girls during this time period. However, the data required tidying up before analysis. For instance, while the reporting tool had the names of all students who attended the middle school during the 2019-2020 school year, it did not include all of their demographic data, including their race and gender. The same was valid for teachers. Therefore, this data was added to the dataset set using a VLOOKUP function to recall exported data from a standardized demographic data download. The dataset was double-checked for accuracy with a Charter X leadership team member. The data were anonymized before analysis by assigning each student and teacher a number. Then, the dataset was uploaded to R Studio, a statistical software, and certain sections (such as student and teacher racial demographics and incident frequency) were analyzed for trends.

Data Analysis

Teacher's Narrative Descriptions of Black Girl Behavior Incidents

This research extracted the narrative descriptions of behavior incidents, whether "negative" or "positive," from the 2019-2020 internal student culture incident reporting tool. This narrative data was uploaded into Delve Tool, a cloud-based software program for qualitative coding research. Using an inductive approach, the researcher read through each narrative incident to identify open and axial codes (see Figure 3). The open and axial codes were aligned to the Respectability conceptual framework, in which, within the context of the capstone study, there is an "ideal" student who must behave a certain way within the school and possess a certain mindset to be viewed as acceptable by

teachers and the school. A common theme within this line of coding was the common mention of students' "rule-following." In juxtaposition to the "ideal" student behavior and mindset, axial codes, "problematic" student behavior, and mindsets were identified and connected to "disruptions" that occurred within the classroom and school.

Black Girls' Narrative Descriptions of Their Experiences at School

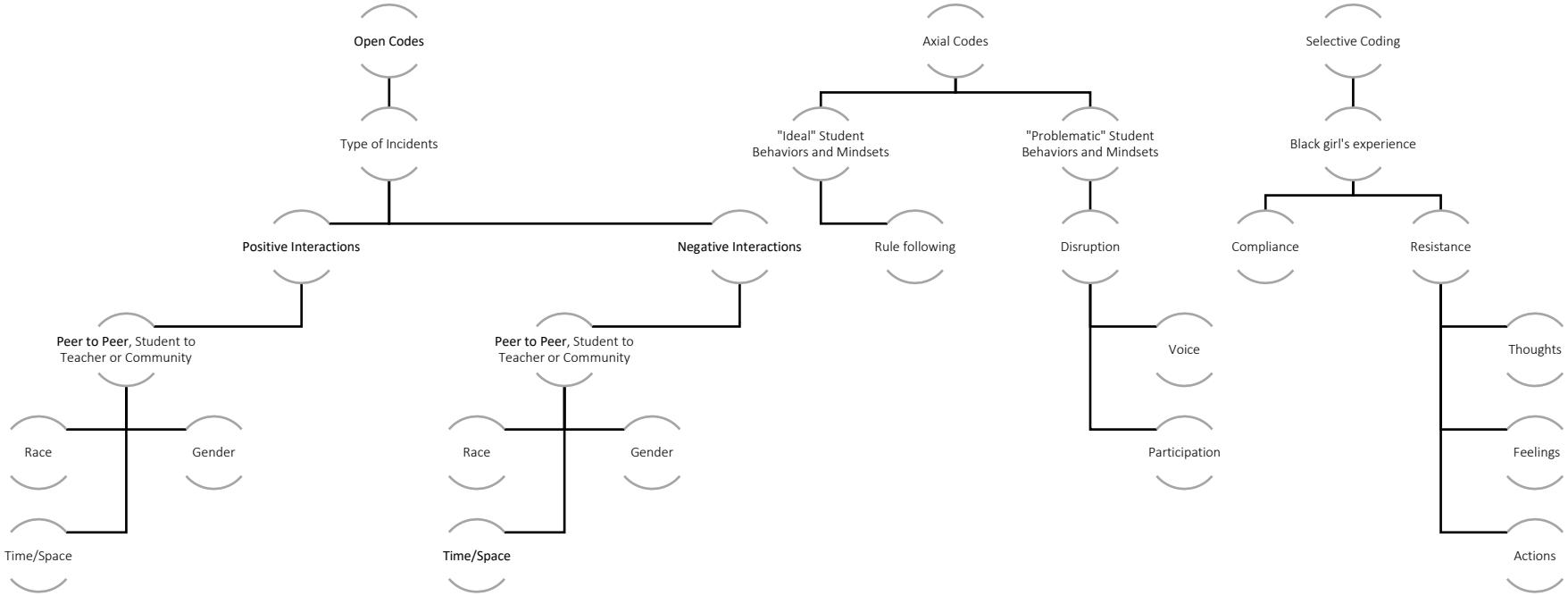
As mentioned previously, the notes from the classroom observations were analyzed for patterns at the end of each observation. They informed the purposeful sampling methods for the focus groups and the refinement of this capstone project questions. However, the focus groups and student surveys were utilized to better understand the perspectives and experiences of Black girls at Charter X. Each focus group was audio recorded. The audio recordings (over 3 hours) were uploaded into Rev.Com, a cloud-based service for audio and video transcription. Once completed, the transcriptions were downloaded into Microsoft Word and read by this researcher. While reading the transcripts organized as running records, this researcher updated participant names for conversation accuracy. The transcripts were also loaded into Delve Tool. Building off the codes used to analyze the teacher's narrative description of student incidents, this researcher applied selective coding in alignment with the Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018) and Interior Homeplace (hooks, 1990; Quashie, 2012) conceptual frameworks as represented in Figure 7. When analyzing the narratives of the Black girl participant's experiences, selective codes such as "resistance" and "compliance" were used to connect to the teacher's "ideal" and "problematic" student mindset and behaviors. This research then paid particular attention to any narratives which reveal

Black girl's thoughts, feelings (relevant to the Interior Homeplace conceptual framework), and subsequent actions.

Descriptive Analysis of Student Surveys

Survey questions were also used to understand the perspectives and experiences of Black girls attending Charter X. The survey was administered online through Qualtrics, a cloud-based survey software program. The results were synthesized, and univariate analysis was conducted automatically as a feature of the Qualtrics software. The univariate analysis included the following for each survey question: central tendency and a measure of variability. The central tendency included the mean, median, and mode distributions. The extent of variability had the standard deviation, variance, and range. However, the researcher also reviewed and added percentage descriptions to explain the survey results to summarize the data.

Figure 7: Overview of Qualitative Data Analysis Codes for Teacher and Student's Narratives



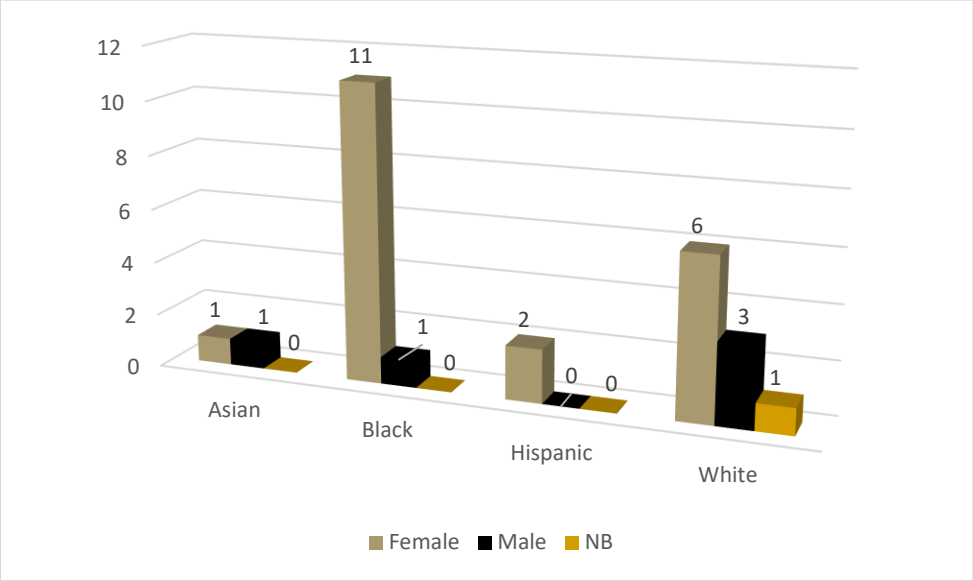
Findings

Prior to discussing the findings from the qualitative analysis of the internal student culture incident reporting tool, it is important to situate these findings within the multivariate analysis of the quantitative data provided within the internal student culture incident reporting tool. In this brief introduction of findings, this summary will answer the following questions about the 2019-2020 school year:

- How many middle school teachers did Charter X have overall?
- What is the breakdown of middle school teachers by racial and gender identities?
- What is the middle school teacher's frequency of incidents regarding racial and gender identities?
- Which middle school teachers reported the most incidents, whether "positive" or "negative" overall?

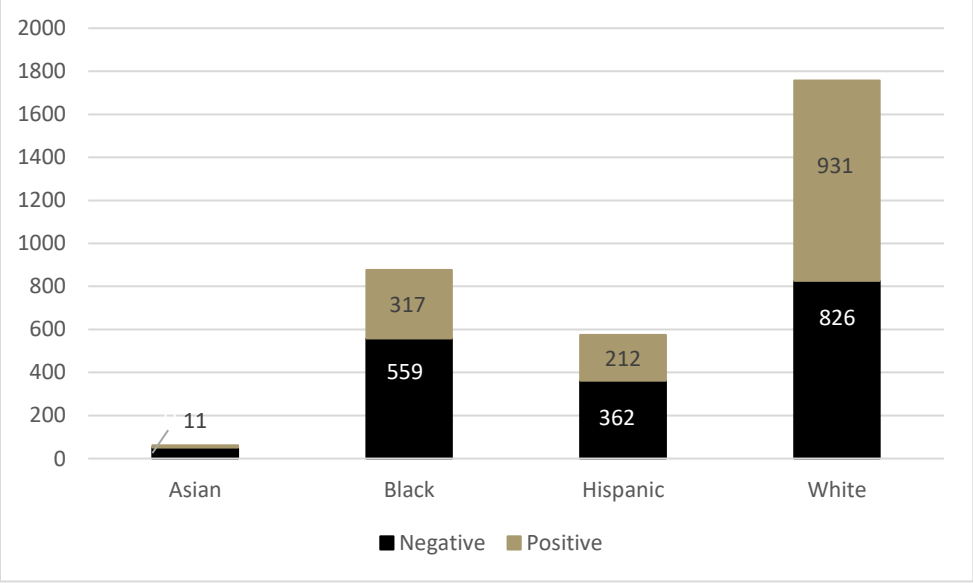
As Figure 8 reveals, 26 middle school teachers reported "positive" or "negative" incidents during the 2019-2020 school year. Female teachers represented 77% of the overall middle school teacher reporting demographic. Black (42%) and white female (23%) teachers represented the majority racial and gender reporting demographic.

Figure 8: Summary of 2019-2020 Middle School Teachers by Race and Gender



Of the teachers who reported the most incidents, white teachers, whether female, male, or non-binary, reported the most "positive" and "negative" incidents (Figure 9).

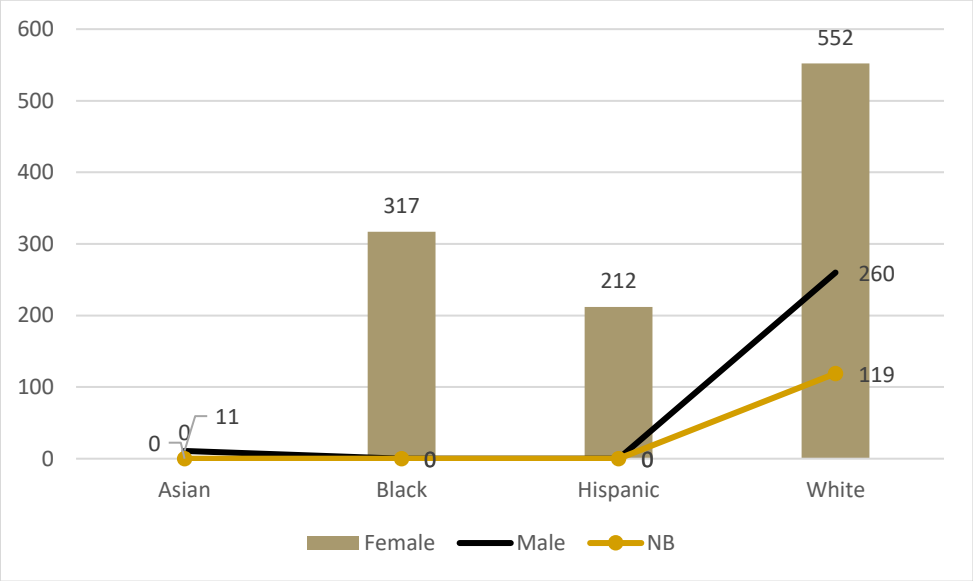
Figure 9 Summary of 2019-2020 Incidents Reported by Teacher's Race



When aggregated by teacher's race and gender, the six white female teachers reported the most "positive" incidents than any other racial or gendered group, as represented in

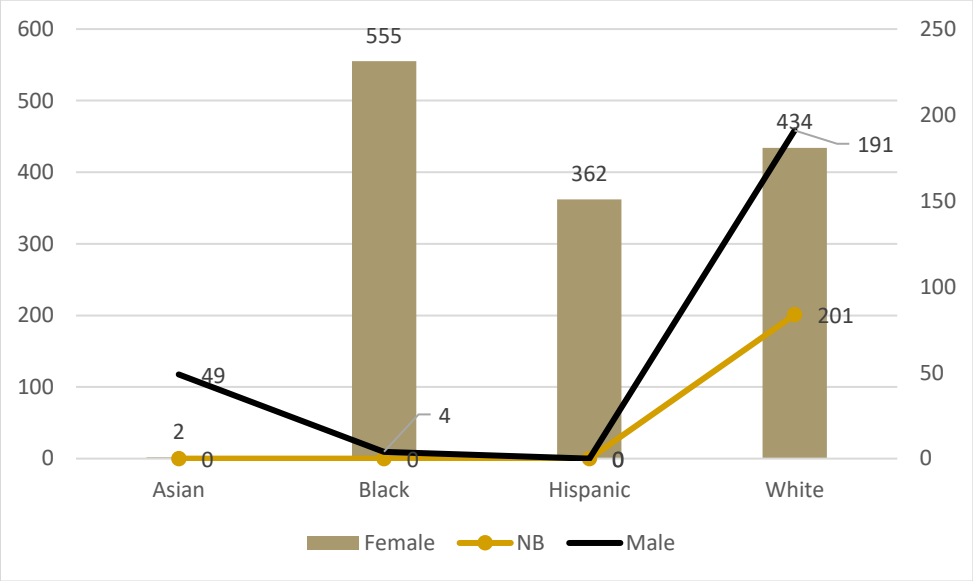
Figure 10. Overall, white teachers, who were 38% of the demographic of middle school teachers who reported incidents, accounted for the majority of positive incidents.

Figure 10 Summary of "Positive "Reported Incidents by Teacher's Race and Gender



As represented in Figure 11, Black female teachers and staff, 42% of the middle school teacher demographic, also reported "negative" incidents. When compared to other staff members that self-identify as female, Black teachers and staff members reported more "negative" incidents.

Figure 11: Summary of "Negative" Reported Incidents by Teacher's Race and Gender



RQ1: What did teachers say about Black girls who attend Charter X?

Finding #1: Black girls demonstrate prosocial behaviors.

The first theme that emerged in the qualitative analysis of teachers' narratives is that Black girls demonstrated prosocial behaviors.

Table 3: Charter X Student Expectations

	Expected Behavior(s)	Prohibited Behavior(s)
I am independent and resilient.		
I act with integrity.	Attending class for the full period	Cursing, skipping class, misuse of technology, plagiarism, forgery or cheating, theft, uniform code violation, eating approved gum, candy or having a cellphone in class
I can connect and collaborate.	Working with classmates	Play-fighting, bullying, "joning"
I show compassion and embrace diversity.		Disrespect to peers and teachers
I know myself.	Following directions	Not following directions

Black girls were praised as "excellent team members" who could "connect and collaborate" while working in a group. As an example of this collaboration, a Black girl was recognized for working with a peer to edit their poem during class. Another Black girl was recognized for her advocacy in class when she spoke up for herself and her classmates to have another opportunity to "get a four on their quarter 1-grade book." Another example of advocacy is a Black girl who was recognized for correcting other students who used gender slurs during class. Black girls were also celebrated for being helpful and supportive to their peers and the classroom environment. For example, they were praised for their emotional support of peers, as demonstrated by the teacher's description of them "being a good friend" and helping a" classmate get back on track emotionally." Black girls were also recognized for being helpful to the teacher, as demonstrated by picking up materials, passing out materials, and setting up bulletin boards and their willingness to clean the classroom on behalf of other students who failed to do their part. For instance, one teacher wrote, "C" stayed after lunch to help clean and straighten up the classroom for drama." Another teacher wrote, "K" helped clean up the art room and return chairs that weren't hers to the correct tables. Similarly, a teacher wrote, "A," and another student offered to clean the classroom after lunch even though they were not responsible for the mess."

Another theme present within the teacher's narratives was recognizing, although limited in frequency, Black girls' academic prowess. For example, a Black girl was recognized for asking "thoughtful questions to further her understanding of skills on Khan Academy" and working "hard to solve problems about decimal operations independently.

A final theme present in the teacher's narratives was the Black girl's positive behavior in class. Black girls were recognized for being focused and displaying "appropriate" behavior. One teacher wrote, "A" showed amazing focus and dedication... She tuned out all distractions and showed that she cared about working hard on her conference presentation!" Similarly, another teacher wrote, "E" stayed incredibly focused and engaged with her work over the course of a 2-day assessment!" Appropriate behavior that was recognized within the Black girls included but was not limited to completing assigned tasks with a "voice level 0", being "on task and politely following directions," "doing the right thing automatically when others are not," "being respectful of expectations," and acting with integrity when running errands for a teacher.

Finding #2: Black girls were intentionally disrupting the learning experiences of themselves and others, and some did not demonstrate a willingness to change.

Another theme in the teachers' narrative descriptions is that some Black girls were intentionally disrupting the learning experience for themselves and others and did not demonstrate a willingness to change. Due to the number of teachers' narratives for this finding, a purposeful sampling of excerpts to represent was conducted. The selection criterion for the excerpts below included the type of incident and the resulting consequence/instructional time lost. A priority was placed on incidents with severe consequences (such as suspensions) or depth of instructional time lost.

Generally speaking, teachers characterized Black girls' disruption of the learning experiences at Charter X as calling out in class, play-fighting with peers during class or during transitions, not completing classwork or participating in the lesson, or not

following the teacher's directions whether in class or not and skipping class. Teachers wrote that often Black girls wanted to sit near their friends and disengage by play fighting or "joning," a Black colloquium for playfully joking in conversation with peers.

In some instances, teachers provided additional context to the incident by describing the student's actions. For instance, when describing a student's *perceived* lack of integrity, a teacher wrote of an incident where a Black girl took crafting wire that did not belong to her during the class. Although the teacher asked the student to return the art supplies, the student did not and "hid it in her coat" instead. Then, this student "left the building with the materials." The teacher shared that they were able to retrieve the items from the student; however, it was after class when she transitioned back to the main middle school building. When teachers engaged with the Black girls who exhibited this behavior to redirect them, they noted that some Black girls "simply ignored" their requests. For instance, when one Black girl was asked to spit out her gum when she arrived at the class, the student agreed and walked over to the trash can as if she were spitting out the gum. However, a few minutes later, the teacher wrote that the student was still chewing gum. As a result, the teacher issued a consequence to the student. In another incident, a teacher noted that one of their Black girl students complained of having a headache, but the teacher gave this student a consequence when she decided to walk out of class. The rationale cited was that the student "walked out of class without permission."

In some instances, the teachers wrote that some Black girls responded in a way that lacked respect. One teacher reported that a student "responded in a disrespectful tone, words, and demeanor" and did not stop the "disruptive" conversation. Another

student responded to a teacher by saying, "idgaf," which translates into, "I don't give a *expletive*" In another incident, a teacher wrote of a Black girl who arrived late to class without reason. After providing the student with instructions for the quiz, the student insisted on using their materials. After being reminded several times that it was a "closed book quiz," the student threw her materials on the floor. The teacher wrote in the incident report that the student was disrespectful in her "tone and actions." When a teacher asked a Black girl student to stop talking during class, the teacher wrote that the student responded, "blah blah blah" and also "stomp[ed] her feet loudly. This student also wandered around the room, and when redirected, the student mimicked the teacher's voice and told the teacher to get away from her.

Similarly, teachers wrote about their interactions with the same Black girl, "A," and what they perceived as untruths and disrespect. For instance, one teacher wrote,

> "A" came out of community meeting (no permission from a teacher) she went to the water fountain, pulled out a piece of candy put it in her mouth "Ms. C" [a Black woman] saw her. I asked, "A" did you just put candy in your mouth? "You need to spit it out." She lied to me [, and] continued to chew and swallow the candy.

Another said,

> "A" skipped Spanish Class today. "Ms. N" [a Black woman] checked in w/her in the hallway, and she stated that she had already been to class. This was not so." Ms. C" [a Black woman] escorted her to class two minutes before dismissal. "A" missed a Spanish class quiz and homework assignment due today.

In another incident, when describing this student's interaction with a peer, a teacher wrote,

> "A" called a classmate a black mutha....and then she stopped. "Ms. N" [a Black woman] debriefed the incident with "A." "A" insisted that there is nothing wrong with being black or a mother, so she did nothing wrong.

When describing the student's engagement in class, a teacher also wrote,

> "A" failed to meet baseline class expectations during the drama assessment today (voice level, zero; stay in your seat; refrain from distracting behaviors). After her TAB, she continued to loudly disrupt class. I tried to check in with her afterward, and she walked away without permission, saying, "I ain't gonna talk to you."

In another incident, a teacher wrote of a Black girl refusing to follow multiple staff members' directions.

> "A" was skipping class and was found located in another room where there was a substitute. When redirected, "A" became disrespectful to both "Ms. C" and Ms. S" [both Black women]. As a result, she was sent to "Ms. S'" office for some time out of class; she still continued and, at one point, left the office without permission. "Ms. S" found her in the girl's bathroom.

Many teachers described Black girls who left a classroom without permission, but for different reasons. For instance, one teacher wrote of a student who kept leaving class and, as a result, received redirections from the teacher and an administrator.

> [She] entered class and quickly exited without permission. She re-entered and engaged with the teacher in an argument over why she was in trouble for leaving. Though directed to her seat and given multiple opportunities, she was unable to follow directions. She again left class without permission. When re-entering, she was unable to speak in a respectful tone with the teacher and was pulled aside by an administrator to call home. She later met with the teacher over next steps and has agreed to get express permission from the teacher moving forward for any needs she might have.

Another teacher wrote of "K," who decided to attend another class because they did not get along with another teacher. She wrote,

> At the end of my lab class today (during last period), "K" came up to me and said something to the effect of, "thanks for letting me be in here," and it wasn't until then that I realized that she's not actually supposed to be in my lab class, and she had been [there] the whole 45 minutes. It didn't immediately occur to me because many of her classmates ... are also in that lab, so seeing her with them didn't trigger any alarms in my head. But when she came up to me at the end, I told her, "K," I never gave you permission to skip your lab class and be here. Which lab are you supposed to be in?" She replied, "Ms. D's" [a white woman] math lab, but she do

> too much; I don't wanna be in there. I wanna be in here with y'all." I told her that what she had done by just not going to her assigned class and sitting in the back of another class and pretending she belonged there was the same thing as skipping a class, and that she had earned a referral by doing that. She seemed somewhat surprised and asked me to not give her a referral, but I explained that our rules are very clear about students going to the classes they're supposed to be in. She wasn't rude or arguing with me in the process, and then she left to go pack up to leave.

Another teacher wrote of another Black girl who became upset because her cellphone was taken away. Several staff members attempted to calm the student down. The teacher wrote,

> [She] came out of [the] whole school community meeting while younger classes were exiting the gym. She seemed upset--talking fast and loud, demanding that "Ms. A" [a Black woman] give her phone back. She said she needed to call her Mom. I tried to direct her into a quiet space to calm down. She went into 102 and picked up the phone to call her Mom, so I hung up for her and insisted that she couldn't call right now and that she could solve this problem when she was calm. Students came into 102, so we left and went into [the administrator's] office, and again, she tried to call her Mom, and I hung up for her. She continued to demand that "Ms. A" give her phone back, and she needed to call her Mom. [She] then left and went to the front desk and demanded "Ms. A" give her the phone. "Ms. P [a Black woman] acknowledged that she was upset, and that was ok, but she refused to let [her] talk to her that way. "Ms. P," told her that "Ms. A" had given her the phone and [she] could pick it up at the end of the day. "Ms. P" offered that she could talk with "Ms. A" about it. I suggested that it would be better to talk with "Ms. A" once she had calmed down, but she immediately walked up the stairs.

Another teacher wrote of a Black girl who left class because she disagreed with the teacher's directive.

> [She] was asked to work with her small group on her acting scene. She started yelling that she was not going to work with certain people. She stormed out of the classroom into the hall. I tried to conference with her to make an alternate plan, but she repeatedly shouted at me to get out of her face. I told her that I could not leave her in the hall and that she could sit w/ "Mrs. M" [a Black woman/school administrator], at which point she took off running down the stairs. She returned about a minute later and stood outside of the class. I asked her to either come in or go to "Mrs. M." She continued to shout at me, and as an 8th-grade student passed her way, she shouted, "you ugly, boy; get out of my face," and then she ran down the steps again. I called "Ms. S" to intervene.

A similar reaction was described for another student in another incident. However, a theme that this researcher noticed is that the same Black female staff member, Ms. S, was

requested by teachers to speak with the Black girls, or many Black girls sought out Ms. S themselves.

> [She] was on the wrong website during class and played a video aloud on her computer. I quietly asked her to close her computer. She yelled that she was not doing anything. I quietly asked her again to close her computer and please take a break. [She] misunderstood this as a direction to leave the classroom, and she walked out of class. She returned after spending about 20 minutes in the hallway. I then attempted to conference with her in the classroom, explaining that she should not have been outside of class. She began yelling in front of the class that she was "taking a break outside." I asked her to match my volume, which was at a whisper, but she was upset and continued to yell. To deescalate, I asked her to wait on the bench outside [the principal's] office. [She] checked in with Ms. S, and they discussed the value of being ready to listen.

In the above example, Ms. S spoke with the student, and they discussed the value of listening to teachers. In another incident, Ms. S observed a student's interaction and attempted to intervene. Ms. S' narrative is below.

> During the hallway transition on the 2nd floor, [she] shouted aggressively at another student that she was going to slap the sh** out of him. She screamed this in front of multiple adults, including an administrator. With that, I asked her to step into the break-out space, away from students, to chat with me. I asked her what she said, and she shared with me that she wanted to hit him because of something he did to her, and then she escalated and [began] to curse me out. At one point, she put her hand close to my face, almost to the point of touching my glasses. I asked her to move her hand and guided her away from my face, and she began to yell at me and curse me out and call me all sorts of derogatory names. Students had then moved into their classes as she continued to shout at me. I asked "Ms. R" to bring her to "Mrs. M's" office and that I would go to her teachers now to ensure they give her work to do outside of the classroom. She eventually went with "Ms. R" as I waited and attempted multiple times to get in touch with her mother about the threat to a student and major disrespect to me.

In another intervention, a teacher wrote of her attempt to facilitate a conversation between two students in a perceived altercation. The conversation failed, and the student left the teacher's space and went to Ms. S.

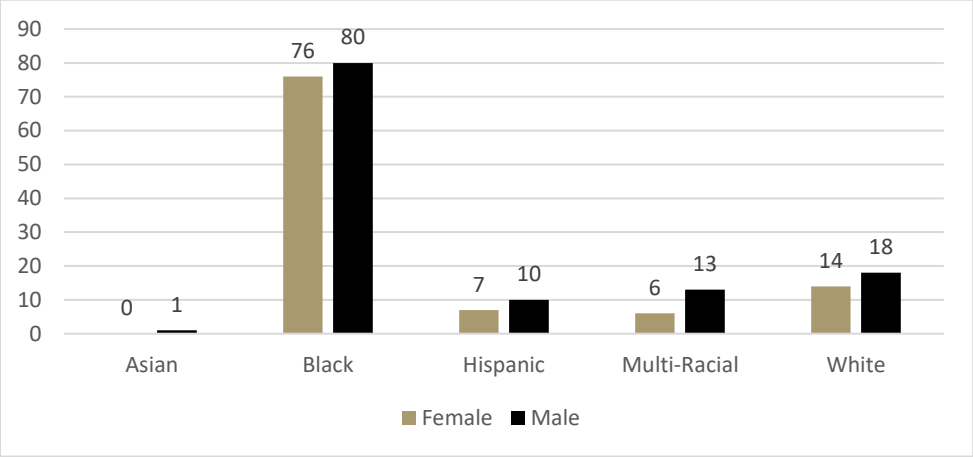
> I heard a lot of noise in the hallway, and when I stepped out, I could tell that someone ran to the stairwell; I opened the door and saw a student with her hands-on "H." She had her hands on the back of her as if she was trying to get her up, and "H" had her hands up either trying to protect herself from the student or hit her back; neither girl looked upset or angry. I had both of them go inside my office and asked what the problem is. The question was geared towards what is at the root of their issue/relationship because there have been several physical interactions between them that appear as play fighting but could be something more. Both girls said nothing, and "H" eventually got up and left the office, I called after her, but she continued to walk away; I had to jog/run after her, and she went into Ms. S' office. While in there, she would not follow any of my directions; I called her mother, who then came to talk with us.

Through the examples provided, the teachers wrote of how the Black girls disrupted their learning experience and the learning experience of others. In response to the expectations set by the teachers and the schools, the teachers wrote of Black girls who left the classroom and the steps that were followed, including, in some instances, relying on other staff members to respond to the Black girls.

RQ2: What are the perspectives and experiences of Black girls who attend Charter X?

Before introducing the findings that respond to this research question, it is important to situate these findings in demographic information about the students and isolating Black girls. During the 2021-2022 school year, the time of this capstone study, 216 students were enrolled in Charter X. Figure 12 provides a breakdown of student demographics by racial and gender identities.

Figure 12 Charter X Students by Racial and Gender Identities



Black girls represented 35% of the overall middle school student population of the students at the time. As discussed earlier, this capstone study engaged in the purposeful sampling of Black girls enrolled in the 8th grade due to their likely matriculation during the 2019-2020 school year when they were in the 6th grade. Fourteen eighth-grade Black girls were enrolled during the 2021-2022 school year, and they represented 18% of the Black girl population at Charter X. Of the fourteen girls, ten participated in the focus group and completed the survey.

Sample of Student Survey Results

Most girls in the focus group were thirteen years old (Figure 13) and had attended Charter X for more than five years (Figure 14).

Figure 13: Age of Focus Group Participants

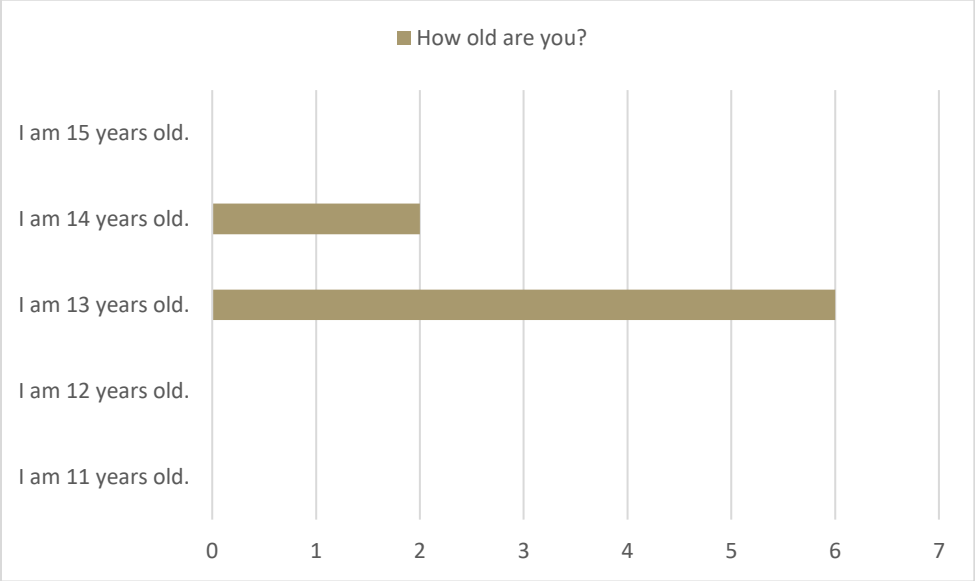
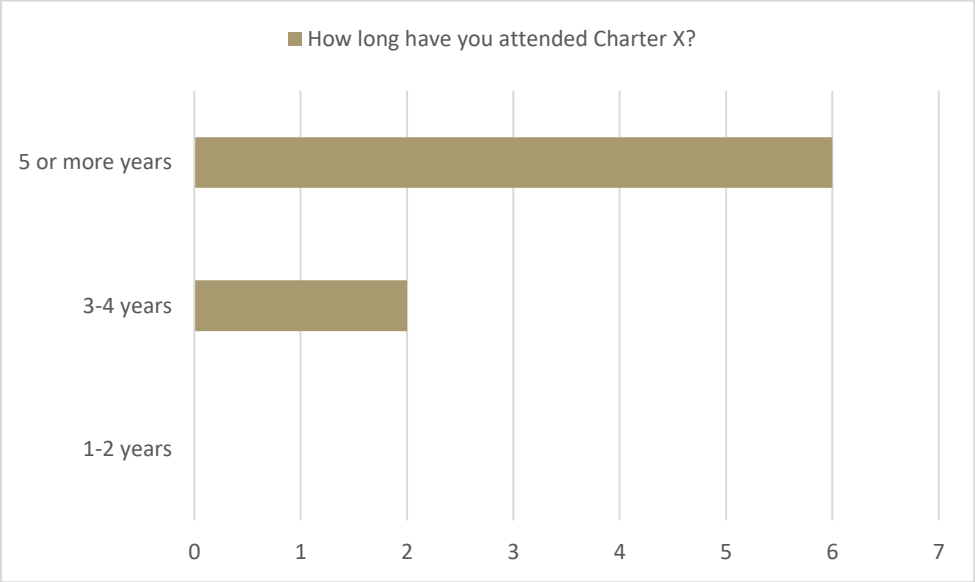


Figure 14: Length of Charter X Enrollment



The results were mixed regarding whether people at their school understood them as a person (Figure 15). However, about half of the girls believed their peers showed them some respect (Figure 16).

Figure 15: Survey Results (Understanding)

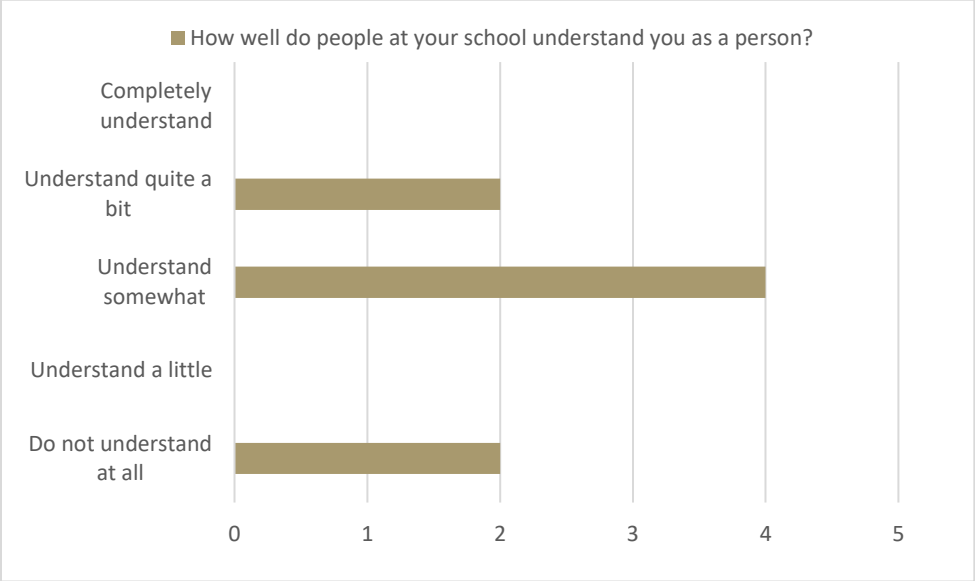
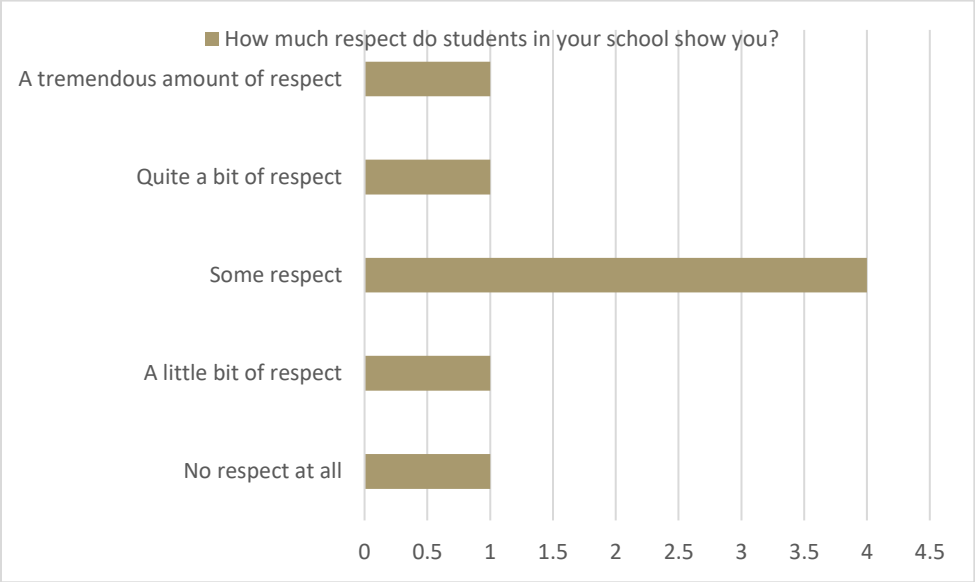


Figure 16: Survey Results (Peer Respect)



The focus group also responded to excerpted questions from the Respectability Scale (Jefferson, 2019). For instance, most expressed the importance of being Black (Figure 17) and that Black people act responsibly in public (Figure 18).

Figure 17: Survey Results (Respectability – Black Identity)

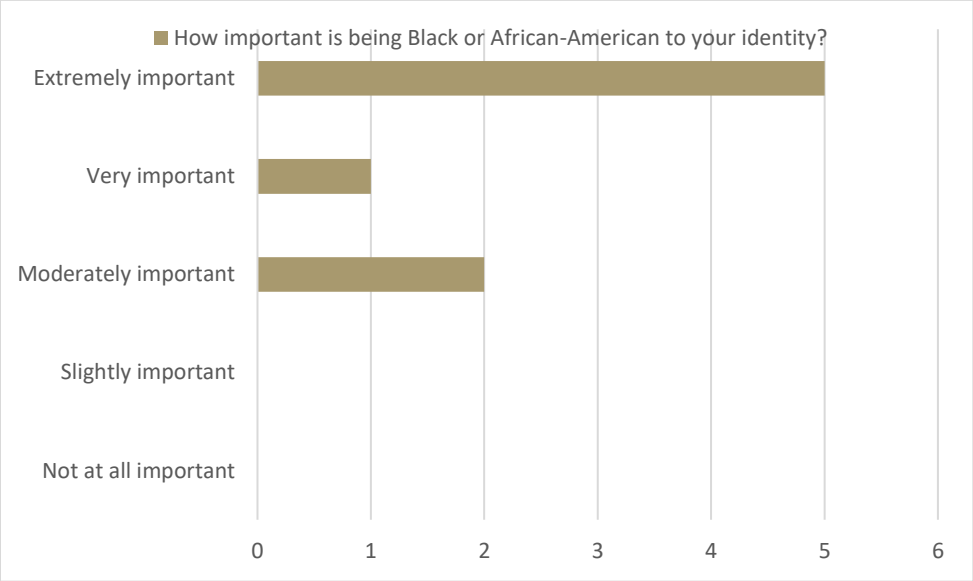
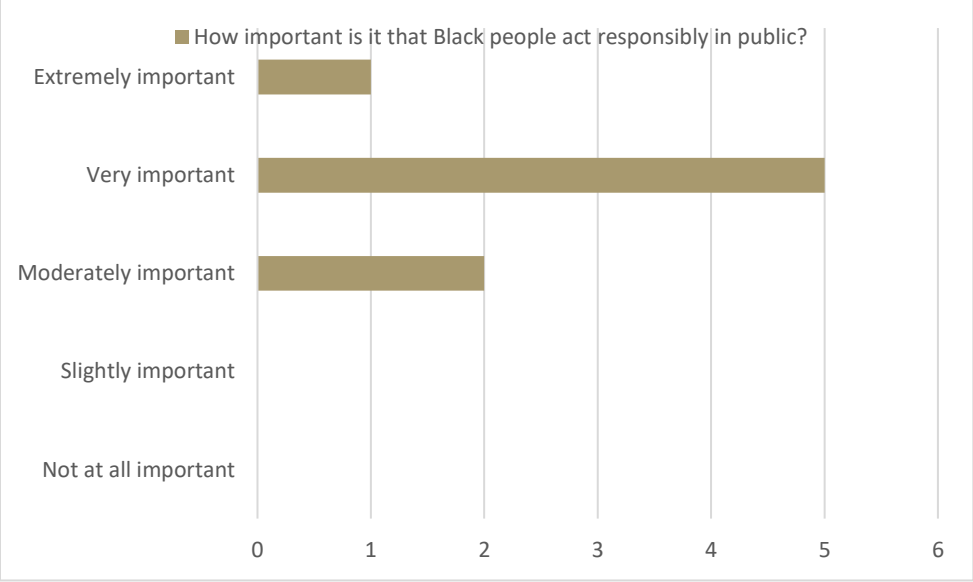
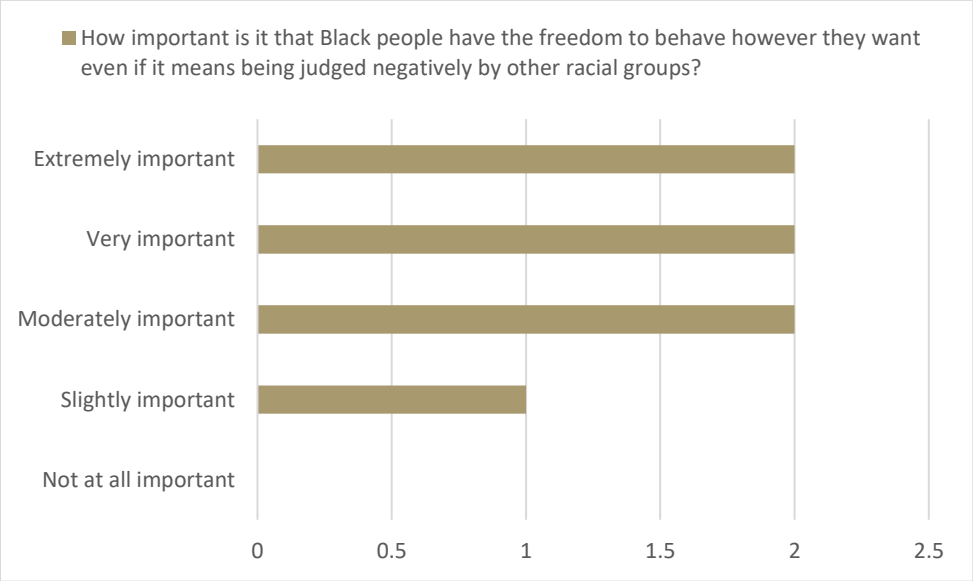


Figure 18: Survey Results (Respectability – Public Black Behavior)



Similarly, the Black girls expressed importance concerning how Black people should comport themselves in public (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Survey Results (Respectability – Public Black Behavior Judgement)



Finding #1: Black girls believe that there is an ideal girl who is accepted (or rejected) by their teachers and peers, which causes internal tension for them.

When describing their opinion of the ideal female student to their teachers, many of the girls agreed with "C" s point that,

> [From] a teacher's perspective, [the ideal student] is someone who's always going to pass all the learning stuff. They see the perfect person as some who is quiet, someone who sits down and is quiet the whole time, who doesn't ask a question unless it's actually a necessary question. Someone who does their work completes it with good evidence, good analysis, they have a good flow, everything is spot on, so it's less work for them or something. But it's like trying to make someone perfect, and they're not."

This idea of perfection rang true for other girls who expressed their opinion that none of the students were perfect. Yet, they believed that teachers were looking for perfection and only looked at how students looked on the outside and not within. Teachers, they perceived, just wanted someone to do good schoolwork and did not realize that students can be one way in class, "but that's not who they are out of class. That's not who they are, probably as a person. That's just the person that they are in class." "S" shared her opinion that teachers want the ideal students to "be like a robot" who "can't talk" or "breathe too loudly" because the teacher will become angry. So, the ideal student has to "sit there on the computer, sit down in the same hard seat all day and just do what they tell you to do."

From the student's perspective, the Black girls believed that the ideal girl was likely someone who was "probably very popular, [and] very known by sixth and seventh graders." Others shared that the ideal student was active in extracurricular activities and probably received "perfect" grades. While "everybody else in the class is getting threes... somehow, she's getting fives, and nobody else is getting fives," "C" shared. The girls were puzzled how a student could even achieve a score of a 5 in class because it was rare. One girl concluded that "It's clear favoritism from the teachers." The desire for high grades caused the girls to share that from their peers' perspective; the ideal student was likely in competition with other students. "It's kind of a jealousy thing," one student shared. "You are always trying to compete with that person to get higher with them and be them. And people who you've been with forever are just trying to compete with you and do all that stuff."

When this researcher inquired about which students' teachers hold these expectations, A student shared,

> It's every one of them now. When you've been here for so long and the way people treat you at this school, you kind of start losing respect for most of the people here to the point where if you don't have respect for other people and they don't have respect for you, it's like just everybody's coming for each other no matter what. And then eventually, they'll come to the conclusion that they're not you or you're not them."

It is important to note that this student's use of "people" references other Charter X middle school students.

During the conversation, this researcher noticed that a student who usually sat upright in the classroom observations sat with her arms folded around her waist and hunched over. To students, "S" added, "You have to look a certain way, you have to dress a certain way, you can't be this too tall, too short. They want you to wear what stuff you're wearing now." She motioned across the room at "K," who sat quietly and listened. "C" piped up and agreed. "So, she's [referencing "K"] in say the popular club or whatever, then they would want her to wear what the popular girls are wearing: Crop tops. Skinny jeans. Fly shoes. Their hair has to be a certain way." In response to what "C" and "S" said, "K" shared that her experience was not "as rosy" as they perceived. She thought that many of her peers judged her quite a bit.

She shared:

> If you come in with a new hairstyle, you're getting judged for that. Everybody just always has something to say about me. Me and my friend are just the talk of the town. We're just in everybody's conversation. I come to school with braids. [Someone says,] "Oh, come on, you got force to do." I come into school with my hair pulled down, [someone says] "Oh, your hair looks ugly. Are you a wife? Because you have your hair too short now." It's just something that somebody's always got to say.

In agreement with "K," "C" recalled the time when "K" came to school with braids. According to "C," "K" constantly asked the Black girls in her friend group, "Does my hair

look that bad? Is it really that bad?" The Black girls, including "C," said to "K," "It's not that bad. It's just something new that people don't like." "C" opined that "K" was "freaking out over it because they were making fun of her."

Throughout the conversation, "S" shared her discomfort with the overall school environment. In this instance, about the discussion about hair acceptance, she shared, "Like what happened with "K," I kind of was a victim of it, but not really. Because if you say you don't like my hair, okay, cool, I'm not going to change unless I want to. But once you get older, you're kind of like influenced by other people's opinions." Another student agreed with "S" and said that it was "peer pressure," to which "S" responded,

> Yeah. It's like you're being peer pressured to do this or be this certain type of person and stuff like that. One time, I wore something, and a small group of people are like, "Oh my gosh, that looks so nice," and stuff like that. Like, "Thank you," because I've never really been complimented a lot.

However, the same people who complimented her on her style choices that day also attempted to tell "S" what she should or should not wear. This researcher inquired if natural hair was more accepted in the school. "C," said someone told her, "You look way more beautiful with fake hair than your real hair." "S" shared that some students told her that she did not have hair "like a Black girl" and offered that she sometimes straightened her hair because "if you have an afro, it's not accepted. It's like, "Oh, your hair is nappy," or "it's dry," or stuff like that. So yeah, I just have my hair in braids or stuff like that.

This researcher asked the girls which students were most likely to make them feel uncomfortable about their style choices, and the responses were mixed. In some opinions, it was the boys, and in other views, the girls. Overall, there seemed to be some mistrust in either group. One girl said, "The boys will taunt you, laugh in your face, point.

The girls will ... Well, there are certain people you know that even if you don't look your best, they'll still probably lie to your face and make you feel better."

"C" also shared how other students responded to each other, "there's people who'll say, "Well, you look good in this but maybe you should wear something else another time." In response to this, "C" shared a little bit of her internal dialogue,

> It's like, "Well, that's not what I want to wear. This is what I want wear." "Yeah, but she'd look better." "This is what I want to wear." They'd be like, "Okay, but I'm just saying you'd look better." It's like a whole type of thing where you try to have a conversation with somebody, and they make it into some type of mind manipulating thing. And now you're confused on, "Do I know myself? Do I really know who I am?"

The girls noted a shift in their school experience when they noticed that what a person wears or how they do their hair matters. The shift occurred right before they began middle school when "a new wave of Black kids" came. These new students did not attend Charter X during their elementary years as many of the girls during the focus group. When the shift occurred, many girls felt like their friendships were tested, and they began to notice tensions in the conversations with their peers and the expectations they held for each other. For instance, one girl shared that she stopped talking to certain people because "if you try to say one thing, they'll [curse] at you or maybe [say] some type of slur or calling you things. But I don't want to do that. I just want to have a conversation. Doesn't have to end up to be like that."

As a result of this type of response, the girls agreed that they did not feel heard, lost respect for some of their peers, did not trust them and tried to avoid drama. "You know telephone game, and how when you go around, the story changes over time?" "C," asked. Well, "So now people are saying some things about you and starting rumors that are not true and calling you names out of your own name because they're not true. And

you're like, "Well, how did we get there?" "Well, blah, blah, blah said that this said, and blah blah said, blah, blah, blah said." And now you're some type of slur. When this researcher inquired about the type of slur, "C" and other girls mentioned the "N-word," the "F slur," and the R slur, which is "targeted against disabled people with the disease." In response to these slurs, the one girl shared, "I don't want to do this. Why is this the environment here?"

"K" also shared,

> When I date a certain person, "Oh, you're matched up with this person. That's your boyfriend. That's this." There's the athletes; there's the hood ghetto ones, there's the good nerdy ones, there's the nerdy weird ones.

"K" looked at "S" when she said, "he nerdy, weird one"; "S" put her head down. "No offense," "K," said. "S," still engaged in the conversation, but now her arms wrapped tightly around her torso spoke to the ground as she shared,

> I've been a victim of it almost the whole time I've been here. At this point, I really could care less because it happened so much over time. Basically, I don't feel safe anywhere. Not even at home. I hide myself a lot from everyone. Even my friends like "C" and "M" even though I'm close with them, I won't tell them everything about myself because I just feel like I'll be judged for it. And that's my biggest fear, which is why I don't really talk to a lot of people because I'm scared of getting judged and stuff like that. But I've been judged by a lot of people, which is why I've been very more quiet in a sense you would say. Because when I first got here, everyone was so nice and stuff like that, but over the years, my friend group has gotten way smaller because everyone's different. Everyone has other friends and stuff like that. It's just hard to say stuff like that because I can't even say it at home, which is why I'm not safe anywhere, which is why I'm trying to get away from everyone as fast as possible.

Noticing the dynamics in the conversation, this researcher then paused the conversation and shifted it to one of encouragement and acceptance for the Black girls in the focus group.

The dynamics in the conversation during the focus group between "S" and "K" also reflect the survey results. While 75% of the Black girls said that they would recommend the school to someone else, 75% of the Black girls also shared that they felt like they only belonged "somewhat" or not at all in the school and also that they believed that they only mattered "somewhat."

Finding #2: Some Black girls did not think that the classroom environment, whether virtual or in-person was considerate of their needs.

During the focus group, the girls had an opportunity to share what it was like to be a student from their perspective. Many shared that they did not think that the classroom environment, whether virtual or in-person was considerate of their needs. For instance, due to the global coronavirus pandemic, which forced schools to transition to virtual learning, some girls expressed their need for social interaction with their peers. However, the school did not provide that opportunity for them. "J" shared that virtual learning was very independent. Without the social aspect of school and the ability to see her peers, virtual learning was "boring" because "you're only doing the academics." Although school occurred virtually, "J" shared that she and other students just wanted to work in a group because it allowed them to "get more work done that way" and "we're just more productive." Doesn't this tie back to the "we" ethos you discussed in your lit review?

In addition to missing the social interaction during virtual learning, some girls also missed the opportunity to do hands-on projects. For instance, "C" referenced her experience in science class before the transition to virtual learning when they had opportunities to do hands-on projects. She shared that "I've been doing hands-on

learning my whole entire life basically, so that's probably the way that I learn the best." In her opinion, although there were experiences, the students were required to "write about what you thought would happen... if you could do this?" She shared that they didn't want to write about that; they wanted to "do the experiment." Although back in person now, "C" said that she did learn to adapt, she felt like she "wasn't getting as much of an education" because "I was used to learning hands-on." "K" discussed the stress that she felt during online learning. "It was just so stressful" and "boring," she said. "I just can't engage like that. I'd rather just be in person and be hands-on engaged instead of being on the computer."

Now that the girls were back in school, some girls shared that teachers wanted them to be more mature than they felt they were ready to be. One girl shared,

> I feel like, in middle school, a lot of teachers expect more from you, a lot more maturity now, since you're in middle school and they threaten like, "you guys can't be acting like this in high school; they won't accept this." Try to make kids scared of stuff. [In] elementary school, they didn't really care about anything as long as you did your work.

Sincere shared the following about herself, "I am the type of person, I'm very hyper. I'm a very hyper person. I just always have a lot of energy," and because of this, it was hard for her to "sit down the entire hour and be quiet." Although she sometimes was able to sit down for the entire class period, she did not feel like it was a good thing and did not feel that it allowed her to learn her best. "K" spoke of a teacher who sometimes allowed the students to work in pairs or small groups, and because of it, they were able to socialize during some events though they were required to whisper with one another. However, allowing them to work in pairs or small groups was not consistent. As a result, some students shared that they attempted to advocate for themselves and others for that type

of learning, and the teacher told them that "some people need to work in silence," but no one agreed with her. One student said, "I've never seen anybody sit up and be like, "Oh, I need to work in silence. No, no, no.

The discussion about the requirement of working independently or in silence caused "M" to say, "Some teachers expect too much of us. They be like, "Oh, you need to grow up," but I'm still in the house playing Roblox." Roblox is a videogame often played by elementary children. "Ko" spoke of a teacher who said to the class, "Ya'll are [in the] eighth grade, [so] act like it. In another example, "M" said, "We could be laughing at a joke, and they'd be like, "Oh, that's not even funny. You need to grow up," or "That's really childish." "M" shares her internal thought, "Are we not children?" Their reaction to the adults who wanted them to be more mature than they were ready for was one of sadness. "K," said they, "wanted me to be this way instead of who I am already. So, I'm pushing myself to be who [they] want me to be instead of who I want to be.

Finding #3: Some Black girls did not always feel academically supported by their teachers during virtual learning. This feeling contrasts with how the students think about the academic support this school year.

Although the school has returned to in-person learning, during the focus group conversation, the Black girls reflected on the difference between their school experience this year compared to the previous school year. A theme that emerged in the findings is that some Black girls did not always feel academically supported by their teachers during virtual learning. During virtual learning, the consensus amongst the girls was that they did not feel academically supported by the teachers. Many girls discussed the assignment of

activities and their perceived lack of support to complete the assignments. "M" shared, "They would assign assignments that we never learned, and we never went over, and then expect you to get it done and then be like, "I'm going to call your mother because you decided not to do work." And we be like, " What you talking about?" Although they were motivated to complete the assignments, they felt that often, the work was overwhelming, and it gave some of them anxiety. "J" spoke up quite a bit during this particular conversation segment. She shared, "It was just so much to keep up with. It was like, you finally turn something in, [then] something new was assigned." Although she did not want to miss assignments, she often could not keep up with them all. This was frustrating to many of the girls because not only did they feel like "college students," but it was not fair to them that the work assigned during their virtual learning would be reflected within their transcripts. These transcripts would be reviewed by high school admissions counselors as they prepared to submit applications. As a result of this understanding, "we had a lack of motivation," one girl shared. "K" shared that virtual learning made her more antisocial. Citing its awkwardness, she felt that virtual learning made her even more antisocial, and she "hated it so much." She felt like she "was doing homework for eight hours" and just meeting deadlines. As a result, she said, it "gave me a lot of anxiety. So, I just didn't do it. Yeah. I hated it." Independent of the overwhelming assignments, some girls did not feel supported during the actual virtual learning class period. They recognized the teachers who were "quick to rush off the Zoom call." To save content discussed during class, they would "have to go on [their] phone to the Zoom app and screenshot the content because they knew it would be deleted.

Another girl felt that teachers were pushing them outside of their comfort zone too much during the virtual learning year too soon. For instance, she said,

> There's a point where you know that a teacher is pushing you out of your comfort zone to do better and stuff, but sometimes you can be pushed a little too far to your limits, and it's like, "Okay, but I've pushed myself yesterday. Today, I just want to reflect on that, see what went well, what went bad, and maybe I'll try it again another time and see how that goes." But at school, it's like Monday, you're going to push you to do this, Tuesday, he's going to push you to do that, Wednesday, we're going to push you to do this. And you're going to keep getting pushed and pushed.

The entire virtual learning and quarantine experience weighed heavily on one girl who spoke about her mental health and spending time in a patient facility. While this reflection may or may not be connected to the statement from the previous girl, the reflection is apropos. The girl shared,

> I had to go to this counselor lady, and then I ended up being inside the... You know how Children's Hospital have like a mental, it's not an asylum, but it's a mental thing we have to spend the night in? Well, it's kind of used like a mental asylum, I don't know. I don't know what it's called, but it's that mental thing. I've been inside that before; I stayed there for six days, I think.

Some girls did discuss ways that they learned to adjust to virtual learning and advocate for their needs. However, the consensus was that changing to virtual learning was not always the case and depended on the relationship with the teacher. "C" discussed her interactions with one teacher, whom she believed was supportive during office hours. "For me," she said, "there were times in class where I didn't understand anything and teachers weren't very communicating during this time, [so] I would just go to office hours." During this time, she told her teacher that she wanted to improve her MAP score. MAP is a standardized assessment used by the school. The teacher created a 1:1 book club and ordered a book for "C" using her own money. She shared that she read and discussed

the book with her teacher, and as a result, her MAP score went up 6 points. "She was very helpful for me," "C" shared.

As the student survey data support, the theme of lack of teacher support contrasts with how the students feel about their academic support this school year. For instance, when asked if teachers made them explain their answers in class to demonstrate their knowledge of the content, 75% of the girls said that teachers "frequently" made them explain their answers in class and make sure that they understood the material in class. An identical result is that teachers encouraged them "quite a bit" or a tremendous amount to do their best" in their class. Almost all of the participants shared that teachers have "quiet" or "extremely" high expectations of them.

Finding #4: Some Black girls do not always feel emotionally safe at school, contributing to their feelings of mistrust of adults at school.

Another theme that emerged in the focus group conversation is that some Black girls did not always feel emotionally safe in school. This feeling of emotional unsafety contributed to their feelings of mistrust of adults in the school. Based on the conversations with the girls, emotionally safe is conceptualized as being able to share how one feels about a situation and trust that the person with whom they shared their feelings will use this knowledge not to make the sharer feel uncomfortable in the future situations. A girl recalled telling all of her teachers that she did not feel comfortable with public speaking in one shared memory. She said one teacher; and despite this, the teacher would "always make [her] do it, even though [she] told her countless times that she was "uncomfortable with it." Of all of the teachers that she shared this with, she believed that

one "actually listened," and that is the reason why she does not "like any of [her] other seventh grade teachers."

Another girl shared a personal event that occurred with her outside of school regarding her feelings of suicide. After the event, she shared what occurred with her teacher and said that she "trusted her with" the information. The teacher asked her if it was okay to share the information with the counselor, and the student agreed but did not want all of the details shared. A few days later, the student noted that she was in class, and there was a lesson on the very topic that she had discussed with the teacher. She said, "She didn't do the right thing, [instead] she did the opposite of what I asked her. It just made me feel so uncomfortable because I knew it was because of me." She tried to speak with the teacher after the class, and the teacher's response was, "I can't." As a result of this mistrust, the student shared that she "didn't really communicate with her" because she made her feel uncomfortable. Also, she shared that "everybody eventually found out. All of my peers and stuff like that, but I didn't want any of my teachers to know, but they found out eventually." When everyone discovered what occurred with her, she said she "was just annoyed, and it made [her] feel some way because, why would you do that?"

Some Black girls agreed that when they shared incidents of feeling bullied or peer pressured by their peers, some teachers were not supportive of their emotional needs. However, they were aware of the different student relationships and dynamics. "C" shared,

> They know who you're friends with and who you're not, whom you have connections with and who you're not." It's know like... It's the same thing like who's dating who, who's doing this and that, who broke up. They know everything, and it's just kind of like everybody is in your business.

One student said, "When you tell teachers about this type of stuff, they tell you that bullying happens everywhere. People are going to say certain things about you, and you just have to let it slide and stuff." Although this advice was accurate, it did not provide the emotional support that the girls needed in those moments, and one of the girls shared that the teacher's response made them feel like bullying or peer pressure was okay. Teachers telling them that, "You're going to be fine," "What they're saying is not true," [and to] "Let it go" was not enough. "C," said, "It makes me feel better, but does it make me feel like I got justice or something? Not really. It makes me feel like I haven't done anything, and they're going to do it still."

Finding #5: Some Black girls felt that being disciplined was biased and often connected to their teacher's ego.

Another theme in the data is that some Black girls perceived their school discipline as biased and often connected to their teacher's ego. "J" recalled an incident on Valentine's Day during her 7th-grade year. While in the hallway, a male teacher tried to give her a referral for being late to class, but she had just arrived at school. She did not understand why she was receiving a referral because she had only been in the building for a few moments and did not understand what she had done wrong. The teacher began to follow her to her locker and repeatedly began to say that she was [disrespectful]. Annoyed, she shared what she said to him, "Scoot over, get away from me. I'm trying to open my locker, trying to put my stuff [away]. Did I ask you to come to join me? Am I not doing it fast enough? She believed that the teacher was following her to provoke an adverse reaction. In the referral, he shared how he felt disrespected by her asking him to

step away while trying to open her locker but did not share what he did to contribute to it.

Additionally, she believed that although she was annoyed by the teacher at that moment, asking him to move out of the way was a legit request as she shared with the group, "You know how when you're opening your locker, you have to tilt to the opposite direction?" Then, she motioned with her arm. Other girls nodded in agreement. In frustration, "J" shared that she went to speak with a school administrator about the unfairness of the situation. She became frustrated when the administrator, who affirmed that she "shouldn't have gotten that referral," could not remove the referral. She believed that administrators "take the teacher's word over the students." In their opinion, not listening to students was unfair because "half the time, teachers are sneaky" and "if you say something that hurts their feelings, they have authority over you, meaning they're going to give you a consequence every single time." "J" believed that her request was not disrespectful; it was a statement. This is not the job for you if you feel disrespected by people asking you to scoot over."

This researcher inquired if they thought that teachers believed them. A student responded, "they believe what they want to believe." Another student, affirming the other, shared a time when a teacher attempted to give her a referral for "slamming a computer." Using the laptop in front of her, she demonstrated how she closed the laptop. She closed it softly. However, the teacher referred her because he thought otherwise and wrote in the referral, "She was being very aggressive and slamming computers." At that moment, other students stood up to share that that was not what occurred. However, it was their word against the teachers.

A student shared their opinion to rationalize this: "It becomes a matter of them being embarrassed. It's a pride thing. Even if you weren't in the wrong, and everybody is there to defend you, they are still going to give you something because it's a problem that they were wrong." This researcher inquired if this was a common occurrence with all of their teachers. The girls disagreed but named the specific teachers where this was common. They called both men and women teachers and teachers across different racial groups. In another incident shared, a teacher tried to give everyone a referral on the first day of school. The teacher did not have any work assignments in that class, so some students began doing work for other classes. A student shared, "I literally got a red sheet for doing my ELA homework in her class, but we weren't doing anything else, so it doesn't matter."

A student shared an example of a teacher who accused her of cheating which led to her receiving a referral.

> I remember she gave me a piece of paper before we did the test. She said, "Give it to me after you're done with the test." Then, she forgets. So it's right there, on my chair, because I wasn't going to use it while I was doing the test. So then she came running; she said, "What is this paper right here?" I said, "You gave it to me." "She said, "No, I didn't, I don't remember giving it to you.' I said, 'You gave it to me before class.' She said, "Oh, I meant to give it to somebody else, but that's a referral for cheating.

After receiving a referral, the student shared that her mother was called. Although the student was worried about what the teacher would say, she said that her mother knew that cheating was not like her, so she did not get in trouble at home. The theme of teachers demanding respect from students, although they were not respectful to them, was a pattern across all focus groups. "K" opened up about a substitute teacher who told her to "shut up and sit down" and how it made her "lose respect" for the woman. Her

response was, "Okay, first of all, you're a sub at that. And then you think that you can just tell them to just shut up. I'm not your child." She went to the administrator's office and shared what the substitute teacher said to her in class; as a result, she did not receive a referral.

However, her belief remained the same,

> I just feel like teachers just demand all this respect and think that we should just treat them in that way, treat them any kind of a good way, and then they can just yell and scream and tell us these rude, disrespectful things. I'm not the type of person who will keep on giving you respect. I'm just letting you keep talking to me in that kind of way. I don't think that that's fair, or I don't think that's reasonable. Because if you tell me to shut up and sit down, I'm going to treat you the same type of way that you treat me.

This researcher's classroom observations found another point of evidence to support what the girls were saying about teachers. In one particular observation, this researcher observed an interaction between "K" and two male students and the teacher's response, a white woman. At first, this researcher could not ascertain if the interaction between "K" and the first male student was friendly. However, both students were asked to refrain from engaging with one another by the teacher. The teacher requested "K" to step outside the classroom when the interaction did not stop. "K" was reluctant to leave, citing that the male student was the issue. The male student began yelling at "K" when she said this. The teacher asked "K" to leave the classroom and wait for her in the hallway. It was clear to this researcher, by "K"'s expression, that she did not think that asking her to leave the classroom was fair. Eventually, she did leave the classroom and spoke with the teacher, who was standing in the classroom's doorway. This researcher heard the teacher say to "K," "show me that you are ready to return to class." "K" returned to class, and she began working on the assigned activities with the teacher and another Black girl. Before the end

of class, another interaction occurred between "K" and another male student. "K" was located in the front of the classroom, and the male student was sitting in the back of the classroom. This time, the student yells at "K," "Leave!". The teacher takes "K" by the hand and leads her back outside the school. They speak briefly, and then they return to the school. By this time, it is the end of the class period. The teacher dismisses students based on their "quietness." Although "K" sits quietly, she is dismissed last.

RQ3: What navigational practices do some Black girls use in their experiences at Charter X?

Finding #1: Some Black girls engaged with adults whom they, individually and collectively, could trust.

In their experiences at Charter X, some Black girls shared how they engaged with adults they could trust individually and collectively. All teachers' names are withheld, but the rationale for why teachers trusted them is illuminated. Also, a theme that emerged from these reflections is that students mentioned having trust with Black adults in the school more than any adults of any other racial group. However, they referenced more men than women or nonbinary adults regarding Black adults.

For instance, the students spoke of a male teacher they believed trusted. One student said, "I spend a lot of time with [teacher name redacted], but I can go to him about any situation, and he'll make sure that it's solved. In moments when the students did not feel heard in a situation and were able to get a referral, they believed that they could go to this teacher because he would listen to their perspective and believe what they were saying. Another student affirmed this by sharing that they felt this teacher defended them a lot. All students didn't feel the same about the teacher and shared that

when the teacher became irritated with students, they sometimes took it out on other students and didn't think this was okay. Two additional Black staff members were cited in the conversation about supportive adults they could sit and talk with, realizing they "were pretty cool."

Another student mentioned a Black woman, not employed at the school at the research, who was the only one supportive of them in their middle school years. However, they did not share the rationale behind what made this teacher supportive. In opposition to the mention of this Black woman, a student said, "I don't know. She was nice and all, but I don't know. I didn't. I feel like she was better for outside-of-school things." Here, both girls are saying the same thing; the Black woman was supportive of them but in different ways. It is essential to mention here that after observing the students in their classrooms across several periods, there was a pattern that this researcher noticed in how students interacted with their teachers, which supported what the students were saying. This researcher noticed only one Black woman who taught the students in their classroom sequence. Students were more responsive to the teacher than in classrooms with teachers who shared their gender but not racial identity in this class. For instance, "J" entered a class in one interaction and did not engage with the teacher leading the lunch block. The teacher asked "J" to do something, and "J" did not respond. However, the response differed when a Black woman entered and engaged with "J."

This engagement with Black adults was similar in other observations as well. A male administrator covered a class for an absent teacher in one class. This researcher noticed that the students used their cellphones during class in previous classrooms, although they were not allowed to have them on in school. Upon entering the classroom

of the male administrator, the students were asked to put their cellphones away, and the students did so immediately. Whereas in other classrooms, students spoke over the teacher. In this class period with the administrator, the students were engaged in the lesson with minimal redirections.

Finding #2: Some Black girls use friendships as a navigational practice in schools. However, these friendships are nuanced and not permanently stable.

Finally, another theme found in the Black girl's perspectives and experiences is their use of friendships as a method to navigate the school. However, these friendships are nuanced and not permanently stable, as mentioned previously and here. "D" shared that she "fell out with many people in the previous school year," and many people made new friends. "J" shared that she stopped speaking with "D" because "she did too much." What "she did too much" meant at this moment was unclear to this researcher. However, the girls did share additional context. They were playing Roblox, a video game, and "D" received a message from "J" that made her upset. As the girls explained the situation to this researcher, other girls in the group listened intently. The problem occurred in October, during the previous school year. Then, at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, they encountered each other for the first time and immediately reconnected. "We just ran up and hugged each other," "D" shared. Although it was awkward at first, the girls pushed through and rekindled their friendship.

Earlier, in this study's discussion about the girls' perception of the ideal student, the girls acknowledged the division within their friendship groups. For instance, students spoke of "popular" and "unpopular" students and also "nerdy" and "weird" students. The girls' categorization of students is also supported in the classroom observations by this

researcher. In the classrooms, Black girls often sat near other Black girls. During moments when students were able to work independently (often in classrooms where there was a substitute), all of the Black girls seemed to rely on each other. For instance, if a Black girl arrived at class late, one often noticed that she sat next to another Black girl, and then they would begin working together. It appeared to this researcher that there was an unspoken rule about academically supporting one another.

The girls seemed to be aligned when speaking about boys who crossed the line or students of other racial groups who did the same. In this dynamic, the girls said of a male student they believed was a "punk" because he called "K" "a b*tch." They did not care for this student because they thought he appropriated Black culture. For instance, "J" shared her reaction to this male student's use of the word "sis." She said, "I was like, hold on, brother. What you doing? ..." Although excusing his appropriation as endemic to his proximity to them and other Black students, they agreed that he had crossed the line. "J" stood up for "K" then, but in previous years, she revealed the reason why she had in-school suspensions was a result of tension that she had with "K," whom she characterized as "messy" and who "[talked] out her mouth a lot."

Discussion

At the beginning of this capstone study, within the problem of practice, a question was posed – what might be causing Black girls at Charter X to have more "negative" incidents than any other racial or gender group? This study explored what teachers at Charter X said about Black girls by analyzing their narratives of student incidents, whether "positive" or "negative," during the 2019-2020 school year. This research also explored Black girls' perceptions of their experience as students at Charter X by

providing the space for them to reflect on their experiences in a semi-structured focus group interview and through the completion of a survey. In this section of this capstone study, this research will use the findings presented in the previous section to understand this study's inquiry better. This discussion will refer to the findings and situate them within the context of the literature review and this study's conceptual frameworks.

It is plausible that Black girls at Charter X had more "negative" incidents than any other racial or gender group based on the reasons that follow: as a result of their Black girlhood, the Black girls at Charter X fell outside of the normative ideals of girlhood. Their existence as Black girls and often refusal to assimilate or deny their identities caused them to be misunderstood and always be in tension with the school environment, its teachers, staff, and their peers.

As introduced earlier, Black Girl Cartography, the "study of how and where Black girls are physically and socio-politically mapped in education," provides the tools to see how Black Girlhood is "informed, reformed, stifled by the geopolitical space of the school" (Butler, 2018). This research centers the intersectional identities (race, class, gender, and sexuality) of Black girls through this lens. It draws a connection between the multiple axes of oppression that Black girls experience in education's socio-cultural and geopolitical locations (Butler, 2018). This framework allows this research to notice three trends in the findings that form the structure for this discussion and the rationale for the conclusions. First, Black girls at Charter X must navigate being surveilled by teachers, staff, and peers who hold "identity" expectations. Secondly, Black girls' navigation of the "identity" politics within the school environment requires a consciousness not always present to others within the school. This includes teachers, staff, and other students. As a

result of this, the Black girls at Charter X and the daily decisions that they make are misunderstood. It is within this misunderstanding that harm (or oppression) is perpetuated. In the case of this capstone study, Black girls had more "negative" incidents than any other racial or gender group during the 2019-2020 study.

The findings reveal that teachers, staff, and peers are surveilling black girls at Charter X. It is through the teacher's narratives and Black girl's reflections (this research argues the expression of their interior homeplace), that we learn of this surveillance and of the "identity" politics therein. Black girls at Charter X are navigating a "good" vs. "bad" identity paradigm that places their Black girlhood in tension with the white girl racial, cultural, and gendered framework (Collins, 2004; Deliovsky, 2008; Welter, 1966; Handau & Simien, 2019; hooks, 1995). For example, while commended for their prosocial behaviors, the teacher's praise of the Black girls was rooted in a racialized gender ideology where "weak" and "submissive" attributes were privileged. For instance, in the findings, some of the girls were praised for "quick and calm" transitions between classes, being "super chill and productive" during lab, or "quietly putting things away." One teacher lauded a Black girl by writing, "absolutely excellent work during Expeditions today." However, this teacher also noted, "a few unnecessary high-pitched noises, but otherwise...the best work I saw all day!" Another teacher wrote of her excitement that a student "stayed completely on task the whole math period and finished all her work." In these examples, the Black girls were positively acknowledged. However, the inclusion of words such as "calm," "chill," and "quiet" communicate a belief system that to be accepted as a "good" student requires not only submissiveness but proximity to it through one's voice and body control. When expected of Black girls, these beliefs affirm a

respectability politic that could have been advanced by Black staff members. Unfortunately, some of Black girls at Charter X also communicated similar internalized, yet fluid respectable beliefs. In the discussion about the ideal student, the girls described someone who is "quiet," "sits down... the entire time," "never get[s] in trouble," and does not do her work "always," essentially comporting themselves as "robots" or someone who can be controlled. While some Black girls' experiences at Charter X fall within this description, many, as evidenced by the school data, fall outside this ideal. Teachers wrote of Black girls who they subjectively perceived as speaking untruths, taking items that did not belong to them, engaging in physical and verbal altercations, refusing to do work, and disrespecting authority. In reference to the literature presented in this study, the findings suggest that at Charter X, the "Mammy" controlling image is expected of Black girls due to the "faithful, obedient" servitude attributes and its better alignment to the white girl racial, gender, and cultural framework. The Mammy identity is privileged and in opposition to the Matriarch identity that is "overly aggressively," "unfeminine," and "disruptive," or the Welfare Queen who is "deceptive." Although not explicitly stated in the teacher's narrative descriptions, when reviewed through a critical lens, these controlling images present respectability politics used to control the "identity" of the Black girls.

This discussion advances the idea that Black girls were aware of "identity" politic and resisted. It was through this resistance, the Black girls (although fluid in their understanding and manifestation of it) were acting in ways that were anti-respectable.

We can better understand anti-respectability by situating it in the politics of refusal. Cultural anthropologist Carole McGranahan (2016) writes, "to refuse is to say no.

But, no, it is not just that. To refuse can be generative and strategic, a deliberate move toward one thing, belief, practice, or community and away from another." Refusal, she argues is not another word for resistance, nor "the end to something," but in fact, refusal is an "insistence on the possible over the probable", it "produces or reproduces community" and "illuminate[s] limits and possibilities. Given this, when Black girls choose to refuse the "identity" expectations set upon them, they "imagine Blackness on terms outside of apophatic definitions of whiteness" and open the school environment to the radical subjectivities of their Black identity that not only fuels their collective resistance, but their ultimate survival.

To put it another way, we see examples of this refusal in mainstream media. Belcalis Marlenis Almanzar professionally known as Cardi B, a Puerto-Rican woman rapper rocketed to fame and popularity in 2016 due to her appearances on VH1's Love and Hip Hop and her singles that topped Billboard music charts. Tracks such as "Bodak Yellow", "I Like It' and "WAP" featuring Megan the Stallion permeating the airwaves and served as anthems due to their resonate hooks and memorable melodies. Matos (cite) argues that "Cardi rejects respectability politics by challenging the mainstream embodiment of womanhood with her fashion, cadence, and expression of her sexuality." In response to public criticism, Cardi B (2018) shared her subjectivities on Instagram,

> I'm from the hood, I speak how I speak, I am how I am. I did not choose to be famous people choose me! People followed me on Instagram and the people gave me a platform to introduce my talent. I never asked to be a example or a role model I don't want to change my ways because I'm famous that's why I just mind my business. I'm not apologizing or kill myself because of who I am.

"K," shared a similar reflection to Cardi B in the focus group when she said, they "wanted me to be this way instead of who I am already. So, I'm pushing myself to be who [they] want me to be instead of who I want to be.

Black girls at Charter X are also surveilled by their peers who contribute to the "identity" politics. Thematically, as the girls expressed the interiority of their homeplaces, they spoke of the tension to look or dress a certain way to be accepted by their peers. These revelations illuminate the internalized and externalized racism, sexism, and classism that they must navigate. For example, being told that "fake" hair or Eurocentric hairstyles are more privileged than Black hair in its natural state (which in some instances is referred to as "nappy" in the girl's narratives) is not only racist and sexist but foreshadows the hair discrimination and bias that Black women experience (Robertson, 2022). Readers must also consider the stylistic "recommendations" given to the girls by their peers through the critical lens of classism. Assuming that all girls come from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds erases the experiences of Black girls whose families may not have the economic security to expand clothing purchase decisions. Furthermore, the peer surveillance Black girls at Charter X experience can result in in-group bias, which can be a primer to bullying (Mulvey, Hoffman, Gönültas, et al., 2018). This nuanced understanding of the relationship between bias and bullying influenced this researcher to disrupt the focus group interviews when "K" called "S" *weird*.

While Black girls at Charter X navigate the "identity" politics discussed above, they must be conscious of the tensions in their decisions whether to assimilate or deny their cultural identities because if they do not, there are consequences from the "adults" in the school. Implicit in the findings of this capstone study were the expectations that the

school environment held for all students. Although these expectations were not stated explicitly, this researcher surmised that all students were expected to comply. Elsewhere, student compliance is conceptualized as students following the directives given by an authority figure within 10 seconds (Noguera, 2003; Quale, 2019). Non-compliance is defined as any occurrence of a student responding to directives by explicitly or implicitly saying "no," "I do not want to," "I will not do it," or "not now" to any academic or non-academic request (Quale, 2019) At Charter X, many directives are given to students throughout the school day. For instance, students must attend school daily, follow their academic schedules (often individualized), and transition to each class within a set time. When they transition to class, they must do so "safely," sit in their seats and prepare themselves to engage in the academic experience. Additionally, students must remain in class for the agreed set time unless they have permission to leave. While in class, they must not disrupt the learning experience of themselves or others and must fully engage all while embodying character principles through prosocial behaviors such as being independent and resilient, acting with integrity, connecting and collaborating with peers, showing compassion, and embracing diversity, and knowing oneself (Charter X, 2021). The use of the words "must", and "directives" are intentional in these explanations to communicate the requirement of students' adherence to the school's expectations or social contract in exchange for a "good" education (Noguera, 2003). However, implicit in the expectation of compliance is the expectation to comply even if the directives do not make sense to the student nor align with their value systems often cultivated by their families. Furthermore, as the research suggests, unspoken beliefs that the school is always working in the best interest of all students, and therefore the expectations given to

students are always "good" is not always the case (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). The expectations that Charter X sets for students in of themselves are not the issue, but the subjective interpretation of how they were adhered to during the 2019-2020 school year provides reasoning to this researcher as to why Black girls had more "more" than any other racial or gender group that year.

For the Charter X Black girls who willfully chose or were perceived to "not comply" with the expectations of the school environment, the response was authoritarian. Teachers and staff members at Charter X (across all racial identities) seemed to interpret common expectations for all students. However, in the findings above, for Black girls, this research acknowledges a causal relationship between a Black girl "challenging authority" and the adult response—more discipline. As mentioned earlier, as students enter the schooling experience, they engage in a social contract to acquire a "good" education (Noguera, 2003). A requirement of the social contract for Black girls in school is that they often give up social freedoms in an environment that is not always safe for them. As a result, Black girls resist, as they have been socialized to do by their mothers/motherly figures.

For example, many Black girls were socialized to protect their personal property—their cell phones. This research provides examples of how some Black girls responded when that property was taken away. However, deeper than the personal property was giving up the social freedom of access to family or, as this research argues – the psychological safety created by being able to access family while at school. In these instances, the Black girls were prohibited from doing so; one teacher repeatedly hung up the telephone as the student attempted to dial home. In these instances, the Black girls

resisted this social contract, and in doing this, they were continuously placed in opposition or "insubordination."

It is through this resistance, this research argues, that an antagonistic relationship cycle developed where the issues become less about the girls "chewing gum" or "speaking in a disrespectful tone" but seemingly more about the teacher's reliance on punishment or admonishing respect. The teachers and staff seem to be fixated on the authority of their positionality as adults in the building versus understanding the root causes of the issues described in the behavior incidents. In the findings presented, the antagonistic relationship was sometimes disrupted by reliable adults such as Ms. "S," who seemed to have a greater rapport with the Black girls. However, this was not always the case. Similar to Hyacinth and Zimba in the Murphy et al. study (2013), it is important for "adults" to consider the correlation between the relationship and culture of mutual respect that they have cultivated with the student and the resistance that they might be experiencing. In doing so, perceptions of a student's willful ignoring an "adult," or "disrespectful tone" could be a manifestation of a student's mistrust with the adult and the environment. When this occurs, Charter X teachers and staff members must consider their relationship with the student and what has been done to create a space of safety and mutual understanding.

As the research presents, the Black female teachers and staff members reported some "negative" incidents about the Black girls. This research advances the idea that a plausible root cause for this is respectability politics, where Black people expect and hold other Black people to comport themselves in a certain way, is due to the gaze of white people or "white' environments (Leonardo, 2009). This research reminds readers of the

"terrifying whiteness" that hooks (1990) spoke of on her way to her grandmother's house, her homeplace. It is possible that Black female teachers were also conscious of the "terrifying whiteness" in the school environment itself (Leonardo, 2009) and, as a result, responded accordingly to Black girls to protect them. This research calls attention to the memory work that Hill (2017) discussed in the literature review. This memory work helps those who work with children to remember their own experiences as children. In doing so, one can empathize. If former Black girlhood is not a part of one's memory or experience, one can also remember when one was misunderstood or oppressed.

The findings suggests that Black girls must also be conscious of the tension within the "identity" politics led by their classroom peers. In the example that the girls provided, it is evident to this researcher that the Black girls were navigating peer pressure rooted in racism, sexism, and classism to control them socially. In some instances, the social control was successful. And in other instances, it was not. The Black girls spoke of their resistance to this social control, often finding other friend groups or deciding to retreat into the interiority of their homeplaces where they believed they could abscond themselves from the judgment and pressure to be someone they did not want to be. The challenge posed in this research is that the Black girls were navigating this tension with individuals who often held social capital, a currency not only in the middle school experience but also in K-12 experiences and beyond. The peers in the Black girls' experiences wielded social capital that caused them to feel pressure to acquiesce to their peer's expectations of them. The research demonstrates that the tensions that existed for these Black girls as they navigated these identity politics resulted in disruptions to their emotional safety.

Various stakeholders: teachers, staff members, and peers seem to be unconscious of the "identity" politics that the Black girls had to navigate within the schooling experience, and as a result, the Black girl's decisions were misinterpreted.

Recommendations

As established earlier in this capstone study, data from Charter X revealed that Black girls attending Charter X had more "negative" incidents than any other racial and gender group during the 2019-2020 school year. Given this, this capstone aimed to understand what might have caused this to occur and prevent it from occurring in the future. To better understand the experiences of Black girls in schools, the literature review in this capstone study provided context into their experiences. While some people view the Black girl as community-oriented, socially aware, playful, and academically successful, others, who may not intimately know her, perceive her as a deviant who is not innocent but culpable and worthy of social control. This foundational understanding of Black girls' experiences within school spaces helped situate the data collected from Charter X and the conceptual lens to interpret it. Using the conceptual frameworks of Respectability (Higginbotham, 1995), Black Girl Cartography (Butler, 2018), and Interior Homeplace (Quashie, 2018 & hooks, 1990), the findings and discussion from the previous sections, as summarized below, affirm the literature review, and provide the rationale for the recommendations to Charter X. As mentioned in the introduction of this study, the "negative" incidents attributed to Black girls at Charter X during the 2019-2020 school years can be interpreted as examples of oppression . Oppression can occur on four levels: cultural, institutional, interpersonal, and individual (Hardiman et al., 2013). Therefore, responses to oppression can also occur within these same levels. Using a

triangulation of the literature, conceptual frameworks, and data findings from Charter X, this section presents recommendations to disrupt the oppression that the Black girls at Charter X are experiencing. The recommendations are organized from the cultural to the individual levels.

Cultural Change Recommendations

Cultural oppression refers to the "ways in which social norms, roles, rituals, language, music, and art reflect and reinforce the belief that one social group is superior to another (Hardiman et al., 2013)." As the findings from multiple perspectives and experiences reveal, the Black girl identity is not considered the norm within Charter X but can be. There are many ways to accomplish this; however, this research presents the following recommendations and the rationale. Charter X needs to consider methods to disrupt the respectability (Higginbotham, 1995), that may play within their classrooms and school community through interventions that strengthen their school culture to be inclusive of all identities and experiences.

Recommendations

1. Engage in critical reflection activities that help the school community to define or refine an educational equity mindset through liberatory thinking.
2. Develop or revise existing systems and structures that use educational equity mindsets and liberatory thinking to support the whole child's development.

The Charter X school community needs to engage in critical reflection activities that help define or refine their collective educational equity mindset through liberatory thinking to create a cultural change that will be inclusive of all student identities and experiences. Critical reflection aims to help individuals engage in reflexive thinking to identify

assumptions (typically about power) and identify new ways to improve and change a situation (Fook, 2015). Critical reflection activities that work towards educational equity for all students are important because failure to do so can perpetuate systems of inequity that schools often intend to disrupt (Bucknor, 2021). Fook (2015) provides a structure for critical reflection. Participants meet in a small group and present "raw" material for review; an objective facilitator leads the reflection activity. In the first stage, participants engage in an analytical process intended to expose and examine hidden assumptions about the "raw" materials. Before the second stage, participants have an opportunity to reflect independently. In the second stage, participants use their awareness of the hidden assumptions to develop new ways to understand and approach their practice as a group, considering their power and how they might challenge and change their environment (Fook, 2015). This capstone study recommends that Charter X convene a group of stakeholders that consists of school leadership, teachers and staff members, students, and families to engage in conversations that consider the experiences of Black girls at the school and the cultural changes that need to occur to create a more inclusive and equitable environment that is absent of racial and gender oppression. The questions below (Morris, 2016) are a great starting point to include in the critical reflection activities.

- What assumptions are we making about the conditions of Black girls?
- How might Black girls be uniquely affected by school and other disciplinary policies?

- Are our systems and policies (such as those related to dress code, discipline referrals, or eligibility for participation in sports or extracurricular activities) creating an environment conducive to the healthy development of Black girls?

This research connects critical reflection activities to educational equity mindsets and liberatory thinking in the following section. Mindset is a combination of "perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, and dispositions" that influence professional actions or choices (Nadelson et al., 2019). In applying this conceptualization of mindset to educational equity, the following results: educational equity includes the "knowledge, beliefs, and dispositions supportive of educational equity for all learners" (Nadelson et al., 2019). The Great Schools Partnership (2020) defines educational equity as ensuring "just outcomes for each student, raising marginalized voices, and challenging the imbalance of power and privilege." Including the mention of "power" and "privilege" in their conceptualization of educational equity provides space for liberatory thinking as it denotes that oppression exists. The Chicago Public Schools (2022) system defines liberatory thinking as "the reimagining of one's assumptions and beliefs about others and their capabilities by interrupting internal beliefs that undermine productive relationships and actions." In using this approach, educational equity goes beyond changing mindsets but creating concrete opportunities for others to experience liberation.

By engaging in critical reflection activities intended to define or refine existing educational equity mindsets through liberatory thinking, Charter X will be better positioned to develop or revise existing systems and structures that advance educational equity by supporting the whole child's development. In doing so, the expectation is that

Charter X will be able to create an inclusive environment that not only affirms and values the identities and experiences of all students, but also supports their development beyond academics. Indicators of educational equity because of critical reflection activities in schools include the following outcomes (Great Schools Partnership, 2020):

- All educators work to design safe and supportive classrooms by forging relationships, listening to students and families, and employing asset-based teaching, learning, and discipline approaches.
- All educators speak to students with warmth and caring, ensuring that comments and cues that students receive are free of bias, whether students are in the classroom, in the front office, on the bus, in the gym, in the library, or anywhere else.
- The perspectives, experiences, and voices of every demographic represented in the school community are sought out, included, and incorporated in developing and refining policies and programs.
- All educators ensure that students feel a sense of belonging and ownership in class, giving students opportunities to connect their work to their own goals, interests, dreams, and lives.
- All educators use asset-based approaches, helping students see and build on their own academic and personal strengths.

For educators and schools to accomplish the above, liberatory thinking (Chicago Public Schools, 2022) offers the following strategies:

- Engage in deep reflective work to understand their biases, multiple intersecting identities, and personal stories.
- Examine how they have been impacted by structural racism or systematic oppression while considering how they might be unintentionally perpetuating these conditions.
- Engage courageous conversations on racial equity, internal biases, systemic inequities, and systems redesign, including rethinking how they use data and how data impacts student experiences.

Institutional Change Recommendations

Institutional oppression involves the "policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs enacted by organizations and social institutions that create differential access to goods, services, and opportunities by disadvantaging some social groups and advantaging other social groups" (Hardiman et al., 2013). Using the exact language of institutional oppression, to make institutional changes within Charter X, it includes engaging in processes to review and change any "policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs" that marginalize Black girls. Charter X should consider the following recommendations and other rationales therein.

Recommendations

1. Develop or refine and follow a comprehensive school plan that includes goals to improve the school climate for all students, especially focusing on Black girls.
2. Engage in the continuous process of reviewing data and adjusting the comprehensive school plan as needed to achieve the stated goals.

A comprehensive school plan (CSP) is essential in a school's improvement process because it is often the critical lever to set its direction and focus (Maholmes, 2004). In developing and using a CSP, schools can view their organization and focus on the areas that drive school performance and achievement. The goals and objectives within CSPs are supported by school data and collected strategically so that the goals are timely, measurable, and achievable (Malhomes, 2004). In the case of Charter X, a CSP with a focus on improving the school climate for all students, but especially with a focus on Black girls, will cause them to consider their response to questions such as: "What are we doing?" "Why are we doing it?" "Which processes and strategies are working well?" "Which are not?" and "What needs to be changed?". These questions will help Charter X make better decisions regarding any "policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs" that marginalize Black girls."

The following sections detail steps to develop or refine a CSP (Comprehensive School Plan) (Malhomes, 2004). The first step to creating a CSP is to assemble the right team. While many schools have existing teams that lead schoolwide planning, it is essential that the CSP team at Charter X intentionally includes individuals with diverse perspectives that represent the school community and are involved or impacted by the school's approach to the school's climate plan. The CSP should consist of "students, educators, administrators, paraprofessionals, volunteers, bus drivers, other support personnel, and families" (Osher et al., 2015). Charter X should consider including individuals who can apply mathematical or statistics skills to data analysis that will occur throughout the data interpretation and action planning process. Math teachers or an external consultant may help provide this level of study. Students, specifically, Black girls,

are essential to the CSP team because they can describe the impact of the school discipline policies and practices. Also, including students can increase the possibility that the strategies within the action plan will be adopted and will be successful (Osher et al., 2015).

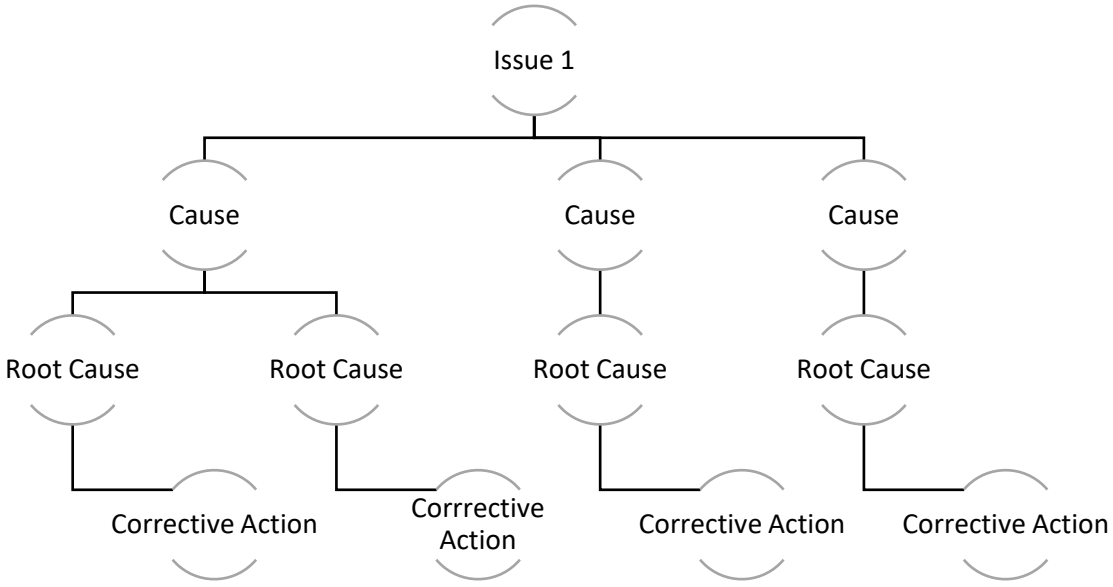
After the CSP team is assembled, the next step is to review the data related to the school's climate. This capstone suggests looking at data that will inform the decision-making process, including academic, behavioral, and school or classroom climate data (Maholmes, 2004). Charter X should consider the data they already collect regularly with special attention to data collected for multiple years to review it thoroughly. This data should be valid and reliable from reputable sources and disaggregated by subgroups or other defining units such as class, grade, or demographic such as race and gender. (Osher et al., 2015) Charter X can use two standard methods to determine disparities: Risk Ratio and Risk Gap. The disciplinary outcome for a specific demographic is divided by the risk for a comparison group to determine the risk ratio. To determine the risk gap, one would subtract the likelihood of students from a comparison group receiving disciplinary action from the possibility of students in the target group receiving a corrective action (Osher et al., 2015). Questions to consider when analyzing the data include, but are not limited to:

- How many students are subjected to disciplinary action?
- To what extent are students in specific demographic groups (e.g., American Indian, or Alaska Native students, students with disabilities) experiencing exclusionary discipline (I.e., suspension, expulsion, or referrals)?

- Which student demographic groups are at the most significant risk for exclusionary discipline?
- What is the rationale behind disciplinary actions taken against students?
- Is disciplinary action taken uniformly regardless of the type of offense, or does the severity of the action taken vary?
- How have exclusionary disciplinary actions influenced student outcomes?
- Is the school pushing students out, or is the school responsible for educating students despite the disciplinary actions taken against them?

Once the data has been analyzed and disparities identified, it is also essential to consider the root causes of any disparate data. To understand the why behind the data, Charter X can leverage the team's diverse perspectives and consider gathering additional data through a root cause analysis, which is a systematic process for identifying the underlying

Figure 20: Root Cause Analysis Tree



cause(s) of a problem (Osher et a., 2015). Figure 20 provides a visual outline of a root cause analysis.

Once the data has been reviewed, it is essential to begin the planning process. Maholmes (2004) offers the following six steps: 1) establish or revisit the vision, 2) introduce child development into the planning process, 3) identify goals and priorities, 4) establish an action plan, and 5) review and finalize the plan with the team. When establishing or revisiting the vision, there is an opportunity for Charter X to revisit the critical reflection activities suggested earlier in this capstone study. Figure 21 provides the outcome of a school that has completed the CSP process. It is important to note that the school has created specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based goals as their corrective action to address the problem(s) identified.

Figure 21: Culture of Achievement Comprehensive School Plan (DCPS, 2021)

Focus Area: Culture of Achievement

Establish routines and expectations that enable instruction, even as instruction is improving.

Domain Goals

- By June, we will reduce the number of suspension days per 100 students from 111.3 to 72.2
  - Sub-Goal 1: Reduce the percentage of suspensions given to students identified as SPED from 45% (Target is 28%)
  - Sub Goal 2: Reduce the number of students that are suspended more than once from 72 (Target is 50)
  - Sub-Goal 3: Reduce the average length of suspensions from 4.4 (Target is 2.0)
- By June, we will increase Student Satisfaction Rate from 45% (Target is 63%)
  - Sub-Goal 1: Increase SEL Competency "Social Awareness" from 57% (Target is 67%)
  - Sub Goal 2: Increase SEL Competency "Perseverance" from 46% (Target is 56%)
- By June 2021, we will increase our Leadership Insight score from 3.1 (Target is 5.9)
  - Sub-Goal 1: Increase positive response rate to "School leaders consistently support me in addressing student misbehavior when I have exhausted my classroom consequences" from 10% (Target is 42%)
  - Sub-Goal 2: Increase positive response rate to "Across my school, there are consistent expectations and consequences for student behavior" from 3% (Target is 39%)

Progress Monitoring *How will we know we are there?* *Identify the measurable indicators that lead to changes in practice, attitude, behavior, or systems observed if the strategy is having its desired impact that will lead to accomplishing the goal.* **Measurable Indicators:**	**Status/Target***			
	Status at Term 1	**Status at Term 2 (MOY)**	**Status at Term 3**	**Status at Term 4 (EOY)**
Decrease average number of referrals per 100 students per week (Target: 37 - Largest Rate for SY19-20)				
Classroom and hallway observations using De-escalation Rubric (Target: Average Score of 3 out of 5 by T3)				
Number of SGA meetings with 10+ Student Attendees				
Whole Student Body Satisfaction Surveys (Student Voice and SGA Representation): Positive Responses on Likert Scale Section (Target: 55%)				
Whole Student Body Satisfaction Surveys (Student Voice and SGA Representation): Meaningful Responses (i.e. no "N/A") on Open Ended Section (Target: 40%)				

The CSP will require the school to address any "policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs" that marginalize Black girls, or any other group identified within the data (Hardiman et al., 2013). Charter X can find examples of policy changes to adopt or adapt from the Oakland and Chicago School Districts.

- Banning suspensions for willful defiance (which aligns with the California law on this subject)
- A prohibition from suspending students for referring them to the police for dress code violations
- Implementing a restorative justice program
- Creating a harassment policy with girls' input that prioritizes psychological and emotional health and ensures victims have a voice in how their companies are resolves
- Using student-led disciplinary proceedings
- Ends suspensions for pre-kindergarten through second grade
- Creation of a student code of conduct that makes clear what students can and cannot be excluded from class for
- School use of alternative strategies for exclusionary discipline

Individual and Interpersonal Change Recommendations

Individual oppression includes the individual "beliefs, attitudes, and actions that reflect prejudice against a social group," which can occur at the conscious and unconscious levels (Hardiman et al., 2013). Individual mindsets and beliefs impact interpersonal interactions. As such, the theory of change for Charter X includes assumes

that interpersonal changes within Charter X require individual differences among the staff members. Charter X should consider the following recommendations and the rationale provided.

Recommendations

1. Provide ongoing implicit bias and restorative justice professional development for all staff members to build their self-efficacy to see, respond, and prevent racial and gender oppression.
2. Create safe spaces for Black girls to frequently share their perspectives and feelings about their school experiences and require teachers to facilitate these conversations.

Oppression exists in schools, whether institutionally or interpersonally, and negatively impacts minoritized students and teachers (Kohli, Pizzaro & Nevarez, 2017). In all schools, teachers must be skilled in examining positive and negative patterns in their teacher-student and teacher-teacher interactions and be prepared to respond when oppression occurs. Before teachers can see pressure in their classrooms or with their colleagues, they must first acknowledge and accept that racial inequality exists and be able to understand how and the degree to which their actions influence racial inequality (Pollock, 2004). In a study exploring teacher's beliefs about discussing race and police violence, Alvarez and Milner (2018) found that while almost all teachers in the survey reported that they believed it was necessary to discuss topics about race in the classroom, fewer said that they felt prepared to lead these conversations. Many factors contributed to teachers' unpreparedness to lead race-centered discussions. For instance, some teachers shared general discomfort because they did not know how to respond to

potential backlash from their students' parents, their school's administration, or their teaching peers, potentially compromising their jobs (Alvarez & Milner 2018).

Yoon (2019) illuminates how the silencing or muting of race talk is imposed on students of color by white teachers who are uncomfortable or do not understand racial humor. For example, Black girls' speech is often policed for volume, tone, and passion. Teachers may not explicitly connect their disciplinary decisions to systematic trends, suggesting that stereotypical perceptions may implicitly guide them. (Monroe, 2005). Teachers unfamiliar with how Black students communicate could perceive their actions as threatening. The teacher may adopt a more authoritarian style of classroom management, which results in more conflict in the teacher-student relationship and a higher likelihood of disciplinary actions occurring (Skiba et al., 2000). As discussed in the literature review of this capstone, this silencing of race talk or racial humor has negative implications. Therefore, as a recommendation, Charter X should require ongoing implicit bias and restorative justice professional development for all staff members to build their self-efficacy to see and respond to racial and gender oppression. According to Pollock et al. (2010), "Teachers routinely search for concrete, actionable steps they can take in their classrooms and schools, questioning how abstract ideas or theories about racial inequality and the difference can help them" (p. 211). Implicit bias training for teachers has many different names, such as culturally responsive training, culturally relevant training, and antiracist training and are often used interchangeably (Galloway et al., 2019). This training differs from multicultural or diversity training, focusing on the intersections of power and privilege across race groups. The benefit of implicit bias and restorative justice training is the opportunity for teachers to examine their own cultural beliefs and explore their

student's backgrounds (Ginsberg, 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2005). This training encourages educators to recognize their racial identities and privileges in a White supremacist system through critical reflection and interrogation (McIntosh, 1998; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). As a result, students, regardless of their racial identity, are oppressed who do not perform according to the white dominant cultural norms. Dei agrees by saying, when "students go to school, there is a constant negotiation, re-negotiation, and struggle to identify with what goes on within that environment."

Therefore, as supported by this capstone's literature review, a secondary recommendation for Charter X to improve interpersonal oppression is to create safe spaces for Black girls to frequently share their perspectives and feelings about their school experiences and require teachers the facilitate these conversations. Ruth Nicole Brown's Save Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), a program for Black girls, is instructive for this recommendation. In this capstone literature review, Steven's (2002) definition of the word "sassy," often used to describe Black girls, is highlighted as "willful forthright in demeanor that expresses a spirited behavioral expressive style of boldness, independence, and courage" is used strategically to criminalize Black girls as "loud, ghetto, or reckless." Brown (2013) challenges Steven's definition of "sassy" by arguing that Black girls are "too often admonished for the memorable, stylistics, and always the recognizable way they emphasize tonality with express[ion]." She repositions Black girls as creative visionaries worthy of recognition and celebration. SOLHOT becomes the literal space where Black girl's lives are saved, not to be confused with white supremacist sentimentalities of saviorism, she argues, but one where Black girls and former Black girls form community and "discuss diverse expressions of Black girlhood, critique the issues

that are important to [Black girls], and create art that keeps Black girls' lived experiences at its center." Brown (2013) offers the following questions for Charter X to consider in community with Black girls:

1. What is necessary to imagine Black girlhood as a space of freedom?
2. What would need to be abolished and created to enact such a vision of Black girlhood? Who would commit to such an idea?
3. How do Black girls experience affirmation, and how does it feel, to them, to be free?
4. How is this vision of Black girlhood useful for Black girls and women?
5. What is so specific about practicing Black girlhood that the process can lead to something beyond the world as we currently know it?
6. What does this vision of Black girlhood look like in practice, and what new knowledge emerges that may be useful for and benefit everyone?

Conclusion

"She's a ---- kid," a man nearby tells the officer as they are standing outside near a two-story brick home on Legion Lane in Columbus, Ohio (Chappell, 2021). It is Tuesday, April 20, 2021. A small crowd of people gathered. "Damn, are you stupid," is the next thing we hear from the body cam footage. The unidentified man speaks to Nicholas Reardon, the responding police officer, moments after he fatally shoots Ma'Khia Bryant. The first statement uttered by the onlooker, "She's a ---- kid," is irrefutable: Ma'Khia Bryant, a 16-year-old Black girl, was a child. The second statement's rhetorical intent was

to illuminate the fallacy in the 23-year-old police officer's decision to use lethal force moments before.

The first 911 call was at 4:32 p.m., and the caller, perceived to be a young woman, said, "We need a police officer here now!" (Chappell, 2021). In the background, there is screaming, and minutes later, a second 911 call was made. However, it is assumed that since the police, dispatched a few minutes after the first 911 call, arrived on the scene, the caller hung up. When Nicholas Reardon approached the young crowd, he saw a heated argument between Ma'Khia Bryant and another Black girl. He saw a knife and then yelled, "Hey! Hey! Get down! Get down!" Within seconds, he fired four quick shots, piercing her lower torso, right shoulder, right thigh, and lung. Ma'Khia fell to the ground.

As the body camera footage spread across social media and news outlets, many began to justify Reardon's actions as a police officer. On Twitter, a user shared, "Officer Nicholas Reardon is a hero, and I think it's disgusting that the news is ignoring the truth and trying to make a hero out of a knife-wielding psychopath" (Spicer, 2021). Another shared, "Officer Nicholas Reardon is a hero for saving people's lives. That's it. That's the tweet. This incident isn't about race. It's about saving lives. Thank you, Officer Reardon, for your service" (Muzzin, 2021). Even Congresswoman Val Demings (D-FL), who once served as a police chief in Orlando, Florida, lauded Reardon by saying that he "responded as he was trained to do" (Demings, 2021). However, for the many educators who have stopped fights between students with just their voice and a stern look, at that moment, Reardon did not see a child in distress. As logic would have it, if one knows a child is in pain, one helps that child, not hurt them.

At this same time, across the country, those who are attuned to current racial events waited in anticipation for the legal culpability and fate of Derek Chauvin, a Minnesota police officer who kneeled on George Floyd, a Black man's neck for nearly 9 minutes, eventually murdering him. When the guilty verdict was announced, many felt a collective sigh of relief. Many empathized with George Floyd and the family that he left behind. However, that same empathy seemed to dissipate for Ma'Khia when people saw that she was the one holding the knife. Yes, Ma'Khia had a knife in her hand in an argument. However, she did not deserve to die.

Overwhelmed, this researcher reflectively shared the following on Facebook:

> I am frustrated with the empathy gap for Black girls and Black women. Ma'Khia Bryant deserved to live. People, including Black men and women, justifying this Black girl's death is highly problematic. Why are we enraged about the deaths of Black boys and Black men at the hands of the state but are quick to justify the deaths of Black girls and Black women? Why are there individuals interpreting a 15-year-old Black girl's animalistic, monstrous strength to harm another human being that could not be stopped with anything other than four bullets? She was not Beowulf.

When someone kills a child, it is essential to critically interrogate their logic, motivation, and mental state to understand the conditions that influenced the event and the necessary interventions so that it does not happen again. It is a reactive approach to keeping other children safe. When someone kills a child, and the community response is justification and not empathy, one must critically interrogate one's community logic, motivation, and value systems. Reardon and the viewers who supported him saw a knife and an argument

between two individuals. However, why was the justifiable response death and not correction or empathy?

School staff members can ask themselves the same question when interacting with Black girls. When Black girls demonstrate resilience, persistence, and self-advocacy (often taught to them by their mothers/motherly figures) in the face of "identity" politics, school staff members must interpret their decisions through a lens that will cause them to see the complexities of their lived experience. In doing so, they will see that Black girls often face insurmountable odds and expectations and need those around them to listen to them, understand them, and most importantly, protect them from the people, policies, and practices that threaten their survival.

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