ALL THE GIRLS ARE WHITE, ALL THE BLACKS ARE MALE:
EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG BLACK WOMEN ON THE EAST COAST

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Lisa Danielle Covington
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The Undersigned Faculty Committee Approves the

Thesis of Lisa Danielle Covington:

All the Girls Are White, All the Blacks Are Male: Experiences of Young Black

Women on the East Coast

Esther Rothblum, Chair
Department of Women’s Studies

Irene Lara
Department of Women’s Studies

Shirley Weber
Department of Africana Studies

6/25/2010
Approval Date
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by
Lisa Danielle Covington
Master of Arts in Women’s Studies
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Previous scholarship has found that African American adolescent girls and young women experience isolation, exclusion in the classroom and are assumed to be “deviant” in some research. Such research on Black girls does not include a Black cultural perspective. Nevertheless, Black young women develop methods of resilience throughout their girlhood to overcome these challenges often using these methods into adulthood. Through semi-structured interviews and participant observation of four African American teenagers, this qualitative study investigated participants’ lives in an urban community center (“Bridges”) on the East Coast of the United States. Employing the use of grounded theory, the study found four themes. The first theme was that education was important and central to all participants. The young women found teachers’ accessibility, expectations, and curricula to influence their experiences in the classroom. An appreciation of gender-specific programming was the second theme. The programming helped develop self esteem, positive relationships, and community involvement. A key to this programming was the racial make-up of staff at Bridges, in which Black women were the majority. Third, all participants discussed sexual harassment in their schools, neighborhoods and communities, and emphasized the importance of educating younger peers about topics important in their community including sexual harassment. Finally, all four participants were applying to and getting accepted by colleges. Implications of these themes for the lives of young African American girls are discussed.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Despite a large increase in research on adolescent girls in the past fifteen years (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1992; Pipher, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994), research on African American girls is often limited to negative experiences (Evans-Winters, 2005; Ladner, 1971; Miller, 2008; Robinson & Ward, 1991; Ward, 2007). As Black feminist literature indicates, the overwhelming focus of scholarship is on adolescent girls and women who are middle class, heterosexual, and of Anglo-Saxon, or White, heritage (Collins, 1998; Combahee River Collective, 1982; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Lorde, 1984). A number of scholars have noted that the lack of Black girls in gendered research and the social science field at large illustrates the marginalization of Black girls (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Collins, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991; Ladner, 1971; Rollock, 2007; Ward, 2007). Many scholars theorize this marginalization is due to the bicultural lives of Black girls and women--the constant movement between dominant culture and one’s primary culture (Bell, 1990; duCille, 1994; Mays, 1988; Newman, 2007). Often being placed in one category as women or African American, Black women and girls have a constant pressure to sacrifice one identity in order to conform to dominant standards (Bell, 1990; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2007; Mays, 1988; Newman, 2007). Educational hurdles, psychological tolls in coping with racism and sexism, and the obstacles to entering professional occupations are examples of the multifaceted experiences that can be learned from African American women’s lives (Bell, 1990; Lorde, 1984; Mays, 1988; Paul, 2003; Perkins, 1989; Rollock, 2007).

Black girls have little support within schools and institutions of education (Carter, 2007, Fordham, 1993; Henry, 1998; Robinson & Ward, 1991). Therefore, the social and psychological well-being of Black girls is connected to building relationships with adult women, especially Black women, who are aware of the challenges, obstacles, and experiences of Black girls (Banister & Leadbeater, 2007; Belgrave et al., 2004; Hoff, Eddings, & Peavy, 2001; Rhodes, Davis, Prescott & Spencer, 2007).
Following the framework of Evans (1980) and Tatum (1997), the terms “Black” and “African American” will be used interchangeably. Although often overlapping, the distinction between ethnic identity and racial identity will be observed. Racial identity refers to traits, as well as the social meanings and experiences attached to such characteristics (Newman, 2007; Sánchez & Colón, 2005; Waters, 1999). Ethnic identity generally refers to shared culture, customs, language, and ancestry, each of which transcends generations (Evans, 1980; Newman, 2007; Sánchez & Colón, 2005; Tatum, 1997; Waters, 1999). As Tatum (1997) discusses, “[O]ne may recognize the personal significance of racial group membership (identifying as Black, for instance) but may not consider ethnic identity (such as West Indian)” (p. 16).

Participants in this research share Black racial identity and ethnic and cultural identity as African Americans. The inclusiveness of the term “Black” refers to people throughout the African Diaspora (Evans, 1985; Tatum, 1997; Waters, 1999). “Black feminism” will be defined further in the following chapter; this term will be used interchangeably with Africana Womanism (Hudson-Weems, 1993).

In the discussion, the term “White” will be used to identify those with a shared European ancestry. Waters’ (1996) notion of optional ethnicities argues that the majority population (i.e. European Americans) has the option to identify with a nationality (i.e. American) and does not necessarily identify with an ethnicity (i.e. Bulgarian).

Continuing to follow Tatum’s (1997) model, people of color is a term used “to refer to those groups in America that are and historically have been targeted by racism. . .including people of African descent, people of Asian descent, people of Latin American descent, and indigenous peoples” (p. 15). This thesis will use the term “women of color” in a limited capacity. Although it is important to note, many feminist scholars find the term women of color to be vague, and many prefer “Third World women” because it moves away from a binary context and situates women’s experiences in a global perspective often erased in American feminist contexts (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Mohanty, 2003). More specific to this research, African American women have specific experiences informed by their race and gender in the United States. This is illustrated further in the discussion of Black feminist thought.
The terms “urban” and “inner city” will be used interchangeably and are defined as “groups of blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile” (United States Census Bureau, 2000). Urban and inner city also refer to a portion of a neighborhood that is close to the outer portion of a metropolitan city but that often has other characteristics including limited resources for its residents, limited public transportation, exposure to violence, families living in poverty, underfunded schools, and the majority of residents are people of color (Belgrave, 2009; Ginsberg, Shapiro, & Brown, 2004; Miller, 2008; Newman, 2007).

Although there is no one agreed-upon usage of the term “gender-specific”; this research refers to gender as a way girls and boys are taught to behave in accordance with their biological sex (i.e. male, female). The gender socialization process includes perceptions of masculinity and femininity within the context of one’s experiences in society and culture (Ginsberg et al., 2004; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2007; Newman, 2007). Psychology plays a large part, as associations and expectations with being a boy or being girl are learned over a period of time (Newman, 2007; Pipher, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). For example, Lori Murray (1997) found that, regarding gender stereotypes, girls and boys are treated in school as they would be later in life. Murray (1997) observed that girls are less vocal, are given less time to respond to class questions, receive little praise and advice for academic work but are often praised for “being nice,” having manners, and keeping assignments neat (Murray, 1997; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). The previous areas mentioned are understood as specific for young women; therefore strategies to address these issues would include informing teachers of the ways in which girls are treated in the classroom and teaching girls strategies to succeed in the classroom despite such treatment. Murray did not mention the racial or ethnic background of the girls in this particular study. Murray, like many scholars and feminists alike, often have valuable, profound research findings, however, many tend to speak in general terms when speaking of ‘young women’ or ‘girls’, which focuses only on their gender and no other social identities such as race.

**RESEARCH GOALS**

The goal of this thesis is to listen to and understand the lives of young Black women through their individual voices and as a collective community. Issues discussed were of
importance to Black girls. Understanding participants in environments and involvement in a program for girls are factors that may influence their life decisions. All of the Black girls discussed in this research are participants in an organization—“Bridges”—designed to serve girls of color.

Topics that were expected to be important to participants include community, confidence, and school experiences. Exposure to women of color for girls of color was an important topic to include in this sample. The growing field of youth development centrally identifies the importance of adult women in the lives of girls (Banister & Leadbeater, 2007; Belgrave et al., 2004; Bogat & Liang, 2005; Paul, 2003). Relationships are central to the development of girls’ social and psychological growth. Connections with African American women expose African American girls to areas of positive racial identity development, potential career options, and affirmative reinforcement (Adenika-Morrow, 1996; Banister & Leadbeater, 2007; Belgrave et al., 2004; Carroll, 1997; Hoff et al., 2001; Sánchez & Colón, 2005; Ward, 2000).

**INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH**

Intersectionality is the convergence of Black women’s experiences based on multiple identities with regard to race and gender (Crenshaw, 1991). Legal Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) recognized the precarious manner of discussing Black women through a “single-axis framework” (p. 58). To remedy this issue, she coined the term “intersectionality” that focuses on integrating both race and sex in praxis and analysis of Black women’s lives. One’s identity as an African American or a woman is erased when the single-axis framework is employed (Crenshaw, 1991). This is illustrated through the experiences of Black girls as well. Generally, when speaking of African Americans the subjects are boys and men, and when speaking of girls and women, they are White (Adenika-Morrow, 1996; Bhavnani, 1993; Evans, 1980; Grant, 1997; Hull, Scott, & Smith 1982; Paul, 2003).

Based on classroom observations in an ethnographic study, Fine, Anand, Jordan, and Sherman (2000) identified similarities and differences between Black and White adolescent girls. Both Black and White girls identified equality as important; however, their approach in explaining it varied. The researchers found that the African American girls discuss “power,
difference, and inequality” whereas White girls “[try] to be sympathetic and inclusive, they may offer up universals” (p. 175). From this classroom observation, the researchers argue, “Typically an African American girl is pressing a question of race, class, and gender alone, and yet she stands sturdy, bold, and alone, often without support in the room. The room coalesces around its desire for her to just stop” (p. 175). Thus, Black and White girls have large varying experiences. Ultimately, African-American girls are often isolated in such experiences and universals do not coincide with their experiences.

The three primary areas of development for Black adolescents include community, schools and familial environments (Banister & Leadbeater, 2007; Banks, 2005; Carter, 2007; Irvine, 1990; Ward, 2007). Wendy Rountree (2008) discussed the importance of ethnic communities playing a role in youths’ development as the dominant culture is not affirmative and validating for young people of color. Urban Black girls are primarily in overcrowded public schools that lack resources (AAUW, 1992; Irvine, 1990; Orenstein, 1994), employ teachers who have limited experience with African Americans (Carter, 2007; Irvine, 1990; Paul, 2003; Thompson, 2007), and continue to neglect Black girls academically (Evans-Winters, 2005; Grant, 1997; Irvine, 1990; Paul, 2003). Urban Black girls live in communities where harassment by male peers and adult men, including police officers, occurs frequently (Fine et al., 2000; Miller, 2008). Although Black girls’ experiences within each domain vary, there is a need to be in environments that are supportive and affirm their experiences and identity (Banister & Leadbeater, 2007; Carter, 2007; Evans-Winters, 2005; Irvine, 1990; Miller, 2008; Ward, 2007). Consequently, the family is often the solitary place of support and source of lessons about social, psychological, and emotional resilience (Boyd, 1993; Miller, 2008; Paul, 2003; Peterson, 1992; Ward, 2000).

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The primary theoretical framework utilized throughout this research include (1) the foundations of Black feminism, (2) understanding of Black feminism and Womanism, and (3) research on girlhood.

**The Lens of Black Feminism**

The foundation of this thesis is Black feminism as described by the Combahee River Collective (1982). The issues this collective defined as essential include the importance of
addressing all oppressions; the inability to separate race, sex, economic oppressions and sexuality; solidarity among Black people; racism within mainstream feminist movements; and the psychological burden Black women face (Combahee River Collective, 1982; Smith, 1998). The importance of Black feminism counters the idea that feminism is for the benefit of only White women (Collins, 1998). There is recognition of the differences between White and Black women from a historical perspective. The experience of married, middle class, White women interested in working to supplement their husband’s income is at the opposite end of the spectrum of Black women working, often as the primary provider of their family (Beale, 1995; Collins, 1998; Lorde 1984; Pack-Brown, Whittington-Clark, & Parker, 1998). The historical experiences of White women were not commonly applicable to Black women; the realities of financially supporting one’s family, inequitable pay, sexual abuse and reproductive sterilization, among others, continue to be salient issues often overlooked by the mainstream feminist movement (Beale, 1995; Collins, 2008; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Hull et al., 1982; Roberts, 1997).

**Womanism and Black Feminism**

It has been argued that there is little difference between Womanism and Black feminism. Many scholars find that the goal of each is to primarily address issues of race, sex, and class. The African American community consists of Black women and men; thus some scholars argue womanism provides a way for Black women to address issues of gender without neglecting issues of race (Collins, 1999). Alice Walker (1983) defines Womanist as, “A black feminist. . .From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, ‘You acting womanish,’ i.e. like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth” (Walker, 1983, p. xi). Although Walker, the founder of the term, does not distinguish between Black feminist and Womanist, several scholars have done so (Hudson-Weems, 1993; West, 2006). The term Womanism is often used in reference to spirituality and religion. Social Christian ethics scholar Traci West (2006) emphasized that Womanists’ have created space within the field of Black religious studies. Black women’s experiences serve as the foundation to work in the community and within religious scholarship; each area has allowed for “discussion and analysis of texts by and about Christian women” (West, 2006, p. 292). Conversely,
Womanism is used to avoid association with feminists; Patai and Koertge (1994) discussed this topic with a Black professor who defended the use of Womanism:

Feminist, for me, is too narrowly associated with [W]hite women. And most women of color who have issues and are active around them are not feminist, do not define themselves as feminist. . . . Right now, in order to get their degree, [students] still have to predominantly study [W]hites. . . . the mass of the curriculum that’s available for anybody who’s doing Women’s Studies is a [W]hite curriculum. (p. 68)

As with Womanism, Black feminism includes theoretical ideals combined with women’s lived experiences (Collins, 2008; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Lorde, 1984; Smith, 1983), yet it primarily serves as a direct challenge to the term feminism. Black feminism “disrupt[s] racism inherent in presenting feminism as for-Whites-only ideology. . . . Inserting the adjective Black challenges the assumed Whiteness of feminism” (Collins, 1998, p. 67). Thus, both Black feminism and Womanism continue to collectively address the issues of racism and sexism African American women experience.

**OVERVIEW: GIRLHOOD IS NOT UNIVERSAL**

In a groundbreaking work on Black girlhood, Grace Evans (1980) explained that gender is not experienced the same by all girls:

Gender construction is not universal. Some of the ways girls come to an understanding of womanhood are culturally specific. . . . If we look to the points where educators seek to alter the message of inferiority regarding gender or encourage understanding in pupils of issues of sexism, do we do so with an awareness of the various constructions of femininity that lie behind the experience of womanhood of the students before us? Are we speaking to the Black girls in the classroom? There is a danger that the movement to counter sexism in schools will carry into the field of education some of the errors of the Women’s Movement regarding race. We need to examine the ways that the Women’s Movement has perpetrated a type of cultural imperialism that takes the oppression of [W]hite women as its norm and develops its theory from the experiences of a small minority of women in global terms. (p. 189)

Similarly, and more recently, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1998) identified “false universalism” as follows:

[B]reaking silence meant criticizing, in public, scientific and other academic “truths” that presented the experiences of White men as representative of all human experience. Such knowledge was characterized by a false universalism unused to open dissent. Closely linked to power relations, false universal perspectives reflected the efforts of a small group of people to exclude the majority of humankind from both education and the making of what we call
knowledge. These few defined themselves not only as the inclusive kind of human but also as the norm for humanity as the ideal human. (p. 51)

This research will disrupt the universalisms used within girlhood and feminist texts and add to the growing body of Black feminist scholarship that allows African American girls and their experiences to be visible and validated. Ostensibly, Black girls experience dual oppression due to their race and gender (Beale, 1995; Collins, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991). Experiences also are affected by socioeconomic status (Collins, 1998, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Lorde 1984) and other “dimensions of difference” (Dill & Zambrana, 2009, p. 5) such as sexuality, ability, and religion (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2007). This research functions from the understanding that Black girls are generally an underserved and invisible population (Carter, 2007; Irvine, 1990; Ladner, 1971; Paul, 2003).

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

“Bridges” is located in an inner city on the East Coast of the United States. Although participation in the organization had an influence on the girls’ experiences, the functionality of the organization, the mission, leadership within Bridges, and other identifying information about the organization will not be discussed in order to maintain confidentiality of the young women who participated in this study. This study included four of the seven girls involved in the program for teenage girls of color. It is anticipated that through understanding Black girls’ experiences and needs in urban environments, challenges faced, access to resources, and exposure to ethnically relevant, gender-specific programming will be recognized as important to their healthy psychosocial development by families, educators, communities and caregivers. The young women’s experiences and perspectives during their involvement with Bridges will be the primary focus and their activities while at Bridges will be peripheral. Data from the qualitative interviews will be classified through identified themes discussed by the young women in Bridges.

An analysis of young women’s experiences will be discussed as they defined areas of importance. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What specific concepts do participants view as a problem for teenage young women?
2. How do participants feel about the importance of gender-specific programming for young women in high school?
3. How do participants view themselves within their communities?
4. What is the impact of gender-specific programming for Black girls?

**RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Students involved with out-of-school activities have access to opportunities that are often unavailable in school, including: positive adult and peer relationships (Belgrave et al., 2004; DuBois & Karcher, 2005), exposure to potential career opportunities (Adenika-Morrow, 1996; Liabø, Lucas, & Roberts, 2005; Rhodes 2005) and healthy physical activity (Staurowsky et al., 2009). Although seemingly unrelated to school, these three areas serve as empowering opportunities that positively impact Black students’ academic achievement, decision making process and self esteem (Adenika-Morrow, 1996; Belgrave et al., 2004; Paul, 2003). Investigating the young women’s experiences will be central to understanding the value of gender-specific programming for young Black women (Banks, 2005; hooks, 1984).

Previous research on Black girls and young women will be analyzed; however, literature that values gender-specific programming for young Black women will be central to the discussion. The connection between gender-specific programming and ethnic-specific programming was rare but addressed two categories that are often separate when solely discussing African Americans or girls.

One primary assumption made regarding this study is that Black girls’ exposure to a program focused on gender will provide them with context for understanding many of their experiences. This assumption is based on research that concludes Black students learn effectively in an environment that includes African Americans (Adenika-Morrow, 1996; Carter, 2007; Irvine, 1990). As such students who learn about non-traditional roles for women and men are less likely to embrace gendered stereotypes; however, if women are not included misconceptions and stereotypes are created (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Chapter 2 will review previous research and literature on African American girls; the majority of literature in this area focused on urban girls. Literature that values gender-specific issues for Black girls will be central to the discussion. Black feminist scholars indicate much of the literature on Black girls assumes deviance (Banks, 2005; Evans-Winters, 2005; Ladner, 1971; Miller, 2008), including unplanned pregnancy, risky sexual behavior, drug abuse and academic collapse (Banks, 2005; Leadbeater & Way, 1996, 2007). Therefore, “limited conversations make it easier to exclude adolescent Black girls from
countless, significant conversations both in and out of schools. . . .broadening the discussion requires creating space where individual voices can be heard” (Banks, 2005, p. 179).

The young women's lived experiences drive this research and the topics they discuss and identify as important will be central to Chapter 3. Data of the qualitative interviews will be classified through identified themes discussed by the young women in Bridges. The focus of this discussion will be the participants lived experiences and the way they understand their realities.

Through utilizing Banks’ (2005) theory, conversations with young Black women are essential to the expansion of discussion on girlhood, critique of debilitating stereotypes, and distinguish the variance among Black people. Chapter 4 will analyze the collective themes the young women discussed, implications for this research, and suggestions for further studies. The importance of valuing and supporting Black girls is central to their survival and success. The support systems of ethnic and gender specific educations are ways to honor and value Black girls’ voices and lived experiences.

In sum, the goal of this thesis is to: recognize the neglect of Black girls in the scholarly literature, understand Black girls' experiences in their own voice, and determine the value of their experiences while enrolled in a gender-specific program. Supporters of Black girls will find this to be resourceful information, and the results may inform their reactions to their relationships with Black girls. Black girls will understand that their lives are valued and recognize the importance of speaking about their experiences within the context of a familiar environment.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research on Black girls and young women will be analyzed; however, literature that values gender-specific programming for young Black women will be central to the discussion. Generally, the focus on scholarship about African Americans is boys and men, and the focus of scholarship about girls and women are White (Adenika-Morrow, 1996; Bhavnani, 1993; Evans, 1980; Grant, 1997; Hull et al., 1982; Paul, 2003). T. Jean Adenika-Morrow (1996) maintained, “Studies of women generally overlook women of color, and studies of students of color de-emphasize gender difference” (p. 80). One area of distinction Adenika-Morrow (1996), Collins (1998, 1999, 2000), Evans (1980) and other scholars continue to address with regard to race and gender is the focus of one of the founding Black Women’s Studies texts: *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (Hull et al., 1982).

EDUCATION

Academic achievement of Black girls in elementary school is similar to their Black and White male counterparts (Belgrave, 2009; Grant, 1997). However, as they continue through middle school, high school, and beyond, African American girls experience invisibility from teachers that magnifies each year they are in school (Banks, 2005; Henry, 1998; Irvine, 1990; Rollock, 2007). Black girls are often praised for social, non-academic duties such as assisting the teacher or monitoring their peers for the teacher, whereas academic tasks are often ignored (Banks, 2005; Grant, 1997; Irvine, 1990; Paul, 2003). Education constitutes a large part of children’s experience in the socialization process (Banks, 2005; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Tatum, 1997).

Education does not generally provide a space for African American students to understand Black history; little attention is paid to gender and race with respect to the reality of community and curriculum. Boyd (1993) discussed a link between education and self esteem: “The main thing I learned in school was that I didn’t exist. Not as a student, a
female, or a person of color. What I learned was that the American educational system, like much of the society we live in, was never intended to educate or support our female gender or our ethnic diversity” (Boyd, 1993, p. 57).

Boyd (1993) addresses the explicit and hidden curricula for African American girls, a sense of invisibility within school that plays a part in marginalizing the experiences of people of color. According to Harris (1992), education should incorporate those “traditionally denied a voice in the chorus of authority” (p. 309). Similarly, Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (1990) argues that the hidden curriculum is damaging:

The hidden curriculum is the unstated but influential knowledge, attitudes, norms, rules, rituals, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through structure, policies, processes, formal content, and the social relationships of school. . . . it is not hidden at all and what this curriculum teaches the majority of black and low-income children is obedience and deference to authority, docility, subordination, extrinsic motivation, external control, dependence, and fatalism. Adoption of these behaviors ultimately predestines black students to low-paying, low-status jobs, diminished self-concepts, and feelings of inferiority. (p. 5)

Etta R. Hollins (1996) defined null curriculum as what is communicated through the omission of contents within the hidden curriculum: “Omitting the culture and history of a particular ethnic group can lead the reader to infer that its members have accomplished nothing of value” (p. 88). The impact of the null curriculum is illustrated in conversations M. K. Asante, Jr. (2008) had with African American youths. Asante found that many of the students had a lack of understanding of their cultural heritage in school and were primarily taught about African Americans in the limited context of slavery.

Over the course of one year, Peggy Orenstein (1994) observed and interacted with eighth grade students at two California schools; one with primarily White, middle or upper-middle class students, and the second consisting of low-income students of color (African American, Latino, Asian and Filipino), many first-generation U.S. citizens, the majority of whom lived in poverty. She observed that both schools operated under a hidden curriculum in which gender roles and racial stereotypes are reinforced by teachers. Furthermore, socioeconomic status determines students’ experiences within the school and accessibility to resources. Orenstein found specific challenges faced by young African American women, including working-class backgrounds, sexual harassment, lack of academic support, and familial obligations. Students often were blamed for situations such as these by teachers and administrators.
Signithia Fordham (1993) observed and interviewed 33 African American students over the course of two years at a high-achieving, predominately Black high school in Washington, D.C. Fordham found that Black girls who appear invisible through remaining silent and act like male peers in their self-presentation are academically successful. The socialization of successful Black girls to be isolated, silent and invisible is the beginning of a lifelong process of “her ability to live a life saturated with conflict, confusion, estrangement, isolation, and a plethora of unmarked beginnings and endings, jump starts, and failures” (p. 24).

Similarly, through conversation and writings from students, Annette Henry (1998) observed three 11-year-old African American young women at an African-centered school in a U.S. inner city. Although the school provides a large sense of responsibility and critical thinking, there is a lack of these qualities in the only three girls in the class. As a result, Henry was encouraged to assist the girls in developing a space to discuss issues of interest to them, such as sexual harassment. Henry argued that issues specific to Black girls are often overlooked, including their invisibility in a male-centered Africentric curriculum. She found that “Black girls are expected to adopt ‘female’ roles of passivity and complacency; they are invisible to teachers as serious learners; they receive less encouragement and rewards; they are evaluated by their physical characteristics (hair texture and skin color); they are considered sex objects as they mature” (p. 154).

Stephanie Carter (2007) utilized ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods in combination with Black feminist thought to analyze the experiences of the Black girls in a high school literature class located in the southeastern United States. Through observation and interviews with the two Black female students in class, Carter determined they are silenced by the teacher and not represented in the literature or context of the class. The students frequently chose to be selectively silent in order to avoid being misunderstood and reprimanded. This selective silence is also identified as a “deliberate silence. . .[which] enables high-achieving African-American females to deflect the latent and not too latent hostility and anger that might be directed at them” (Fordham, 1993, p. 17).

Rollock (2007) observed and interviewed twenty-one staff and twenty-four students at an inner city high school. Students were from a variety of ethnic and social class backgrounds. Gender was discussed in a race-less manner. In a similar vein to Henry (1998)
and Fordham (1993), Rollock argued that Black girls are invisible to teachers and staff. This invisibility fosters a lack of priority. At this inner city high school, social capital for young women accompanies the assumption of excelling academically and following rules. However, Black males were incredibly visible due to their ethnicity and sex, which was a threat for many teachers; ethnicity creates visibility and gender assumes self-motivation that fosters invisibility. Rollock argued that social capital affords some students a combination of invisibility or visibility to teachers. Ultimately, Black girls are not visible due to gender and hyper-visible due to ethnicity.

**COMMUNITY**

Joyce Ladner (1971) conducted one of the earliest studies on Black girls; she queried the meaning of being a young Black woman in America. Exploratory research methods included participant observation, social interactions, and interviews with 30 girls and their parents over the course of four years. She found that socialization into womanhood begins early--girls were aware of issues such as sexual harassment and sexual assault before age twelve. Young women were also aware that education was valued in their families, race and class were largely connected, discrimination existed when applying for jobs, and there was a need to improve the quality of their neighborhoods. Additionally, cultural heritage and resources played a large role in young women’s development.

As early as 1971, Ladner theorized that the concept of deviance is often applied to African Americans because of “represent[ing] a departure from the traditional [W]hite middle class norm” (p. 5). This perspective limits the scope of research, holds Black people solely accountable for their experiences of institutionalized inequity and poverty, and does not critique the social policy that contributes to such circumstances. Ladner notes it is important to research African American communities and Black girls through a “Black cultural” perspective.

Black neighborhoods are not only a place where one lives but are also communal spaces; a place in which to share the similar challenges and experience--solidarity--one has with neighbors. Girls would often live with several generations of their extended families who would provide support for the girls’ experience. The role of the African American
community has changed as the Black middle class has increased, and Paul concludes that the need for community programs for Black girls is vital (Paul, 2003).

Through interviews and surveys with 75 young African American boys and girls from an urban community in St. Louis, Judy Miller (2008) assessed their perspectives on violence. The youths were a combination of offenders and those considered at risk. Miller discovered the risk of delinquency was a precursor to victimization and 77% of the girls experienced sexual harassment at school.

Young men are encouraged by male peers to harass young women, as this increases their social status. The school functions as a public space for males to sexually harass and subjugate young women. Black girls are not only sexually harassed by peers but by adult men as well. Because of the accountability placed on girls, many restrict their movement within their neighborhoods, becoming isolated in their homes. Young women who seek resources to counter sexual violence are often met with resistance--little protection, often abuse, from the police, teachers and personal networks. Blame is placed on young women if they do not stand up for themselves and is also based on their clothing and assumed sexual history. Miller (2008) determined that research on Black, urban communities lacks emphasis on the relationship between poor urban communities, youth culture and violence against women. As Ladner (1971) argued decades earlier, too often studies of inner cities function on “perceived deviance” (p. 225). Looking through a deficit lens disregards the impact of socioeconomic status, gender, and race, and creates the assumption of “uniformity in the inequalities faced by women” (Miller, 2008, p. 3). Connecting structural inequities that create heavily impoverished, racialized environments informs Miller’s theory of a continuum of victimization--on one end of the spectrum are White, middle class women who are victimized by strangers and worthy of attention; at the opposing end are African American girls who are assumed to be responsible for their victimization.

**DEVELOPING RESILIENCE AND INTERVENTIONS**

Dierdre Paul (2003) found that when research is on Black girls it is often done with a Eurocentric lens. This perspective is a foundation for the deficit lens. Paul called for attention to African American girls as distinguished from the discussion about immigrant girls and girls of color in general. Due to their unique historical and social experience in the
United States, African American girls have specific needs that are often neglected. Racial and gender identity permitted Paul to provide specific strategies for parents and caregivers to encourage Black girls to develop a sense of agency and empowerment. Through understanding education, financial literacy, independence, and health, Black girls and their supporters can discuss and address solutions.

Rebecca Carroll (1997) utilized a Black cultural perspective to interview 50 Black girls who ranged in age from eleven to twenty, were located in twelve cities, and came from a variety of class backgrounds. Of those interviews approximately twelve girls were the primary focus. The use of biographic narratives, as Carroll argued, was to “reconstruct and recreate the voice” of Black girls and celebrates Black culture through the tradition of storytelling, oral histories, and the use of the Black vernacular (p. 14). Significant issues the girls discussed include a sense of racial solidarity, support from women role models, familial support, experiences with racism, and concepts of feminism.

The young women have an awareness of their multiple oppressions--racism, sexism and classism--and Carroll (1997) allows Black girls’ voices to be heard through their lived experiences. Nicole from Vermont explains experiencing racism as “having to work at a job I didn’t apply for. . .that isn’t something I bargained for when I came into this world. . .I’m the one who is going to have to defend myself. . .in the final analysis I’m the one with the knowledge and the sense of self. The racist is the one who will forever have in his or her mind that I am bad and that they are good, which is a lie. . .I get so tired of people believing in their heart of hearts that they can win or achieve anything by making someone feel inferior. I think that’s how I have developed my defense mechanisms against racism” (Carroll, 1997, p. 53). Nicole notes that Black teenage girls are aware of racism and its personal impact. Similarly, Savannah identified with “being black first” and she questions feminism:

I think its funny how all these [W]hite feminists sit around talking about how men and women are equal and all that. . .But see, I don’t think men and women are equal. I think two piles of clothing are equal. I think men and women are two pieces of a puzzle and that we need each other. . .It’s not that I have no use for feminism, it’s that I do not like the way a lot of women use the word. (Carroll, 1997, p. 79)

Savannah and Nicole discuss race and feminism as separate entities. Savannah describes feminism in relation to White women, something apart from herself. Nicole
expressed her personal experience with racism. Carroll (1997) finds that all adults are directly or indirectly educators to youths and have the ability to provide them with an environment that reflects their potential to assist in Black girls’ positive development. She also identified the importance for Black people be present in spaces with each other in order to be supportive. Thus, it is important for Black women to be with Black girls.

Banister and Leadbeater (2007) discussed the implementation of a mentoring program that focuses on heterosexual relationships, safe sex, and dating violence for young women in Canada. The authors found that relationships with adult women--outside of parents and authority figures--were helpful to girls gaining confidence and an understanding of the actions of others and of themselves. There were 40 participants ranging in age from 14 to 17 years; 30 were White and 10 were Aboriginal. A characteristic of the majority of the girls was a low-income status and some “were at risk of dropping out of school” (Banister & Leadbeater, 2007, p. 128). The Aboriginal girls were mentored by Aboriginal women and the curriculum reflected Aboriginal cultural perspectives. The commitment to having same-sex, same-culture mentors allows for girls to see themselves reflected in an adult mentor and provides opportunities to discuss similar experiences, address cultural-specific needs, and create a sense of community.

Historically, Black girls were influenced by numerous Black women through the process of “other-mothering.” This was a different relationship than mentoring: girls were taught academic tasks (especially when school was not accessible), and socialized into simultaneous roles of caregiver, student, daughter/relative, role model, and worker (Beale, 1995; Collins, 2000). Through understanding multiple roles from women who embodied those roles, Black girls learned through informal affiliation. Collins (2000) states:

This community other[-]mother tradition also explains the ‘mothering the mind’ relationships that can develop between African-American women teachers and their Black female and male students. Unlike the traditional mentoring so widely reported in educational literature, this relationship goes far beyond that of providing students with either technical skills or a network of academic and professional contacts. . . ‘mothering the mind’ among Black women seeks to move toward the mutuality of a shared sisterhood. (p. 207)

Currently, there are few places where Black girls can gain an understanding of multiple roles. Although Black girls may benefit from gender-specific or ethnic-specific programs, one part of their identity--race or gender--is sacrificed, even though both influence
identity development. There are programs that recognize both gender and cultural identities (Adenika-Morrow, 1996; Belgrave, Chase-Vaughn, Gray, Dixon-Addison, Cherry, 2000; Belgrave et al., 2004; Harris, 1992); though small in number, the impact on Black girls has served as a catalyst to increase such programming due to the positive outcomes.

African American girls often have different challenges than girls of other ethnicities. The literature suggests a theme in which Black girls remain strong and resilient, often with or in spite of proper guidance. This is illustrated in taking on adult responsibilities in order to assist the household, such as taking care of a younger sibling. This behavior contributes to confidence and independence at a young age, which is accompanied by higher self esteem and healthy body image, and low levels of substance abuse (Belgrave et al., 2000).

Belgrave et al. (2000) developed an intervention program specifically focused on increasing resiliency through relationships with respect to gender and culture. Based in an inner city on the East coast, 55 at-risk, low-income African-American girls aged 9-13 who were the elder sibling in their family were included in the study. Belgrave et al. (2000) identified that the majority of girls have both feminine and masculine characteristics (i.e. androgynous characteristics): “Androgynous sex role beliefs are associated with resiliency factors such as self-confidence” (Belgrave et al., 2000, p. 134). Resiliency is necessary when one lives and goes to school in areas that are considered high risk due to drugs, violence and criminal activity.

The program included an after-school program that created an environment in which Black girls developed strong relationships with positive, caring adults and peers. Over the course of four months, the participants and adults met on a weekly basis and participated in a variety of activities including cultural traditions, discussion on sexual development, politics of hair, and creative dance. The girls experienced an increase in Africentric values, ethnic identity, and positive physical appearance. One foundation of girls’ psychological development includes viewing themselves as “a relational entity”: exploring who they are compared to others. Losing a relationship, or threat of losing it, may damage girls’ self esteem. As a result, high-risk behaviors may ensue. Positive results of relationships include “increased energy, better communication, positive feelings about self, strong identity” (p. 135). Interpersonal relationships are important in the “development of resilience” in African American girls (Belgrave et al., 2000, p. 136). This type of intervention, referred to
as resource enrichment and process orientation, allows for girls to utilize resources available through a support system of relationships.

Fifty-nine African American girls aged 11 through 13 were the focus of an ethnic intervention program specifically for African American girls (Belgrave et al., 2004). Ethnic identity, gender roles, and relationships are the primary areas of identity for Black girls. This study shows the benefit of effective gender and culturally-specific, after-school programming. The program included ethnically-appropriate curricula, adult mentors over one hour each week for fifteen weeks, and tutoring for thirty weeks. As a result of the program, the girls experienced an increase in ethnic identity, peer socialization, androgynous roles, decreased relational aggression, and increase in the rejection of stereotypes.

**HOMESPACE**

Paul (2003) used the lens of racial and gender identity to provide specific strategies for adults to encourage Black girls to develop a sense of agency and empowerment. She identified “homespace” as one place Black children develop a cultural identity and learn to negotiate society with this identity. Agency and empowerment take place within and outside of the home and allow for confidence and independence to develop as an individual as well as within a community. Racial socialization and developing resistance to racism take place within the home (Paul, 2003; Ward, 2000). As in Paul’s work, Ward found homespace to be integral in the development of Black children. Ward (2000) defined homespace as “where Black children initially learn to deal with racism and prejudice and where they develop attitudes toward their own ethnicity and toward the larger social system” (p. 52). She further defined racial socialization as, “[acquiring] the attitudes, values and behavior appropriate to the social and political environments in which Black children are raised” (p. 52).

The first place African American children learn the realities of racism through their parents (Irvine, 1990; Miller, 2008; Paul 2003). Racial socialization is a conduit for resistance and allows one to look at the world in a critical manner. According to Victoria Jackson Binion (1990), Black girls are in a unique position as they are raised to have androgynous characteristics. Androgynous characteristics are traditionally male (e.g. financial provider and worker) and female (e.g. caretaker and parent) gender roles. Black women are often employed in order to contribute financially for their families, but are also in
a position to be a caretaker for their children or adult members of their family. Education, exposure to women of the same race, and parenting are areas that allow for traditional masculine and feminine characteristics to develop in independent young women. For example, if a daughter observes her mother obtaining higher education, taking on the responsibilities of the children, and supporting the family financially, this serves as a model for the daughter.

Historically, androgynous roles were common for Black women as the rigidity or gender roles were not often applicable to them (Beale, 1995). The employment for Black women was consistently as domestic workers and laborers for middle and upper-class White families that provided Black women with a consistent income. Thus, the androgynous characteristics Binion refers to are traced historically and are largely connected to the relationship of other-mothering discussed previously.

**Psychological and Social Well-Being**

Black girls’ psychological and social well-being is connected to relationships with the women in their lives and the examples to which they are exposed. Although these relationships vary, each impacts the girls’ sense of self including self esteem, academic achievement and resilience.

Over the course of five years African American adolescents in a low-income neighborhood were interviewed (Rhodes et al., 2007). Forty-five percent of the adolescents identified informal mentors, eighty-five percent of whom were women. Youths without mentors were more likely to be depressed than those with mentors. Latina and African American girls often had positive, informal mentors within their current communities and support networks. The results of positive mentoring included three primary areas: improvements in social, cognitive growth, and identity development. Conversely, formal mentors were assigned to individuals and in order for youths to benefit from these experiences, a “close and enduring connection” (Rhodes et al., 2007, p. 150) must be established to have a positive impact. The authors found much enthusiasm regarding the formal mentoring of girls; however, the mentoring was limited and may not be as influential as informal mentors. Mentors that are inept in working with urban Black girls and unfamiliar with urban communities are likely to create social distance:
Some young women complain that their mentors seem out of touch with their experiences and problems. This problem sometimes stems from the social distance that exists between middle-class volunteers and urban adolescent girls. Adults who live or work in urban communities and who are familiar with the circumstances confronting youth, are likely to be better able to give advice that is consistent with the cultural norms, options, and constraints of a given setting. (Rhodes et al., 2007, p. 151)

Based on interviews with sixty African American children and parents throughout the United States, Janie Victoria Ward (2000) focused on understanding the way Black parents educate their children with regard to the issues of race and racism. The young men and women interviewed ranged in age from 13 to 20; the mothers and fathers were at least 35 years old. Socioeconomic status of the families ranged from low to high-income and education of the parents varied from no high school diploma to those with doctoral degrees. Similarly, Terhune (2008) discusses the importance of parents influence on their children, “Black women frequently rely on and replay the messages they receive in their youth to guard against the toxicity of racism” (p. 551).

Early exposure to inequitable experiences through their parents prepares children to handle racist situations in a healthy way as opposed to the suppression of their feelings (Ward, 2000). Effectively coping with racism comes in many forms, including support networks (Terhune, 2008), familial relationships (Zavala-Martinez, 1988), relationships with biological and fictive kin as well as non-biological family members (Collins, 2000), and inspiration and skills Black teachers provide to Black children (Delpit, 1995; Evans-Winters, 2005; Irvine, 1990; Paul, 2003; Perkins, 1989). Furthermore:

No sane parent wishes to expose a child to hurtful insults and gratuitous pain. Yet for African-American parents, the normal impulse to nurture and protect their children can land them on the horns of a dilemma: whether to expose the children to racial prejudice so they will be better able to fight it, or to prepare them for a world in which race is not an issue—which is to say, for a world that may not exist. (Cose, 1993, p. 135)

Tamara R. Buckley and Robert T. Carter (2005) focused on exploring Black girls’ experiences with gender roles, race and self esteem. Two hundred Black girls in a pre-college program in New York City public schools were surveyed. The findings illustrate that Black girls do not have a large decrease in self esteem compared with girls of other ethnicities. Black girls often take on both masculine and feminine characteristics that are associated with increased self esteem and Black identity. As Buckley and Carter conclude,
“Black girls who depend on White standards to define themselves and feel negatively about being Black had low self esteem, whereas Black girls who felt positively about being Black had high self esteem” (p. 657).

MEDIA

There are few mainstream, positive images of Black women for Black girls to witness (Boyd, 1993; Chimurenga, 2009; Collins, 2000; Fordham 1993; Gray, 1989; Reel Works Teen Filmmaking & Davis, 2005). The groundbreaking work for colored girls who considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf by Ntzoke Shange (1977) was one of the first positive public images of Black women. The work began as a published choreopoem and evolved into a Broadway production. Shange’s choreopoem is defined as several events happening at once; it integrated dance, performance, poetry, ritual and drama (Lester, 1995). The diversity of Black women was illustrated through a variety of characters that addressed issues relevant to teenage girls such as education, familial relationships, motherhood, and street harassment (Shange, 1977). However, there appears to be a limited outlet of such complex and empowering representation into the 21st century.

Indeed, as Fordham (1993) found, “The academically successful girls also study the Euro-American model via television and other media sources, which include their textbooks. These sources strongly influence what they come to value” (p. 24). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) discussed the large representations of ‘controlling images’ Black women in society:

Ideology refers to the body of ideas reflecting the interest of a group of people. Within U.S. culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as normal. . .From mammies, jezebels. . .to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, ubiquitous Black prostitutes, and ever-present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, negative stereotypes applied to African-American women have been fundamental to Black women’s oppression. (p. 7)

Maxine Leeds Craig (2002) identified images of Black women and beauty, such as hair texture, skin color, and facial features. The majority of the images in the media reflect Eurocentric features as the standard of beauty, which creates the invisibility of Black women as beautiful. Craig’s results indicated that adolescent Black girls were aware of adolescent Black males’ preferences for Black women with a light skin tone. Thus, women’s social capital is based on her skin color. The girls were conflicted about the ideal of White beauty but still desired attention from African American boys.
In the film *A Girl Like Me* (Reel Works Teen Filmmaking & Davis, 2005), Black teen girls in New York City describe their personal and familial experience with color. “[I] considered being lighter as a form of beauty. . .I used to think of myself as being ugly because I was dark-skinned,” said Jennifer, age 18. She continued to describe her adolescence, “I had mostly white dolls with long, straight hair and . . .I would wish I was just like this Barbie doll.” Stephanie, age 17, said, “My aunt started using bleaching cream when she was about 25. She started her oldest daughter on it when she was 11. She has an even younger daughter that was about six when she started to use it” (Reel Works Teen Filmmaking & Davis, 2005).

Through understanding the media “an African American adolescent female must learn to identify negating distortions, understand their origins and whose interests they serve, and must ultimately look beyond these demeaning portrayals by embracing the admirable qualities of [Bl]ack womanhood these images obscure” (Robinson & Ward, 1991, p. 91). The National Black Child Development Institute (1986) published a guide of books, videos, and recordings that provide Black girls with a realistic picture of both being a girl and being Black. Through addressing this “double jeopardy” (Beale, 1995), the NBCDI provides alternatives to mainstream media in order to address African American history, non-stereotypical images, appropriate language, and illustrations that provide a realistic perspective of Black women and girls. Although this guide has not been updated, the tradition of providing contemporary resources remains evident through guides provided by Mattie Evans Gray (1989) and Paul (2003). Two of the guides were published over a decade ago and there have not been many similar publications in the present century.

Resources outside of school and popular culture are necessary in order for Black girls to understand experiences in the United States. For example, Fordham (1993) stated that “Black girls are defined as ‘loud’ when they do not conform to standards of ‘good behavior’ without actually entering the realm of ‘bad behavior,’ in this space she constructs her own rules and does not use the known successful forms as a standard” (p. 22). African-American girls are in need of supportive environments that will recognize multiple oppressions, encourage participation in non-traditional fields, and develop critical thinking skills (Adenika-Morrow, 1996; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Paul, 2003). By illustrating the complexity and heterogeneity of Black women’s experiences in multiple forums (film, drama,
choreopoems, poetry, interviews, etc.), artists and filmmakers, such as Shange and Davis, are not conforming to the dominant images of Black women, but are countering it with narratives and realistic images; Black women serve as examples when educating Black girls about themselves.

Ward (2007) identified critical thinking and action as allowing for the development of psychological and social resistance. Resisting in a healthy manner allows for critical thinking to challenge the way children understand race and gender. In discussion of healthy resistance, Ward wrote:

‘resistance for liberation strategies’ promote the search to discover people and activities in Black girls’ environment that affirm and support that their belief in themselves is greater than anyone’s disbelief. . .resistance for liberation provides the requisite perspective, vision, and ultimate wisdom Black folks need to live in ways that are self-defined, are in one’s own best interest, and allow us to live out our full humanity. (p. 246)

The literature review illustrates the process by which young Black women create methods of resilience, intentionally or not. This is largely viewed as a response to crisis and not a technique for overcoming challenges. Psychological strategies develop as defense mechanisms against racism, and African American girls thrive in comparison to White male counterparts in elementary school but not once they reach high school.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this research as to investigate issues of importance to Black girls through their participation in an organization, Bridges. Bridges is located in an inner city on the East coast of the United States and provides gender-specific programming for adolescent and teen youths of color throughout urban communities. In search of understanding Black girls’ experiences in a gender-specific environment devoted to serving youth of color, the study addressed four questions: (1) What specific concepts do all participants view as a problem for teenage young women? (2) How do participants feel about the importance of gender-specific programming for young women in high school? (3) How do participants view themselves within their communities? (4) What is the impact of gender-specific programming for Black girls?

This chapter will include the research methodology and include discussion on the topics: justifications for (1) research approach utilized, (2) grounded theory, (3) research sample, and (4) research design.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The use of qualitative data serves as the foundation for this research. Specifically, the use of analytic induction is developed not only through observations but by recognizing similarities and associations among participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Qualitative research allows for variables to be organized in order to make connections, draw conclusions and create potential solutions as a result of interacting with participants. This study included narrative analysis in order for reoccurring themes to be deconstructed through a Black cultural perspective, as the researcher and the participants share this identity. Max Weber (Rubin & Babbie, 2005) found that as a researcher one needs to have the ability to understand their participants not only on the surface, but mentally, in order to be able to understand their actions. According to Eisenhardt (1989) and Creswell (2007), qualitative
research, although constructed with detailed expectations, is likely to evolve and alter throughout the process.

**RATIONALE FOR GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY**

The use of grounded theory for this research was incited by the research of Black girlhood scholar Janie Victoria Ward (2007). The use of integrated, grounded theory is a process in which an overarching trend applicable to all participants is identified (Creswell, 2007; Ward 2007). Participants’ insights are then grouped into themes (open-coding), developed into subthemes (axial coding) and connected (selective coding). The researcher generates hypotheses based on salient themes (Creswell, 2007). This research method is necessary in order to “uncover the respondents’ interpretations and understandings. . . expressed in their own words and on their own terms, using a process of cross-participant analysis” (Ward, 2007, p. 244).

**Research Sample**

The researcher sought to locate young women of color in gender-specific programs in the United States. Bridges was selected because of its timely response and willingness to participate in the research. The young women in this program are young women of color and each was informed of this opportunity during the participant observation phase and via communication from Bridges employees. Bridges employees were provided with talking points in order to describe the research to the young women (see Appendix A). The only requirement for participants was to be a member of this organization. The research sample included four participants, consisting of half of the young women in Bridges. All participants identified as African American or Black.

**Procedure**

The researcher was a participant observer at Bridges five to eight months prior to the interviews. Over the course of three months, rapport and trust were established between the young women and the researcher. The participant observations took place in a setting where the girls had regular meetings consisting of the projects they were working on with the organization, their plans for the future, discussion of community matters, and plans for the next meeting.
In addition, interacting with the young women directly was imperative to understanding the way the program assists and supports participants’ social and psychological well-being. For the scope of this research, the social aspects of girls’ lives and the way they understand their well-being were the primary focus. Potential participants were informed of the interview project three to five months before interviews took place; they were also reminded a month, and again one week prior to interviews. Participants returned the parental consent and personal assent forms immediately before interviews took place.

**OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH DESIGN**

The following list outlines the procedures executed to produce this research.

1. Prior to data collection, a distinct review of relevant literature was conducted in order to understand the contributions of other researchers and scholarship in the primary areas of girlhood development and social theory.

2. Following the committee approval of the proposal, the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at San Diego State University and Bridges’ governing body to proceed with the research. This process included outlining all procedures necessary to ensure standards required for the study of human subjects, including informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

3. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were administered (see Appendix B). The interviews were conducted by the researcher with four participants. The information obtained through interviews served as the foundation for the study findings. All interviewees self-selected a pseudonym and the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

4. Potential participants were invited to be in the study during the participant observation process, which was several months prior to interviews. Bridges staff utilized talking points provided by the researcher (see Appendix A). Those who agreed to be interviewed obtained completed parental consent and child assent forms.

5. Interview data were examined through cross participant analysis.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The review of the literature suggests four themes take place with young African-American women: (1) experiences of isolation, negativity and invisibility in and out of the classroom, (2) an assumed deviance when researching Black people and urban communities, (3) the need to utilize Black cultural perspectives in order to appropriately discuss African Americans without assuming pathology, and (4) the need to increase programs that address both gender and ethnicity as Black girls gain affirmation and have positive academic and social outcomes. As stated in Chapter 2, the literature review illustrated the gaps: the process by which young Black women create methods of resilience--intentionally or not--is largely viewed as a response to crisis and not a technique for overcoming challenges; psychological strategies develop in order to develop defense mechanisms against racism; and African American girls thrive in comparison to White male counterparts as early as elementary school but not once they reach high school.

This chapter presents the findings from the one-on-one interviews and participant observation of young Black women in the organization Bridges. Five major themes and ten subthemes surfaced from the research. The major themes are (1) education, (2) the importance of Bridges, (3) sexual harassment, (4) higher education, and (5) specific community topics.

THEME 1

The importance of education was central for all four participants. All participants found teachers’ expectations, curricula, accessibility or the ability to relate to students factors influencing their experiences in the classroom. The subthemes are strengths and deficiencies in education.
Strengths in Education

In reflections on education, participants recalled specific examples of influential teachers. Aspects of such teachers included high student expectations, accessibility, inspiration, and relevant education. For example:

I think that most of my teachers interacted with me because they saw I wasn’t ‘average’ to them. They thought I was the smart kid in the class, so that would bring them to interact with me and kind of get more out of me where I was really shy. So they would really push me. (Lynette)

Sally and Lynette discussed qualities of exceptional teachers as using non-traditional curricula and expressing interest in students’ abilities and potential beyond high school. Sally was prepared to graduate one year earlier, but stayed in school because of the curriculum and a positive relationship with the teacher that dates back to her freshman year:

That’s the only reason I’m in school still because I would have graduated early [but] it’s so boring. I had enough credits, so I took some college [courses]. . .but I took this advanced class. I didn’t want to drop this. . .My teacher, he’s like a powerful dude. . .he teaches and he always empowers us. It’s not really all dedicated for the AP exam. But it’s all about empowering. He always empowers us. (Sally)

Sally named several African American authors used in the class as well as books that analyze socioeconomic standings in the United States. Sally continued to discuss her other courses:

“I have other classes, but it’s not challenging [in] statistics and college prep.”

Lynette talked about two teachers that stood out during her education through high school:

[My] seventh grade history teacher and my twelfth grade advanced social science teacher. [You can see] their passion, their love for it. The way the express themselves, and the way they express society. They can give you their point on it, but make sure that you know the facts in order to kind of analyze it. . .and develop your own opinions. (Lynette)

Deficiencies in Education

Not all experiences in education are affirmative for the young Black women in the study. Antalya described her experience of not having many supportive teachers and the importance of having a Black woman (i.e. same-sex, same-race adult figure) in her life:

It depends on the teacher. . .Like some of the teachers that I used to have, most of them are fired now, I was really close to them. They’re really cool like really able to relate to you, speak to you. Like they’re not gonna sugarcoat anything. . .one
Two of the four young women discussed their interest in research they did independently of school. Gaining knowledge that was not provided in school illustrated by Nimue and Antalya researching topics that were not provided in school. Nimue discussed identifying as a Black lesbian and attempting to do research on the identity as well:

I was trying to learn about like black lesbians. And like that was really hard. It was really difficult. Like I don’t know. I’m pretty sure there are more groups out there, but I don’t have access to them. I read this one article by bell hooks and it kind of connected everything. . . (Nimue)

As a result of not receiving much information in school about African Americans, Antalya discussed her interest in Langston Hughes: “I have a book of [Langston Hughes] collected poems. I love it . . . I research things I’m interested in.”

Nimue experienced isolation in her school with limited support from her teachers:

[Teachers say] I’m a really bright individual . . . I didn’t attend school very much because I didn’t want to be in the environment in that school. I felt very disconnected from that school . . . No one tried to know me . . . They didn’t try to find out. No one really tried to develop relationships with me, except for two female teachers, and that was very helpful and kind of motivational up until the point where I just totally felt like not being there anymore and not even they could motivate me to be there. But they were very, very concerned about my well-being . . . because I had health issues. (Nimue)

THEME 2

All participants expressed an appreciation of Bridges as it created a sense of community, respect, and appreciation for their minds and ideas. Through their participation in Bridges, all four participants said they value gender-specific ideals and one participant knew of another program that was exclusively for girls. Participants expressed independence and were supported through relationships developed at Bridges. The sub-themes include: gender-specific programs, self esteem, relationships, and community experiences.

Gender–Specific Programs

The interviews suggest that young Black women in Bridges gain an understanding of the importance of gender-specific programming. One hundred percent of participants expressed the need for similar programs at their schools. Only one participant, Lynette,
knew of any girls’ programs at her school. Based on participants’ high school experience, schools lack programs designed to meet the needs of girls.

There was one program called Young Women Speak, but I never really heard much about it. But a friend of mine went to like one of their meetings, and she pretty much told me that it was just a group of girls, and they kind of express their feelings and what not. But I believe it got discontinued... (Lynette)

Lynette expressed the need for programs similar to Bridges

I really do most definitely [think girls need programs like Bridges] for the simple fact that there’s a lot of girls who are shy and girls who kind of need the extra guidance and a person to just confide in. (Lynette)

In the interest of starting a group for young women, Antalya recognized the need for such a group while dissecting the steps of forming student groups:

[S]ome girls don’t know how to respect themselves. They don’t know how to stand up for themselves or feel peer pressure. But in [Bridges] we kind of learned that we’re individuals. We’re each different, and we kind of learned to have that respect for ourselves. Like I know what makes me comfortable or makes me uncomfortable. Some of these girls probably don’t. It makes me uncomfortable, but it gives me attention. And I’m like, no, if it makes you uncomfortable, it’s not good. That’s enough, no matter how much attention you get from it. That’s where we kind of see a difference between girls in Bridges and girls that are not. I don’t think there are any programs like just for girls [in my school], no. . .I’m gonna start one though. That would be a long process. And I think since budget cuts, they’re not starting any new programs in school--a downer for me. . .I’ll need someone to facilitate it, and I think [teachers are] all taken. I tried to start a track team, and they wouldn’t let me do that because of budget cuts. I tried to start something after school, but they’re like, you need a facilitator. And I couldn’t find a facilitator. It can be a teacher from the school. I mean, if they’re willing to volunteer. I don’t know if they get paid for it. Oh no, because then we’d have to pay for it. I don’t know how that works. (Antalya)

Antalya expressed the desire to start a group for young women at her school while also discussing the hurdles she expected to encounter if she decided to begin looking into this process at her high school. With a group for young women at the high school Sally attended, she explained her initial interest in the group:

I think they started [a young women’s student organization] this year. But they had them when I first came in. . .It was cool. But I think it just got like thrown away for a couple of years. Now it’s back out. I’m not in it. (Sally)

Similarly, Nimue discussed the availability of groups for students and was simultaneously frustrated with the lack of organization at school and excitement for founding a student group:
They had clubs that I could never go to, because they were at [conflicting] times. And they have a very horrible communication problem in my school. . .I actually started a gay/straight alliance with my best friend in that school. And that was the only school that--like that was one of the only programs in that school that was like socially conscious and aware. (Nimue)

**Educational Disconnect: Bridges and School**

In addition to learning the importance of a girl-centered space, the participants learned a variety of topics in Bridges. Some of their experiences in school conflicted with what they learned while at Bridges. Lynette recognized the importance of a program for girls and the role it played in her life via Bridges while also understanding how certain topics are omitted at her school.

(Bridges) made me open minded, because I really didn’t know about much. Most of my knowledge. . .came only from school and parents. And it was like, they never really taught you about social justice issues at school. . .At school, the textbooks really limit what they teach you. They stick to the facts, no analysis, and none of the important things that really matter. (Lynette)

All participants learned critical thinking skills in order to benefit their community. Nimue recalled a moment outside of Bridges where she found language to be powerful in disrespecting women:

Okay, I remember going to one organization where like [some] girls would use this term like “cunt” and it meant cute. And [say things like] ‘cunty boots’, and they would just use like ridiculous terminology, and it really offended a lot of the girls there. It didn’t offend me, because I’m not very offended by [the] word. But the fact that there were individuals there that took offense to it, and people weren’t trying, I guess, they weren’t trying to curb their use of that language. And I feel like here that wouldn’t happen, because people understand the way in which words hurt. And it’s just like because we--I don’t know, it’s like I feel like we wouldn’t use that certain terms against each other. And there’s no reason for that, because like our work is so focused on like combating, I guess, the oppression that we face as women. So it wouldn’t--we don’t have time to just go off task. (Nimue)

**Self Esteem**

Without Bridges, three of the four participants said that they would lack self esteem and not be adequately prepared for the future. Antalya expressed her experience with young women as peers:

I didn’t have any female friends. I didn’t get along with them. I really hated females. It’s just a personal thing. But it allowed--before, yeah, I don’t know. I thought like I wanted to make a difference in doing something, but I guess
Bridges kind of enforced like yeah, you can definitely do this. It gave me like a proof of self assurance. . .here the girls inspire me. Everybody has an interest and I like to learn [from them]. (Antalya)

Lynette connects her self esteem to expectations of herself including a college and a potential career:

It definitely it was a self esteem issue [for me]. Before Bridges it was--I wouldn’t say it was pretty low to the point where I was depressed, but it was just the confidence in me believing that I can do certain things. Whereas now, I feel like I can climb Mt. Everest on some days. Other days are bad, but definitely some days when I do things here, it’s like, yeah, like I can climb Mt. Everest if I wanted to. . .I look at things from a certain point of view. [That’s why] to me that would probably be for why I want to study history and. . .want to become a criminal defense attorney (Lynette)

The positive outlook Lynette described above is juxtaposed to her thoughts regarding if she continued to lack self-confidence:

I think if it wasn’t for Bridges, I’d probably be still very much shy. I think Bridges definitely has brought out that confidence. And I know plenty of girls who kind of need just that extra person to talk to that shoulder to lean on that they don’t really have. Because there are not many programs for girls, especially in schools. (Lynette)

Antalya expressed her perspective on the reasons young women can benefit from gender-specific programs:

I think some girls don’t know how to respect themselves. They don’t know how to stand up for themselves [and] feel peer pressure. It’s like you know when you’re like, ‘Oh no, I should respect myself.’ I should teach other girls about this and. . .But programs like Bridges kind of help you speak up, kind of help you know that, wow, this is the problem. It’s not just me. (Antalya)

**Relationships**

The relationships the young women developed at Bridges were apparent as their connection to relationships outside of Bridges. Sally found that her peers differ from the young women at Bridges and do not consider the implications of institutional systems:

I think that girls that aren’t in the program are less socially conscious. Like my friends, they’ll be like the [indiscernible] like we’ll be sitting down at the lunchroom, and somebody’s failing. And [they say] ‘well, he needs to study harder.’ What if he’s not getting any support? What if the teacher is not helping him out? And then girls here, they’re more socially aware. (Sally)

Sally continues to explain that girls do not generally discuss stereotypical ideas at Bridges:
Yeah, [here girls] are more socially aware, and they’re more open. They’re always there. I don’t know if it’s just [at Bridges], but [at school] girls are always talking about, drama, oh this boy this and this boy that. And I did this and I did that. . .they talk about hair and clothes. I think that’s girl stuff, though. . .maybe without Bridges I would probably just think about partying and drama [too] (Sally)

Similarly, Antalya finds the girls at Bridges to be different than other peers:

Every meeting brings something new, a new topic. If somebody’s going through something, we always learn about that. I learned about a lot of influential women in history. (Antalya)

As a result of Bridges, Antalya and Nimue expressed their connection to their peers at the organization:

I feel more comfortable with being myself [and] being open. Because there are a lot of girls that have been through the same thing as me, and there’s a lot of girls that have been through worse. . . girls have been sexually harassed or raped. A lot have been through physical abuse, have been through eviction or some form of something. . .it makes you feel like ‘Oh, I’m not alone.’ (Antalya)

I feel so comfortable with the girls [at Bridges]. . . And it’s just like really comfortable to be me, and like no one’s telling me, ‘Okay, why are you doing that? You shouldn’t be doing that. People [at Bridges] are really supportive. They care about what goes on in your life outside of Bridges, because everyone has a life outside of it. I value everyone here, I feel like it’s nice developing friendships and connections based on, you know, a common goal. Or you know, we’ll just have a little chit chat, and something interesting will happen. And I can share in their excitement, in their accomplishment. And we can, I guess, indulge in each other in that sense. And it’s something I don’t get to do with a lot of people a lot of the time. . . I feel like I can do that here. (Nimue)

Antalya valued the relationship she has developed with adult staff at Bridges and thinks it would be beneficial for girls to have someone to look up to and confide in:

Other girls are going through [similar things]. . . girls might need a mentor, somebody to talk to. Because when I’m like speaking with Monique [Bridges staff] she asked ‘Is there anybody [I] can go to for help or advice?’ And I [said] no. And she said, ‘Oh, well this is kind of what my job is right now. Just to kind of give you a place to like feel like you can talk to me, you can ask me something if you need help. I’m here to give it to you.’ And I think that’s really beneficial. [Also] I learned a lot about all the other girls in Bridges. Like we’re all going through stuff that you wouldn’t share with your peers, but to have someone older to look up to and to mentor you, then it would be easier for them to help you. I think it would be beneficial for a lot of young ladies. (Antalya)
Community

Bridges is located within the larger urban community. Participants expressed their experiences often expressed concern and frustration through observations made in the community. For example, in her discussion regarding law enforcement, Lynette finds there is a lack of police protection while simultaneously police can create more problems in the community:

On one side of the neighborhood there is no cops, no cops—that’s the side that needs the cops. When you cross the street, there’s one cop on Smith Street. Walk one block over, and I seen two cops on Bryan Street. I go to the next block, there are cops patrolling, like they’re walking down a block patrolling the neighborhood. And then I go a block further and I see two more cops. And I’m just like, wait, you’re on the side that doesn’t need the protection. But the [other] side is more known [for] violence and more known for people to need police protection; [they] have no cops, no help at all.

In her realizing conflicting realities of the police, Lynette explains her desire to create change in the community:

When you have legal aid lawyers, they don’t know your name. They barely know your case. And they only know you by a number. Why is it that I don’t know my rights, so therefore you’re supposed to stand in for me and tell me my rights. But you option not to because it’s more work for you. I believe that if you’re given a lawyer, you’re entrusted let’s say with someone’s life. Someone is either going to go to jail because of you or is going to be home with their family because of you. I’m not saying everyone who’s taken to jail is not a criminal, but there are those few who maybe was at the wrong place at the wrong time or got into the wrong situation, where if given another chance, they could have done something for themselves. And from then on, and from now on, rather, I feel like there’s something that needs to change, and I want to find out what it is and enact it.

(Lynette)

Lynette continues with her frustration about law enforcement:

We’ve gone so long without police protection, it’s like when they’re there we don’t care. When they’re there, they cause more trouble than help. So we really don’t ask for police. But on one side is where you might have the projects. And maybe a shootout occurred. Let’s say a shootout occurred. We don’t hear cops until like a hour after. The cops come when everything is done and over, when everyone done went home, saw what happened and there’s not use for them now. But if I was to cross over on Bryant Street and a fight was to break out, I guarantee you in five minutes, both parties would be in a cop car. They would have details already. They would have witnesses already and they would be on the way to central booking.
Sally also discussed her interest in careers related to the community:

I want to go to college. I want to become a social worker. I don’t think I want to stop there. I want to do something else. I don’t know, maybe law or something. I think I’m just still figuring out, which is weird for me. I usually plan everything, like, okay I’m going to go to school for this. I’m gonna do this, and that’s gonna be it. I’m gonna work here. And that’s where it’s at. Then I have kids, and then I die. That’s how I am, like I plan everything. But now I don’t really know. And they say what kind of social work am I going to get into? Old people, young people, jail birds, rape victims? I don’t know. So I’m really undecided. But I know that I just want to change society, make an impact. So many things move me, things that happen.

Sally spoke of several ideals she had for society. She discussed school and safety as a part of this “dream”:

I would like to see the change with people. Equally distribute the wealth and care about each other and cops are not shooting people and killing people, and people are not doing anything about it? It seems like a far fetched dream. Every time I think about it.

Okay. I wish college was free. I really wish college was free, and like everybody can go. And like everybody knows they’re going away to school. And in high school [peers say] ‘Is there a college? Can we afford college?’ I wish everybody can afford college. And there’s no stereotypes. It sounds so funny just thinking about it, but like nobody is like oh that White person is--and the White person is like, oh that Black person. And there’s no prisons, because nobody is doing anything like murdering each other or raping each other or [selling] drugs. And if there’s prisons, it’s not 85% African-American populated. And there’s no foster homes, because nobody is throwing away kids. (Sally)

In reflecting on community involvement, Nimue explained her role as an intern at a community organization:

I [was a] technology intern, and taught older adults how to use a computer. Then what did I do? I did a youth organizing internship with the organization, as well.

As a result of being in such environments, Nimue expressed a change in her career goals:

I was going to like go to college early and be a doctor, like study to be a doctor and be like either a pediatrician or a child psychiatrist. And yeah, that’s what I was going to do. Just school all the way and get it out of the way. But that like is not the case now. . .My plan now is to possibly be a teacher. I feel like sometimes curriculum is ridiculous. I want to continue to do a lot of the activist organizing work that I do now. (Nimue)
THEME 3

All four participants discussed sexual harassment within their communities, schools, or neighborhoods and the importance of educating younger peers on topics including sexual harassment.

Through communicating with her peers, Sally articulates educating her peers about sexual harassment:

Because I’m always telling them stuff, like do you know that sexual harassment happens in schools... And I’m telling this and it’s like, oh, okay. They wouldn’t know these things without [me telling them]. Maybe they would want to come change, make good and do social work instead of being a host on TV. (Sally)

Sally discussed her frustration and concern when girls experience verbal or physical harassment:

And so the girls are like--in this one class, the girls were like, and ‘He don’t know my name. He can call me “Shorty’; what’s the big deal?’ He don’t know your name? So I hope these girls don’t grow up and like let guys touch on them and just make them do anything [sexual], because it kind of felt like that. And they like don’t know [about sexual harassment]. [The girls say] ‘He can touch me; he’s just touching’. (Sally)

Nimue discussed the challenge of being a Black lesbian and sexual harassment from men in the gay community:

And it’s interesting because, as a lesbian in the gay community, it’s still predominantly male. So it’s not very different in terms of like interactions with--I feel like it’s not very different from society in a sense. The adversity you face in society, it’s perpetuated in the gay community. . .a lot of what one would view as sexual harassment from heterosexual guys, you get a lot of that from homosexual guys. It’s more blatant. Like they will grab your breasts if they see them. Or if they want to, they will touch any part of your body, because they feel like, ‘Oh I’m gay, so I don’t want to be with you, but I like your breasts.’ So it’s just really ridiculous in that sense. Sometimes [they think] it’s funny, but it’s... just a total violation of your personal space. . .like even walking to Bridges, you’re affected by sexual harassment, street harassment, and it’s something that, you know, you can pinpoint something that you can take and use as a source of like empowerment instead of becoming a victim. (Nimue)

Antalya discussed that having experienced sexual harassment was prevalent among the young women at Bridges and she does not think that a lot of peers at school realize it is a problem:

I think it would be beneficial... you learn a lot [at Bridges].... But programs like Bridges kind of help you speak up, kind of help [recognize] this is the problem.
It’s not just me. . .I should respect myself. . .other girls are going through it.  
(Antalya)

**THEME 4**

At the time interviews were conducted, three of the four participants were in the process of receiving college acceptances from multiple universities throughout the United States. Shortly after the interviews, the fourth participant began attending a four-year college.

At the time of the interview, Sally, Lynette, and Antalya discussed college in the upcoming future. Lynette further talks about her interest in college in order to major in social science because of her experience with those teachers: “That’s where I got my passion for history. And my twelfth grade history teacher is where I really generated. And he’s the reason why I want to major in the social sciences.” Lynette was accepted to several tier-one universities and discussed being interviewed by several schools including during the week of the research interview.

Sally explained that her desire to take an advanced course was the reason she did not graduate one year earlier. She is taking another course for college preparation, which assisted her in the college application process and applying for scholarships. Sally explained her motivation for attending college:

I’m a little more open. Because I [used to be] really closed. I don’t really talk to people very much. But now I feel like when I go to college, because I’ve met these women [at Bridges]. These women are so awesome. I could be open to more maybe in college and talk to them and give them a chance to get to know me.  (Sally)

Each of the teenagers was interested in undergraduate education and two specifically mentioned graduate school. One participant attended a pre-college program. Four participants applied to college for the following academic year and each was accepted or was in the acceptance process during the interview. During participant observation, the researcher viewed one area at Bridges devoted to announcing college acceptance letters for all young women in Bridges. In addition, Bridges actively sought to provide scholarships and school supplies for the young women in their program pursuing higher education. Collectively, the four participants applied to between four and ten colleges including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), private tier-one universities, and
Six universities were private tier-one universities, two of which were also HBCUs, and four were public universities.

**THEME 5**

Specific community topics were brought up by all participants. Three of the four girls discussed lesbian and gay rights as an issue of concern. Other topics included alternative forms of educating younger peers, race relations, socioeconomic status in neighborhoods, depression, and sexism.

**LGBT**

Three participants explicitly mentioned the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community. Lynette expressed a need for empathy among her peers.

> Whereas in school they’re kind of just like, oh I don’t like LGBT people, and kind of degrading them. And I’m just like, that’s because you have no idea what they go through and how they deal in life. If you were to be in their shoes for 5 minutes, you wouldn’t like it. And that’s kind of one of the things that stuck with me that I really wish they would teach more about in school. Also, the things that happen in school are really kept on a down low. (Lynette)

Antalya refers to the recruitment strategies of the military and briefly mentions LGBT concerns:

> [The military recruiters] don’t completely tell the truth, and they’ll be like, we’ll pay for college. But they don’t tell you everything. So the truths around Army recruitment, LGBT rights and everything are [hidden]... (Antalya)

Nimue expressed conflicting experiences within the gay community, as in the previous findings, she references sexual harassment:

> I have very positive interactions with the gay community. ...And it’s interesting, because as a lesbian in the gay community, it’s still predominantly male. So it’s not very different in terms of like interactions with--I feel like it’s not very different from society in a sense. The adversity you face in society, it’s perpetuated in the gay community. ...a lot of what one would view as sexual harassment from heterosexual guys, you get a lot of that from homosexual guys. It’s more blatant. Like they will grab your breasts if they see them. Or if they want to, they will touch any part of your body, because they feel like, ‘Oh I’m gay, so I don’t want to be with you, but I like your breasts.’ So it’s just really ridiculous in that sense. Sometimes [they think] it’s funny, but it’s... just a total violation of your personal space. (Nimue)
**Educating Peers**

The young women were aware of the need to teach younger peers. In working with adolescents in elementary school, Sally describes the kind of volunteering she does with middle school students in a program called Truth:

> What do they do the first time? They learn more about the community like cleaning up, donating clothes, things like that. I think that’s what they did the first--it was what they did, because some of the students had a clothes drive, others worked at a park. And it’s like they’re learning to give back to the community. I don’t think they really see that as serious. I think if I was a seventh grader, eighth grader, I’d probably be like, it’s fun, I’m doing it. But I wouldn’t go up and say oh let’s give back to the community. And now they’re learning about conflict resolution, what to do with violence in relationships or sexual harassment, sexual abuse or like bullying, all these types of things. I think that it would be good in other schools, because they’ll learn also. Like my sister, she goes to Second School, I went there also, and I was like, what if I had these programs--I was a bully a long time ago. It was a long time ago. And then I have friends that were in like domestic abusive relationships. But they wouldn’t have allowed that to happen if there was Program Truth a long time ago in their school. Would I throw trash on the floor if I was in Program Truth? Would I throw my clothes away or would I decide to give it away instead of donating it to an organization if there was in Program Truth?

**Race Relations**

Nimue discussed race relations explicitly:

> . . .in high school I was kind of like outcast kind of, and I had like a very small group of friends because of, I guess, I don’t know. I wasn’t Hispanic, so--(Nimue)

Nimue contextualized her interaction with a peer:

> I read this one article by bell hooks. . .and I kind of connected everything and said that, I don’t know, being a Black female is--like having been to [be careful] when you are Black in a predominantly White space, there are certain things that if you make a reference to color, sometimes they say, ‘Oh my gosh, she’s saying that.’ And like they get upset.

Upon reflecting on bell hooks, Nimue connected her reading to an experience she had when a White peer asked her opinion:

> Nimue: [Rebecca] had to qualify herself and [asked what I thought] about what someone did--and I said, you know, I do the same thing, but I don’t want to be a Black bitch. And she just like looked at me. And she was just like, ‘Oh my gosh’. And like she ran away. And like this other girl, she was also White, came in and she said, ‘Oh my gosh, Rebecca is so scared, after you went off on her.’ I didn’t even curse at her. I cursed in my venting. She doesn’t want to come in
here. She doesn’t feel safe around you; she wants to get her room changed. I’m like, no one did anything to her. I did not threaten to hurt her. I did not hit her. And she was just like, ‘oh well, we’re White.’ And all of a sudden like I’m being very--like I’m trying to get her to understand what I was doing, then she starts crying. [My] friend Nelli, she comes in, and she starts dying [laughing]. She said, oh my God, it’s so ridiculous. And it’s just like--that’s the only person on campus that I could connect with. And we were very, very different. Like she was from the west coast. I’m from east coast. She’s heterosexual and she is a Christian. So we were really different, but because of the fact that we are minorities we could relate, like living and like, I guess, you know, urban ghettos and stuff like that. And she was really understanding. I still talk to her now. (Nimue)

Nimue reflects on her connection with Nelli, “Yeah, like I feel so bad about leaving her there with the White people.”

**Depression**

One participant, who did not want to be recognized via her pseudonym, expressed her experience with depression:

Okay, so, basically, I was real sad. And like I don’t know, I was on my period, but instead of like having...instead of having physical pain, I had a lot of emotional pain. So like and I was just really, really sad. I didn’t go anywhere. I stayed in bed. And like I thought well, hey, what if I kill myself? And then I tried to do it, kind of sort of, but I realized, like I don’t even like physical pain, because it wasn’t the best thing for me. So I told my guidance counselor, because I had been seeing her regularly. But like I’ve had so many like meltdowns in school where I was like crying, and like they suggest I see the guidance counselor, so I saw her. And like I’ve been seeing her regularly. And she asked me about Thanksgiving, and I told her. And she’s like, okay, I think you need to be evaluated. And then I got evaluated, and they thought I was evaluated. I got committed for like a week. It was a very nice experience. It wasn’t that bad. I didn’t like the doctors, but I loved the staff. They were very caring. And I was put in an adult like facility because I was 18. And it was just weird, like men and women, and like some people didn’t belong there. It was for like calm people. If you’re violent, they don’t want you there...The experience, okay, you need to get away for three days, not a week.

I think I like suffer from like depression. I think it’s situational. But I feel like I need something for pain, but I don’t agree with medicine.

**OVERVIEW: THEMES**

This chapter presented five primary themes uncovered by the interviews for this study. Data from the interviews illustrated the realities of participants’ experiences within
Bridges, as students and members of an urban community. Extensive quotes allow for the research to utilize the participants’ words in describing their life experiences and opinions.

The first theme demonstrates education as a priority for all participants. Two participants believed at least one teacher provided relevant education and inspired them to succeed. It is essential to note that each of the schools discussed has a majority of students of color. The reflections about influential teachers illustrated the positive impact made on their development as Black students in and outside of the classroom. One participant expressed invisibility in her school even though she was academically successful. This demonstrates a connection between academics and well-being as central to student morale. Two participants learned about African Americans outside of the classroom. Relevant education appears to impact students with regards to their willingness and interest to actively participate in school.

The second theme of the study signifies an understanding of gender-specific programming’s positive impact on Black girls within a space that values women of color on a consistent basis. One participant discussed the importance of relationships with one caring adult. All participants agreed that their peers and younger children should be aware of race, gender, and class issues. It is important to note that the youths they are referring to are primarily African American adolescents. Three participants recognized that inequities in their communities compounded deficiencies in education, poor race relations, violence, or lower socioeconomic status. One participant attended a school that had a program for girls, but she did not participate. The other participants desired to have a student organization focused on girls and recalled the existence of a previously eliminated group. One participant founded a gay/straight alliance. Another expressed a desire to form a student organization, but was confused by the process and was disillusioned and overwhelmed with the school’s budgetary concerns.

All participants found Bridges to be a space where respect and appreciation for one’s sense of self were central. Creating a positive community of primarily Black women, impacted self esteem, relationships with same-sex peers, and increased awareness of society. Two participants found a distinct difference between the social awareness of girls at Bridges and the lack of such in girls not at Bridges. One participant found Bridges to be instrumental in changing her low self esteem to increased self confidence. Respect, self esteem, and positive relationships with same-sex peers and adults suggest African American girls thrive
in environments supportive of their identity and well-being while simultaneously addressing challenges they experience.

Sexual harassment was the third finding that all four participants discussed as a problem in their neighborhoods and schools. Participants explained sexual harassment as having many forms: physical, verbal, and street harassment. When harassment occurs, participants explained that their peers outside of Bridges may be unsure how to respond or recognize the problem. One participant explained that within the lesbian and gay community, gay men would physically harass lesbians while utilizing their sexuality to excuse such behavior. As with the previous finding, teaching peers was one way to prevent harassment. Education as a forum has the ability to inform urban youth on other topics of concern in the community.

Higher education was a priority for all participants and Bridges publicly celebrated their achievements. Within the organization and at the conclusion of the year, young women in Bridges who were attending college received care packages with supplies to use in college. This college-going atmosphere created support and valued the importance of education. Participants looked forward to higher education as a primary avenue to careers that positively impacted their community. As stated earlier, four participants applied to at least four to ten universities. Overall, participants applied to a variety of schools including HBCUs, private tier-one universities, and public universities.

Participants displayed a sense of community, were exposed to potential careers, and thrived in an environment that supported their independence, critical thinking skills, and a desire to change their communities through education. Other topics regarding community that participants mentioned included domestic violence, access to housing, sexism, lack of police protection in their neighborhoods, military recruitment in poor communities of color, race relations, importance of educating younger peers, and sexist behavior in the gay community, and in spaces understood to be ‘all-women’.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how a sample of young African American women perceived their community, expressed confidence, and experienced adolescence within the context of a gender-based program. The researcher believed that a better understanding of these phenomena would allow educators, practitioners, and parents to gain insight into the perspectives of young, urban Black women. In Henry’s (1998) experience with research regarding previous literature she found:

[M]any important clinical and developmental research studies in the USA address issues of self esteem, adolescent pregnancy, single-parent families, emotional problems, or psychosexual behavior. The significance of these studies notwithstanding, American educational literature tends to disregard the interest, needs and concerns of Black girls, conflating them into generalized categories of ‘girls,’ ‘Black students,’ or ‘African American children.’ Moreover, underlying some of this literature may lurk a hypothesis of ‘black-girl-as-pathologized-female’. (p. 154)

As mentioned previously, this study was based on answering the following questions:

1. What specific concepts did all participants view as a problem for teenage young women?
2. How do participants feel about the importance of gender-specific programming for young women in high school?
3. How did participants view themselves within their communities?
4. What is the impact of gender-specific programming for Black girls?

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the findings and attempt to initiate a comprehensive discussion of participants’ experiences and the ways in which it relates to Black feminist scholarship in the areas of urban education, psychology and sociology. The purpose of this chapter is to expound interpretive outcomes of these findings.

The overriding finding in the study revealed that young African American women were in a college-supportive environment at Bridges that encouraged independence, utilizing their experiences as a platform, and operating with their future in mind. As a result, participants were preparing to attend college, developed critical thinking skills, explored
potential careers while also understanding realities of racism, sexism, and inadequate learning environments, all while flourishing in an affirming space with supportive African American female peers and adults.

**EDUCATION AS EMPOWERING: BLACK HERSTORY FOR BLACK GIRLS**

As stated in Chapter 2, existing literature on the education of Black girls primarily suggests that Black girls are academically successful despite a lack of academic support from teachers throughout their elementary and secondary education. This appeared to be the case for the majority of the Bridges participants. Guidance counselors and teachers who made a positive impact played a large role in the academic and emotional well-being of the participants. Young women reported enthusiasm with advanced coursework, and were successful in the classroom as “bright,” “above average” or “advanced.” All participants appeared to be utilizing education as an opportunity to grow and to receive and develop knowledge in order to uplift themselves and their communities. But participants also expressed frustration with the educational system. It is vital that Black girls receive verbal reinforcement and high expectations from teachers in order to exist in an environment where learning flourishes (Honora, 2003; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan 1995). A number of scholars have demonstrated that as Black women advance their education, their communities are also in a position to be improved (Buvinic, 1998; Coleman-Burns, 1989; Collins, 2008; Paul, 2003; Robinson & Ward, 1991).

Culturally relevant curriculum was a salient topic to include, as participants found it to be empowering. Boyd (1993) stated that if African Americans are not present in the curriculum, it is difficult for African American students to find themselves reflected in the academic experience. The lack of this inclusivity in education does not determine academic achievement, as illustrated with Bridges participants, however, the lack of African American men and women can lead to isolation and limited exposure to the contributions by Black people. Consequently Black students are often limited to personal, familial, or communal initiatives and resources in order to learn about Black history and accomplishments of African Americans.

Two participants educated themselves independently about African American men and women. Each found it to be fulfilling to read books by African American authors, such
as Langston Hughes and bell hooks. The participant that identified as a Black lesbian found solace in reading bell hooks, a Black feminist lesbian scholar.

African American students exposed to curricula consisting of Black people and presented by an African American teacher, can thrive in a classroom in which their culture is discussed and validated (Carroll, 1997; Paul, 2003; Payne & Strickland, 2008; Thompson, 2007). Education about African Americans may include men and women in order to avoid what has largely been done in the past and continues to be perpetuated: teaching Black history, literature, and accomplishments often focuses disproportionately on men. The gender, race, and ethnicity of who teaches the culturally relevant curriculum also sends a message to students. For example, if there is a lesson on African American women and there are few African American women as teachers and principals, the query remains: What is the impact of Black students learning Black history from non-Blacks? This is expounded when few African American students are in the class. Collins (1999) determined this is frequently the case in higher education: Black women’s literature is valued, but their presence as students, faculty, and administrators is limited. Although some dialogue regarding the need for culturally relevant curriculum is present in schools, more research is needed to understand the racial dynamics and psychological strategies and perspectives of African Americans being taught by non-Black instructors at all levels of education.

Scholars have indicated that Black girls are often treated as invisible by teachers who are largely not African-American (Banks, 2005; Bhavnani, 1993; Carter, 2007; Evans, 1980; Evans-Winters, 2005; Fine et al., 2000; Fordham, 1993; Grant, 1997; Henry, 1998; Paul, 2003; Perkins, 1989; Rollock, 2007). This experience was not consistent for all participants. However, Nimue communicated dismay and frustration with teachers because only two attempted to form relationships with her throughout her high school education. This suggests that a lack of comfort in school, little motivation, and limited accessibility to teachers play a large role in students’ academic self esteem even if these student are identified as intelligent by teachers. As Honora (2003) argues, students’ accessibility to teachers is dependent upon teachers expressing interest in students’ interests or goals. Perhaps Nimue believed her teachers were not accessible because they did not verbalize an interest in her during much of her time in high school. Nimue’s experience is consistent with the literature that Black women are isolated during their education while simultaneously excelling. Research
indicates that Black women are achieving academic success--college and graduate school--in higher rates than any demographic of people of color, including men of color (AAUW, 1992; Belgrave, 2009; Hrabowski, Maton, Greene, & Greif, 2000; Irvine, 1990). In elementary school, Black girls are succeeding academically at the rates of Black and White males (Belgrave, 2009; Grant, 1997). Therefore, many of the young women may be utilizing psychological strategies in order to maintain their sense of self and academic achievement. Regardless of the reason for academic achievement, it is clear that relationships with adults, including teachers, are important to young African American women’s perception of school and higher education.

**RELATIONAL IDENTITIES: CENTRAL TO DEVELOPMENT**

Relational research and programs often examine the cause of young women’s aggression towards each other and the ways in which girls’ development is largely based on her relationships. Specific to African American girls are interpersonal relationships, which allows exploring who they are via their relationships.

Relationships are important for adolescent girls, as they search for connections and identify with peers (Belgrave, 2009; Belgrave et al., 2000; Boyd, 1993; Rhodes 2005; Taylor et al., 1995). Depending on the nature of these relationships as supportive or unsupportive, girls are likely to feel acknowledged or silenced (Fine et al., 2000; Fordham 1993; Taylor et al., 1995). For example, participants’ career interests were affected by their exposure to some Bridges employees who had a similar background and who also served as mentors. Belgrave et al. (2000) suggest that young African American women who are heard in this manner begin to develop mechanisms of resilience and resistance.

Prior to involvement with Bridges, the majority of the participants reported having low self esteem, which Boyd (1993) has emphasized is connected to positive messages and empowerment. It seems as though participants’ exposure to consistent, positive messages received at Bridges built confidence, increased respect for other people, and elevated self esteem. As Boyd (1993) and Banks (2005) argue, the empowerment of Black women is necessary and the ability to connect with each other can be one strategy. Bridges appears to serve as a space for African American girls to connect and empower each other. As a result of not being supported as young Black women in other environments, Bridges may be a
location were young women are able to connect and not be concerned with stereotypical ideals of girlhood, such as hair, gossiping, etc.

These results are consistent with much of the literature on Black girls’ achievement. Carroll (1997), Paul (2003) and Rhodes et al. (2007) argue that African American girls recognize the value in being in supportive, encouraging environments as an asset to their development. The participants appear to value the supportive environment of Bridges and acknowledge the importance of the space as central to their growth and development.

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1992) encapsulates Black women’s experience with sexual harassment and sexual assault through the lens of the United States legal system:

Although the institution of slavery is now behind us, the stereotypes that justified sexual abuse of Black women are still very much a part of our current society. . .Pervasive stereotypes about Black women not only shape the kind of harassment that Black women experience but also influence whether Black women’s stories are likely to be believed. Historically Black women’s words were not taken as true. In our own legal system, a connection was once drawn between chastity and lack of veracity. In other words, a woman who was likely to have sex was not likely to tell the truth. Because Black women were not expected to be chaste, similarly, they were unlikely to tell the truth. . .One judge warned jurors that the general presumption of chastity applicable to white women did not apply to Black women. Lest we believe that these attitudes are a thing of the past, a very recent study of jurors in rape trials reveals that Black women’s integrity is still very deeply questioned by many people in society. One juror, explaining why Black rape victims were discredited by the jury, said “you can’t believe everything they say; they’re known to exaggerate the truth.” (pp. 1469-1470)

Participants discussed sexual harassment as an occurrence experienced often on a daily basis. Sexual harassment is defined as “unwanted or unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that interferes unreasonably with a student’s ability to learn, study, work, achieve, or participate in school activities. . .schools are legally responsible for preventing [sexual harassment]” (National Women’s Law Center [NWLC], 2007). Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act prohibits federally-funded educational institutions to discriminate based on sex, which includes sexual harassment (NWLC, 2007; Title IX, 1972). Sexual harassment is one of the ten issues schools must legally address. Harassment is not limited to the school premises but includes school related activities, including field trips, afterschool programs, and sporting events, often at other schools.
The limited literature on sexual harassment and violence towards African American girls and women indicates exposure to sexual harassment as early as middle school and continuing on into adulthood in the workplace (Crenshaw, 1992; Jefferson, 1999; Peres, 1999; West, 2003). The Crenshaw quote above addresses a historically-based widespread mentality regarding sexual violence against Black women. Crenshaw (1992) and Burrell (1993) described how stereotypes and ideals of Black women are used as justification for abuse. As mentioned in Chapter 2, U.S. society perpetuates myths of Black women’s sexual availability; such myths are viewed and internalized as normal (Collins, 2000; Simmons, 2006; West, 2003). As West (2003) wrote, “It was easier to perceive Black women as promiscuous Jezebels rather than rape victims” (p. 2). West identifies contemporary terms, “welfare queens, hoochies, freaks, hoodrats. Although the names have changed the message is the same: Black women are sexually available and sexually deviant” (p. 98).

Perhaps children internalize the negative images of Black women and their bodies at an early age. As stated in the literature review, positive images of Black women are limited. This may contribute to African American girls experiencing physical and sexual harassment through inappropriate touching, being cornered, and being forced into sexual behavior (AAUW, 1993; Brandenburg, 1997).

Much of the research on sexual harassment in education focuses on college campuses and K-12 schools. Since 1991, there has been a surge in research and writing on sexual harassment, perhaps due in part to the Anita Hill--Clarence Thomas hearings that took place that year. Although there was much debate about Hill’s role in accusing Thomas of sexual harassment, African American girls and women learned a valuable lesson--that silence won’t protect them (Lorde, 1984) and speaking out may result in a penalty. The prominent Hill--Thomas hearings created national dialogue regarding sexual harassment and workplace behavior (Cleage, 1993; Crenshaw, 1992; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003) and continue to influence young Black girls today.

Similarly, Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education, the first federal case of student-to-student harassment was argued in 1999. This case appeared throughout the barrage of literature on sexual harassment in schools, as it was the first case of student-to-student sexual harassment (Campos, 2002; McClure, 2001; Mintz, 2004; Sandler & Stonehill, 2005; Spade & Valentine, 2008; Wetzel & Brown, 2000). Davis, a fifth grade,
honor-roll African American girl, was physically and verbally harassed by a White male peer over the course of several months. Although Davis informed her primary teacher and two others, her complaint was ignored until the Davis family filed a lawsuit. This was the first federal case addressing peer harassment; it determined that schools are responsible for addressing peer-to-peer sexual harassment that takes place on campus. The unidentified White male peer did not deny the charges and was sentenced via the Juvenile Courts.

What continues to be troubling, however, is that much of the literature discussed Davis’ experience with sexual harassment with respect to her gender (Campos, 2002; McClure, 2001; Mintz, 2004; Sandler & Stonehill, 2005; Spade & Valentine, 2008; Wetzel & Brown, 2000), while simultaneously erasing her African American ethnicity, which continues to be rarely acknowledged (Jefferson, 1999; Peres, 1999; Stein, 1999). Overall, this sexual harassment case is rarely discussed as simultaneously raced and gendered (AAUW, 1993; Brandenburg, 1997). The way in which the school reacted to Davis’ abuser is remnant of the history of Black women’s sexual abuse by White men: abuse that is overlooked and goes unpunished. Notwithstanding, admitting to the charges in the lawsuit allowed him to maintain his protection through use of just his initials, G.F.

It is perhaps not surprising that all participants in the present study experienced sexual harassment, as 83 percent of girls experience such harassment in schools throughout the United States (Phillips, 1998). As stated in Chapter 2, an example of a deficit lens is illustrated through a continuum of victimization, which minimizes the focus of Black girls’ experience with harassment and ultimately places blame on the young woman instead of the perpetrator (Miller, 2008). Perhaps broader uses of deficit perspectives in sociology impede studies on Black girls’ experiences with sexual harassment.

Consistent with the literature, the experiences of participants with sexual harassment were met with little reaction from their schools. In neglecting issues such as sexual harassment, gender harassment, and other gendered violence, schools are creating hostile environments for young women. Although sexual in nature, this harassment particularly illustrates gendered (AAUW, 1992; Miller, 2008; Orenstein, 1994; Phillips, 1998) and raced power dynamics (AAUW, 1992; Crenshaw, 1992; Jefferson, 1999; Miller, 2008). Despite the lack of support by school or public policies, participants’ experiences are in accord with the research literature, which has found that African American girls are likely to speak out
against harassment. The growing literature on eradicating sexual harassment in schools does not often include African Americans of any socioeconomic status; generally, gender is the sole focus. This monist schema is problematic as it assumes similarities among all young women while simultaneously ignoring and erasing ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1992; Phillips, 1998). This model continues to perpetuate the history of erasure and exclusion of Black women’s experiences in education, mainstream feminism, women’s studies, and social science literature (Beale, 1995; Bhavnani, 1993; Chambers, 2001; Crenshaw, 1992; duCille, 1994; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Henry, 1998; Hull et al., 1982; Pack-Brown et al., 1998; Patai & Koertge, 1994; Smith, 1983; Weathers, 1995).

Black feminist scholarship is an avenue for developing practical solutions for African American girls to address sexual harassment. With this in mind, in order to be effective the solutions must be developed by young Black women, in collaboration with their adult advocates who have access to understanding the problems within communities and practical solutions that work specifically for the community.

**PREVIEW OF THE FUTURE: IMPACT OF ‘-ISMS’**

The participants discussed many areas of concern, including racism in education, sexism and racism in general, male privilege in the lesbian and gay community, and depression in the Black community. Each of the topics is important in the lives of Black girls and should be further developed in future research. However, two issues warrant further discussion in particular: sexism within the lesbian and gay community and negative experiences with White peers.

Nimue experienced a situation with a White roommate, Rebecca, who cried during a discussion about race and ultimately claimed to be in danger. After this incident, Nimue and her friend, another young woman of color, ended up debriefing with each other. This occurrence demonstrates privilege and social marginality. Taylor et al. (1995) explain how girls privileged via class, race, and/or education are socialized to think people “are interested in who they are and what they say” (p. 3); these girls often sacrifice their own voice for acceptance by peers. Some scholars and writers find that crying is a technique utilized by White American women to control their surroundings, often utilized to avoid topics regarding race (Hernández & Rehman, 2002; Ponterotto, 2001). Nimue was hyper-visible
through Rebecca talking about her to a peer and simultaneously isolated by having limited exposure to people of color on campus and being accused of endangering a White peer. This technique not only ignores issues of race but removes and silences concrete issues relevant prior to the moment of lament (Bulkin, 1996; Hernández & Rehman, 2002; Leonardo, 2009). Secondly, Nimue is learning the ways in which Black women’s experiences are often bicultural in the dominant--White--and in her primary--Black--culture. Bell (1990) described how the duality of Black women’s lives is complex and requires a social balancing act.

The articulation of male privilege and sexual harassment in the LGBT community was an interesting topic in this study. Nimue discussed her individual experience and collective observation of lesbian women harassed by gay men. There is limited research on the experiences of lesbian women being harassed by gay men. However, Forell and Williams (2001) found that the legal definition of sexual harassment assumes heterosexuality among men and women; therefore the majority of harassment laws assume men as the perpetrators and women as victims of harassment. McIntosh (1988) and Kirk and Okazawa-Ray (2007) found privilege takes place by members of dominant groups, including men, who have “economic, political and cultural benefits and power” (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2007, p. 5). Thus, in the case of harassment by gay men of lesbian women, it is possible the dynamics of male privilege are present. Nimue provides the term “male privilege” as recognition of men, straight or gay, in a position of dominance over lesbians’ bodies. Though sexual orientation is the reason provided by the men, perhaps the acknowledgement of the sexuality illustrates gay men’s justification to physically harass women.

Black feminist, lesbian and mother, Lorde (1984) discusses the importance of individuals moving forward from rhetoric to concrete action. This process, though difficult, is necessary in order to create positive action in communities in which Black women live and thrive regardless of sexual orientation. Nimue created action through her prior experiences as an intern for several organizations, but her explanation of her experiences as a Black lesbian facing harassment may be not be the foundation of action in her life, but create language to make action possible in the lives of others.
CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

In the future, the researcher will continue to expound upon the discussion here. Areas of the thesis that have implications for young Black women include the strategies participants utilize in order to resist sexual harassment, ways to duplicate the Bridges model that may provide young Black women with the tools to identify gender, economic and racial inequities, and means of establishing a college-going environment.

As with all social science research, this research is limited in scope. The sample utilized for this study is composed of young African American women who live in an urban area in the eastern United States, and the sample is relatively small in size considering the large population of African American girls in urban neighborhoods. Regardless of sample size, the knowledge, experiences and concerns participants discussed are valuable. These young women live and attended school in urban neighborhoods. Secondly, the variety of topics and the manner in which they are analyzed in this research create one of several of prospects. Thus, it is not possible to know conclusively whether experiences discussed can be generalized to young Black women throughout the United States or whether accord and variance distinguished here is impacted via the data collection process utilized. As a result of the discussion and topics discussed, the researcher finds the strengths to offset its limitations. Nevertheless, this study contributes to the growing body of Black feminist literature about young Black women’s experiences.

Future research should continue to focus on conversations with young African American women by African American women. This research should also continue to utilize a Black cultural perspective in rural, suburban, and affluent neighborhoods about Black girls’ experiences in school, extracurricular programs, and the community. The need to recognize concepts--such as identifying socioeconomic status, ethnicity and gender--as concrete social locations inextricably linked to growth, development, and prospective opportunities will allow for future, relevant research to focus on the diverse lives of Black girls.
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APPENDIX A

TALKING POINTS FOR BRIDGES
San Diego State University

Talking Points for Bridges

Lisa Covington will be returning to Bridges to talk with you about your experiences as girls of color. Some of what you will discuss will be related to your experience with Bridges but some will include your personal feelings about how being a girl has impacted your experiences. In order to talk with you about this, she needs to get permission from your parents. Please take this paperwork to your parent or guardian to get permission. If you have questions, please contact Lisa [contact information provided].
APPENDIX B

MEASURES--INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
How do you identify (ethnicity, nationality, etc.)?

Why did you decide to work with BRIDGES?

What organizations were you involved with before and during this program?

Tell me about the experience and impact of participating in this program.

Do you think girls need programs like BRIDGES? Why or why not?

Do you have programs in your school for girls?

How did you feel before joining this program? Now?

Would you be doing anything different if you were not part of BRIDGES? What?

Did being in BRIDGES change the way you feel about yourself? Other young women? If so, how?

What are the things you learned during the weekly meetings and retreat? Why?

Are you going to college after this year (senior year)?

Would you recommend BRIDGES to your peers? Why or Why not?

In your own words, what are the goals of the BRIDGES program?

**Additional questions**

What is your age?

How long have been with BRIDGES?

What were your plans for the future (before coming to BRIDGES)?

What are your plans for the future now? What do you think is the reason your plans changed? If your plans have changed, has participation with BRIDGES impact that decision.

Before joining BRIDGES, what were your interactions with peers? Boys? Teachers? Parents?

What are your interactions with peers? Boys? Teachers? Parents?

Do you see differences between girls that are in BRIDGES and girls that are not in BRIDGES?