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Culture Counts: Examining the Effectiveness of a Culturally Focused Empowerment Program For At-Risk Black Girls

Candice Nicole Aston

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CULTURE COUNTS: EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A CULTURALLY
FOCUSED EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK BLACK GIRLS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Candice N. Aston

August 2017

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Candice N. Aston

2017

**DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education**

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

School Psychology Doctoral Program

Presented by:

Candice N. Aston, M.S.Ed. Child Psychology (Duquesne University, 2013)

October 26, 2016

**CULTURE COUNTS: EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A CULTURALLY
FOCUSED EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK BLACK GIRLS**

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ABSTRACT

CULTURE COUNTS: EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A CULTURALLY FOCUSED EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK BLACK GIRLS

By

Candice N. Aston

August 2015

Dissertation supervised by Scott L. Graves, Ph.D.

Traditionally, many of the problems experienced by Black girls were overshadowed by the ongoing crises facing Black Males. Although important, the focus on Blackness and masculinity often implicitly leaves young Black girls on the sidelines and fails to recognize their unique obstacles. Fortunately, there has been a new surge of social concern revolving around the plight of Black girls in the school system. New estimates report that Black girls are facing an educational crisis in regards to disproportionate discipline practices and academics (Morris, 2012). To date, there has been very limited research in regards to school-based interventions that have been designed to help Black girls explore both their cultural and gender identity. This is problematic because Black girls are constantly confronted with deeply embedded stereotypes that reinforce racial and gender biases both in and outside the classroom

(Morris, 2007). A key protective factor of combating negative messages and racial adversity is developing a positive racial identity (Case & Robinson, 2003). To address this problem, a mixed-methods study was conducted to investigate the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing an 8-week cultural empowerment program based on the Sisters of Nia curriculum. Qualitative results indicated a significant improvement in the participants' racial identity and self-concept. In addition, single-subject data has found the Sisters of Nia curriculum to have a positive impact on verbal aggression, which was evidenced by a significant reduction in behavior for all four single-subject participants'. These findings serve as further support to incorporate culturally-based interventions at the school level.

DEDICATION

*“I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has had to overcome while trying to succeed.
-Booker T. Washington*

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Caden Mendenhall. The greatest joy I have received in life is being your mother. It is because of you that I never gave up despite the many obstacles that were placed in my path. I hope that my educational journey will someday encourage you to reach your own goals and dreams in life. I will also like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Warren Aston. While you were not able to be physically present during my journey, I know that you are always with me in spirit and rooting for my success from up above. In addition, I am extremely grateful for my supportive family that always believed in me and offered words of encouragement throughout this entire process. I am grateful to my mother, for her strength and guidance and for instilling a hard work ethic in me and always putting her family first. I am extremely thankful for my family and my faith in God without either of these things I would not be where I am today.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite ending over 100 years ago, the cultural trauma of slavery continues to affect the everyday lives of Black Americans (Akbar, 1996; Leary, 2005). While slavery had an equally devastating effect on both Black women and men, there has been very little attention and emphasis on the lived experiences of Black women and how those experiences worked to form the modern day Black female psyche. Since arriving in America, Black women were dehumanized, physically abused, and treated as property in the eyes of the law. In fact, Black female slaves were given to White women as gifts from their husbands (Adams & Pleck, 2009). A common misconception about slavery is that when compared to males, Black females faced fewer hardships. While it is true that the hardships faced by men and women may have differed, Black female slaves, because of their gender, were placed at increased risk. One of the major sufferings faced by Black female slaves was sexual exploitation. Black women were silenced and prohibited from defending themselves against any type of abuse, including sexual, at the hands of White men and left voiceless (Browne-Marshall, 2002).

Although the physical captivity of slaves ended on December 18, 1865, the mental captivity of slavery has remained through acts of racism and discrimination. The mistreatment of Black women during slavery has influenced how Black women view themselves and has fueled the perpetuation of negative generalizations about Black womanhood. The representation of Black women throughout history through mediums such as radio and film has affected the way American society as a whole values Black women. Historically, mainstream media has been criticized for negatively representing Black women (Gilens, 1996). To date, there have been several recurrent stereotypical characterizations of Black women in American society. Film Historian, Donald Bogle, chronicled the careers of popular Black female entertainers during the

1900's into the late 1970's and found that Black women were repeatedly cast as sex, social, or political symbols (Bogle, 2007). Although Bogle's research is not grounded within a psychological framework, it does provide evidence of the stereotypical depictions of Black women in the media such as Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire.

Mammy was one of the first stereotypes to emerge in the South during slavery in reference to Black female identity. Physically, a Mammy is frequently described as an overweight, dark skinned woman with large lips and a bandanna covering her hair (West, 1995). A Mammy is often portrayed as the faithful domestic servant and caregiver for her White family. Mammies were criticized for caring more for their White families at the expense of their own biological children. Collins (1990) implies that the image of the Mammy functions to justify the economic exploitation of house slaves and helps to sustain the long lasting relationship between Black women and domestic service.

In stark contrast to the Mammy, the image of Jezebel also emerged during the era of slavery. Jezebel referred to a mixed-raced woman that had White physical characteristics such as straight hair, thin lips, and a slender nose. Jezebels were perceived as fitting in with the White standard of beauty, which came with the negative consequence of falling prey to White slave owners. Just as the character of the Mammy functioned to keep Black females in domestic roles, a key function of the Jezebel image was to justify the sexual exploitation of Black slaves by labeling them as being "loose women" with uncontrollable sexual urges (Collins, 1991). By creating this image of Black women, society was more apt to overlook the sexual abuse experienced by Black female slaves at the hand of White slave owners.

Lastly, Sapphire was the third stereotypical image to emerge during slavery in reference to Black female identity. During the 1940's and 1950's, the Sapphire character was debuted on

the Amos and Andy radio and television shows as the loud, hostile, overbearing Black woman (West, 2008). The Sapphire character is strongly associated with the modern day depiction of the “Angry Black Woman” and has perpetuated the belief that Black women are in need of social correction and lack self-control. Historically, the Sapphire character was characterized as a strong workhorse that caused Black men to flee their family due to their aggressive and overbearing nature (West, 1995).

Despite being introduced hundreds of years ago, culturally imposed stereotypes continue to influence the self-concept of Black women. Although progress has been made as a whole toward a more inclusive society, negative images of Black women continue to flood the media. While the term Sapphire is rarely used in reference to modern day Black women, similar depictions of Black women as “hostile” or “overbearing” continue to flood the media and influence the implicit biases formed about Black femininity. Continual negative portrayals of Black women in the media are problematic because it hinders positive identity development. For example, Givens and Monahan (2005) found that viewing stereotypical images of Black women significantly influenced how Black women in real life were viewed. In addition, research has shown that Black media images influence actual self-perceptions among Black people and affect how they view their self-image (Jenkins et al., 1973).

Words like “angry” and aggressive” have unfortunately become commonly used terms used to describe Black femininity (George, 2015). Black women and girls are constantly pressured to conform with societal expectations of femininity, which are based upon Eurocentric ideals of White womanhood. They are often criticized for exuding any behaviors or characteristics that are in contrast with White female identity (Amuchie, 2015). Due to their gender and race, Black women are faced with daily pressures of racism and sexism and are

forced to overcome several oppressive systems (Holland, 2013). One theory that emerged to capture the distinct lived experiences of Black women is Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1990). One of the key tenets of this theory is the concept of intersectionality. In 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw used the term intersectionality to refer to the duality of Black female identity. Specifically, intersectionality highlights how different systems of oppression (i.e. racism; sexism), influence the day to day experiences faced by Black women (Amuchi, 2015). Society's acceptance of intersectionality has been an ongoing battle for Black feminist researchers. Currently, there is no recognition at the court level recognizing how race and gender combine to serve as oppressive forces against Black women. Thus, courts continue to process racism and sexism as two separate entities (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Throughout history, the devaluation and hierarchical challenges faced by Black women has been present. In regard to voting rights, Black women received voting rights in 1965, which was 45 years after the right to vote was granted to White women. The distinction between the privileges granted to White women and not to Black women highlight the need for the adoption of an intersectional framework. Furthermore, it explains how the combination of race and gender form a joint oppressive force against Black women. Intersectionality recognizes that not all forms of oppression are equal and thus, the experience of a Black female is distinctly different from that of a Black male.

Collins (1990) advocated for Black women to refute negative stereotypes associated with Black female identity and take an active role in regards to how they define and value themselves. Racial stereotypes have been utilized by society as a tool to perpetuate negative characteristics and justify the mistreatment and devaluation of Black women and girls. Researchers contend that stereotypical depictions of Black men and women are problematic and likely to cause Black

youth to internalize that they are of little value and worth in society, which disrupts positive racial identity (Watkins, 2005).

Racial identity is defined as the degree to which an individual feels a connection with and an attachment to his or her racial group based on a common history and shared values (Thompson, Anderson, & Bakeman, 2000). Racial identity has always been a significant topic in regards to minorities because it focuses on the importance and meaning that someone attributes to race in defining themselves. Specifically, racial identity is of high importance to Black Americans because of their history of slavery and racism and how those events continue to affect them today. Early psychological research asserted that based on their history of mistreatment in America, Black men and women were naturally more likely to experience low self-esteem (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). Charles Cooley described this ideology as the “looking-glass self”, which explains how an individual’s identity is affected by how society views them (Cooley, 1902; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). This concept was initially supported by the work of Dr. Kenneth and Mamie Clark, who utilized doll studies to assess self-esteem among Black and White children (Clark & Clark, 1939). Through their research, they found that Black children showed a preference for the White doll and were more likely to associate positive characteristics with the White doll in comparison to the Black doll (Clark & Clark, 1947). In addition, the term reflective appraisal was used to describe why Black children repeatedly showed a preference for the White doll. Reflective appraisal is a concept that states that how individuals view themselves is largely influenced on how others around them view them (Felson, 1985). Based on the history of racism and discrimination in American society, Black people continue to struggle with maintaining a healthy self-concept. This was supported in 2005, when Kari Davis replicated the original doll test carried out by Kenneth and Mamie Clark in her documentary, *A Girl Like Me*.

Similar to the results recorded over 50 years ago, Kari found that the Black children in her study also perceived the White doll to be nicer than the Black doll and correlated the Black doll with being bad. Results indicated that fifteen out of the twenty-one children that participated in the study favored the White doll to the Black doll. On a societal level, this demonstrates the inclination for Black children to prefer White skin, White dolls, and White friends (Parham, White, Ajamu, 2000).

Given the fact that Black women have historically been devalued in American society, it is only natural for them to internalize the negative beliefs that mainstream society places upon them (Marks, Settles, Cooke, Morgan, & Sellers, 2004). Therefore, when working with stigmatized groups, like Black women, it is important to consider how stereotypes and attitudes held by mainstream culture can pose a threat to their racial identity. Thus, it is important to base this study under the framework that racial identity is a salient issue for the positive development of Black female adolescents.

Several researchers have shown that having a positive ethnic/racial identity resulted in higher achievement and self-esteem (Phinney & Chavira, 1992), increased prosocial behavior and efficacy beliefs (McCreary, Slavin, & Berry, 1996; Romero & Roberts, 1998), and decreased use of violence (Arbona, Jackson, McCoy, & Blakely, 1999; Belgrave, et al., 2004). Specifically, Black girls that endorse higher levels of Pro-Black attitudes reported lower levels of distressing psychological and physical symptoms and were more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem and self -acceptance (Allen, 2001; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Buckley & Carter, 2005; Constantine et al. 2006). With a majority of current literature focusing primary on Black males, there continues to be a void regarding the specific dilemmas faced by Black women.

In reference to Black womanhood, it is vital to reach beyond the stereotypical images of the video vixen in the latest hip hop video and focus on the intricacies of the unique Black female experience as she navigates through a society that consistently marginalizes her self-worth. A common description ascribed to Black females is resiliency. Resiliency reflects the ideology that despite facing adversity, Black Americans have been able to rise above societal challenges. While the strength of Black men and women is evident throughout history, it is important to not allow the idea of resiliency to diminish the harsh inequities and experiences Black women face. While Black girls represent a slightly higher number of female high school graduates (34.1%) when compared specifically to White females (34%), there are still major barriers to becoming a successful Black woman in America (Stoops, 2004). An alternative approach to understand resilience among Black adolescents is the Strength-Based Model for Black Youth presented by Nicolas and colleagues (2008). In this model, there is a focus on the strengths employed by Black children to overcome harsh obstacles and the possible detrimental effects that can later occur because of those experiences. Furthermore, the Strength-Based Model discusses how Black youth often have to tap into coping strategies that either enhance or impair the quality of their overall social and emotional functioning. While their coping strategies may be beneficial in that specific moment, they could have detrimental effects later in life. For example, Black children that grow up in volatile environments may withdraw and disengage from their surroundings. While disengagement may be a strength in certain situations, persistent disengagement could lead to impaired functioning (Nicolas et al., 2008). Therefore, this model accounts for the fact that increasing resiliency alone does not solve the problems faced by Black children and more emphasis is needed on the specific plight of Black girls.

Barriers to Success

Racial stereotypes have been utilized as a tool to perpetuate negative characteristics and justify the mistreatment and criminalization of Black women and girls. Specifically, Black girls are currently facing an education crisis in regards to disproportionate discipline in American schools. Critical race theory purports that racial schemas about Black women promote the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and form the basis of implicit biases. These biases can be used to explain the current phenomenon of why teachers are more likely to interpret the behaviors of Black students differently and apply more stringent discipline practices. While Black girls are performing at a higher rate than Black males, research has revealed that when compared to their White counterparts, Black females are also experiencing a crisis in regards to schooling experiences (Blake, Butler, Lewis, & Darenbourg, 2011; Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). The need for social correction is a common ideal held by school administrators in regards to discipline practices toward Black girls. One study found that teachers reported utilizing harsher discipline toward Black girls to discourage them from engaging in behaviors that conflict with White femininity. In addition, researchers have shown that teachers are more likely to perceive Black girls as hostile and aggressive in comparison to their White counterparts (Blake et al., 2011). The negative stereotypes that teachers' hold about Black girls is likely a result of the negative depictions of Black girls that they encounter through television programming or other forms of media (Collins, 2004). An unfortunate outcome of these beliefs is reflected in the statistics on disciplinary practices, which revealed that Black girls are more likely to be suspended from school in comparison to their White and Hispanic peers (Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Blake et al., 2011). Recent data revealed that Black girls are twice as likely to be suspended in every state across the United States (US News report, 2017).

Unfortunately, disproportionate disciplinary practices also transfer to the criminal justice system. Black females continue to be overrepresented in the criminal and juvenile justice systems and experience the highest rates of residential detention when compared to females of other races (Mauer, 2013). The same negative perceptions and beliefs that contribute to disproportionate discipline in the schools, also operate within the criminal justice system, and thus work together to create a school to prison pipeline for Black girls (Morris, 2012). In her report, Morris proclaims that Black female and male students experience higher levels of exclusionary discipline than any other racial group. Despite comprising only 17% of the youth population, Black females and males represent 58% of all juveniles sent to adult prison (Children's Defense Fund, 2011). Due to the growing number of obstacles faced by Black girls, providing interventions that account for the unique nature of the Black female experience are critical. Therefore, providing a program that is instrumental in developing a positive racial and gender identity such as Afrocentric programming is of high importance.

Afrocentric Intervention

Afrocentric is a term used to describe practices that are rooted in the cultural image and interest of African people and reflect their lived experiences. One of the leading theorists regarding Afrocentric work is Molefi Asante, who developed the African Centered Paradigm (Asante, 1988). Afrocentric interventions can be a great tool when working with Black youth because they address specific concerns related to the Black experience that traditional Eurocentric theories fail to address (Akbar, 1984). In order to tackle some of the glaring concerns regarding Black females, Afrocentric programs such as Sisters of Nia can be an effective tool in re-patterning the thought processes that Black females hold regarding Black female identity. In other words, where mainstream society may program Black girls to believe

that they are of low self-worth, Afrocentric programs teach them about their rich cultural history and celebrate their African heritage.

To date, several studies have produced positive outcomes in regards to the adoption of Afrocentric beliefs. Jones-DeWeever (2009) found that Black girls that were more in touch with their Afrocentric or racial heritage were more likely to be happy on a given day in comparison to those who did not describe themselves as Afrocentric. The girls in the study that reported higher levels of Afrocentric beliefs also had higher grades and expressed a greater concern to go to college. Interestingly, despite these girls performing well in school, they were more likely to express a dislike for school; which is likely attributed to the lack of culturally responsive curriculum. Furthermore, research has shown that Black girls that endorse a positive ethnic identity are less likely to internalize negative stereotypes or engage in sexual risk (Townsend, Neilands, Thomas, & Jackson, 2010; Wallace et al., 2011) Given this information, the developers of the Strength-Based Model for Black Youth proposed that future educational interventions incorporate knowledge regarding their ancestral group to prepare them for coping with discrimination or other problems later on in life (Nicolas et al., 2008). In response to the need for Afrocentric programming, Faye Belgrave collaborated with a team of researchers and developed a gender and race specific intervention for Black girls entitled, *Sisters of Nia*.

Sisters of Nia

Sisters of Nia was developed in 2004 as a group intervention to aid in the empowerment of Black girls. *Sisters of Nia* bridges the gap between African and Black culture through activities that seek to heighten one's cultural values and beliefs and form a positive racial identity (Belgrave et al., 2004). The intervention itself is based upon the 7 principles of Nguzu Saba, which are: *unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative*

economics, purpose, creativity, and faith and are a part of the African American holiday known as Kwanzaa. Nguzu Saba is defined as the Principles of the Black Value system and was created by Dr. Maulana Karenga (Karenga, 1996). *Sisters of Nia* has been utilized in clinical and community settings over the past decade and has shown positive outcomes for Black girls in areas of relational aggression, sexual promiscuity, drug attitudes, and resiliency. Intervention group participants have demonstrated significant increases in ethnic identity, androgynous gender roles, drug outcomes and decreases in relational aggression (Belgrave et al., 1994; Belgrave, 2002; Belgrave et al., 2004). Initially, *Sisters of Nia* was primarily utilized in conjunction with existing drug and alcohol curriculums. Results from these studies indicated that Afrocentric values and racial identity were significant predictors of drug use and drug attitudes (Belgrave, Brome, & Hampton, 2000; Townsend & Belgrave, 2000). Similarly, when *Sisters of Nia* was implemented with middle school students after school, there was an increase in ethnic identity and a decrease in relational aggression among treatment group participants (Belgrave et al., 2004). Despite the proven effectiveness of *Sisters of Nia* in community settings, there is a current void of studies that implement Afrocentric interventions within the school day. This is problematic for Black students given the fact that adolescent students spend at least 6-8 hours in school and are often faced with threats to their racial identity in this setting. The need for Afrocentric program is of high importance for Black girls due to the challenges they face in regard to race and gender.

Need for Present Study

When someone hears the words, “Black Woman”, what usually follows is a discussion of problems ranging from welfare and teenage pregnancy to drugs and violence. In an effort to build upon previous research concerning the need for Afrocentric interventions to counteract

marginalization of Black females, this study focused on changing the developmental trajectory of Black female identity through the *Sisters of Nia* intervention program. One of the goals of this study was to empower Black female adolescents to rewrite what mainstream society tells them about their Black female identity. Interventions such as *Sisters of Nia* can also be used to educate Black girls on their history and reframe society's expectations of them. Without the implementation of Afrocentric interventions, Black girls are at risk to internalize the negative stereotypes associated with being a Black woman in America. Therefore, school-based Afrocentric interventions can help Black girls overcome barriers that have the potential to hinder their educational success. For Black girls growing up in a world that has traditionally determined worth based off of skin color, programs such as *Sisters of Nia* are critical and can be extremely instrumental in empowering them to reach new heights. This program will allow them to develop a newfound connectedness to their culture and help them uncover the positive qualities of Black womanhood. Being that education is often a key factor in unlocking new opportunities for people of color, it is important to offer schools with viable interventions that address both the cultural and social emotional needs of Black students like the one proposed in this specific study.

Research Questions

The current study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of a manualized Afrocentric enhancement program called *Sisters of Nia* and adapt this program for use within the school setting as a tier II group intervention. The goal of this study is to investigate the impact of a school based intervention designed to promote positive racial identity development for Black girls. It is hypothesized that at the end of the intervention phase, participants will have an improved racial identity, which will result in increased prosocial behaviors and positive self-concept. The following research questions will be addressed:

1. Will the *Sisters of Nia* intervention increase positive racial identity among intervention group participants?
2. Does participation in the *Sisters of Nia* intervention increase positive self-concept among participants?
3. Does participation in the *Sisters of Nia* intervention improve school related outcomes in terms of academic achievement and classroom behavior?
4. Does participation in the *Sisters of Nia* intervention result in a decrease of verbally aggressive behaviors?
5. Is the Sisters of Nia intervention a feasible option for schools that are seeking culturally relevant interventions for Black girls?

Summary

In this chapter, I presented a brief overview of the complex history and experiences of Black women in America and how they influence Black female identity. While the negative characterization of Black women in media, film, and music is evident, very little is offered to contradict the inaccurate portrayals of Black women. Despite the many threats to positive Black female identity, little research has been conducted examining the direct correlation between positive identity, social emotional functioning, and school success. Therefore, the present study aims to illustrate the need for developing a strong sense of racial identity among Black girls by utilizing an Afrocentric intervention.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”

-Alice Walker

The review of the literature has four primary aims: (1) to introduce the theoretical frameworks that are important to the foundation of this research, (2) to provide a concise overview of the relevant literature that describes key issues related to the social and emotional development and academic achievement of Black girls, (3) to provide an overview of Afrocentric interventions, and (4) to provide an in depth description of the Sisters of Nia intervention and the research conducted on the efficacy of this intervention for empowering Black girls.

Framing the Review

This chapter will begin with a brief historical outline of slavery and racism and their effects on the present day psyche of Black women. When evaluating the importance of Afrocentric interventions for Black adolescent girls, it is important to first take into account the complex nature of their lived experiences by chronicling the history of Black women in America.

Most historians date the start of slavery in the North American colonies to 1619. That year, a Dutch ship brought in what was referred to as 20 odd Negroes and docked on the shores of Virginia at Point Comfort, which served as Jamestown’s checkpoint for ships wanting to trade with the colonists (Thornton, 1998). Several historians believe that these Black individuals were not brought to Jamestown for the intentional purpose of slavery, but were to be utilized as indentured servants that would be held for a term of years and then freed, similar to the White servants with whom the landowning colonists were already familiar (Rein, 2006). However, despite initial intentions, “these 20 persons of color were eventually traded for food and supplies,

thus marking the initial beginning of slavery” (Rein, 2006). According to the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, 12.5 million Africans were shipped to the new world. From that number, only 10.7 million were able to survive the treacherous journey through the middle passage and made it to North America (Eltis & Richardson, 2010). In terms of gender, the number of men and women that were enslaved was about equal (Saxton, 2003).

Slavery in America remained in effect throughout the 17th and 18th centuries and was abolished on January 1, 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation that freed approximately 4 million slaves. Although it has been cited that African slaves played a critical role in the development of building early America, Black people are continually viewed as inferior in the eyes of Americans (Rein, 2006).

Even though slavery ended 150 years ago, Black Americans today are still burdened with the ongoing ramifications of slavery, segregation, and racism (Marable, 1994). While slavery had an equally debilitating effect on Black women and males, little attention is given to the specific plight of Black women. In early literature, the male slaves are depicted as being more harshly punished and subjected to physical harm, despite evidence that women were not only physically abused but sexually, as well (Jones, 2009). Both groups were torn from their homeland and stripped not only of their families but also of their cultural identities. While enslaved, both men and women were forced to perform grueling labor, subjected to mental and physical degradation, and denied their most basic rights. They were beaten mercilessly, separated from loved ones, devalued, and defined as property under law (Harris, 1993).

Black women have endured numerous hardships since their involuntary migration from Africa and subsequent enslavement in America. Some argue that the physical captivity of slavery has been transformed into a mental captivity by way of the mainstream American culture’s

systematic fostering of racism and discrimination (Noel, 2007). The contemptible physical and emotional imprisonment of African female slaves continues to affect the values, identities, and ideologies that are imposed upon Black women today (Eyerman, 2001). The representation of Black women throughout history has affected how the world as a whole, values, identifies and idealizes Black women in general. Despite the progression of Black females in American society, notions behind negative generalizations of Black women continue to be present in mainstream culture (i.e., Mammie, Jezebel, or Welfare Queen).

One of the original characters known to represent the identity of Black women is the Mammie. A mammie is characterized as a “loyal domestic servant to White people, who takes care of, and provides for her White family over her own” (Woodard & Mastin, 2005, p. 271). Long after slavery was abolished, Black women were continually portrayed as ‘mammies’ by the media. During the 1950’s, radio and TV shows portrayed Black women as submissive, incompetent, and devious (Isaksen, 2012). In Isaksen’s (2012) article on racial formation theory, she discussed the effects of a radio show featuring a character called Aunt Jemima. In this role, White women pretended to be Black women and entertained listeners with breakfast recipes, minstrel songs, and housekeeping hints (p. 757). This stereotypical portrayal of ‘mammy’ influenced how listeners of the radio show viewed Black womanhood and perpetuated Black women as having limited cognitive ability and domestic roles. This was problematic because it painted an incomplete picture of Black female identity.

The term Jezebel, is another commonly used term used to characterize Black female identity. Collins (1991) described the image of Jezebel as portraying Black women with "excessive sexual appetites" (p. 77). The Jezebel stereotype, which branded Black women as sexually promiscuous and immoral, was originally used to rationalize the sexual exploitation of

Black female slaves. This image gave the impression that Black women could not be rape victims because they always desired sex. Consequently, perpetrators faced few legal or social sanctions for raping Black women (West, 2006). In addition, Sapphire is another reoccurring stereotypical image that dates back to slavery and the Jim Crow era. This image portrays Black women as overly aggressive and has frequently been used to rationalize the mistreatment and physical force used against women of African descent (West, 2006).

An unfortunate outcome of these images is that they were used as propaganda to perpetuate the inferiority of Black women and blame them for the ills of the Black male and family structure. For example, in 1965, the Moynihan Report blamed Black women for the state of the Black family, labeling Black women as “matriarchs” who emasculate their men and prevent them from taking their rightful places at the head of the family (Moynihan, 1965; Berger & Simon, 1974). Following the Moynihan report, President Ronald Reagan created the now infamous image of the “Welfare Queen”, which painted struggling Black single mothers as sexually promiscuous women who drove Cadillac cars while giving birth to babies in order to collect taxpayers’ money (Benson-Smith, 2005). Despite the progress made as a whole toward a more multicultural society, negative images of Black women persist. Givens and Monahan (2005) examined the influence of mediated stereotypes and found that viewing stereotypical images of Black women, significantly influenced how participants viewed Black women they encountered in real life. In fact, after viewing an image of a Jezebel, participants were more likely to use sexually promiscuous behaviors to describe Black women (Givens & Monahan, 2005). Slavery is often associated with being one of the primary catalysts for inserting these negative stereotypes in American society and stripping Black women of their identity. In a sense, Black women were stripped of their original culture and the identity of Black women was a

blank canvas whereupon negative stereotypes filled in the picture. Unfortunately, stereotypes like Mammie and Jezebel continue to reflect how Black women are characterized by mainstream society.

In order for Black girls to develop a positive racial identity, they must counter the negative images portrayed in society and replace those messages with positive cultural values. Therefore, it is critical for Black girls to understand that the images of Black women in the media fail to capture the complete picture of Black womanhood and show a very narrow and often negative perception of Black women. One of the known protective factors of buffering negative media images for Black females is developing a strong sense of racial identity (Caldwell, Kohn-Wood, Schmeelk-Cone, Chavous, & Zimmerman, 2004; Brook & Pahl, 2005). According to a study conducted by Tynes and colleagues (2012), African American students that endorsed higher levels of ethnic identity were less impacted by perceived racial discrimination. For this study, the researchers examined the protective function of ethnic identity and self-esteem for a sub-group of African Americans that encountered some form of online discrimination. Based on the findings, participants with higher levels of ethnic identity were less susceptible to the negative effects of racism and reported fewer anxiety related symptomology. Furthermore, Neblett et al., 2012 reviewed the current literature base regarding the protective aspect of ethnic identity. Based upon a review of the literature, Black youth that have a greater connection to their culture are less likely to experience negative developmental outcomes as a result of perceived racism (Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). In fact, having a greater connection to one's race or culture has been reported to have a buffering effect in regards to overcoming racialized stereotypes (Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, Kohnwood, & Zimmerman, 2003). In the following section, several key identity theories are explored to

contextualize identity development. However, due to their lack of emphasis regarding the intricacies of Black female identity, the Multidimensional MMRI and Black Feminist Womanist paradigm will serve as the guiding theories for the current study.

Identity Development of Black Children

Identity formation is an important area of research in regards to Black children because it focuses on the significance and meaning that they attribute to race in defining themselves. Identity development is critical for minority youth because they often have to encounter threats to positive identity development based upon racial prejudices that persist in America. For instance, while they may receive positive messages about their identity in their home, when they enter into the outside world they are often faced with conflicting messages. Adolescent children that are unable to resolve these identity crises are likely to develop a low sense of self, which leads to increased risk of teen pregnancy, crime, and school dropout (Swanson, Spencer, Harpalani, & Spencer, 2002). Furthermore, Gullan, Hoffman, & Leff (2011) highlighted the importance of identity development and found that Black children often face more obstacles to positive identity development due to the negative messages they are likely to encounter in society.

Most of the early psychological research operated under the assumption that Black individuals suffered from low self-esteem (Sellers et al., 1998). These ideals were derived from the concept of reflective appraisal. The term, reflective appraisal, asserts that an individual's sense of self is based in large part from the way that others view him or her (Felson, 1985; Khanna, 2010). Scholars proposed that the reflective appraisal process applies specifically to Black men and women because of their history of degradation and maltreatment in American society. Researchers at this time assumed that given the devaluation of people of African

descent; it was only natural for them to internalize the stigma placed on them by the broader society and have negative self-images (Cross, 1991; Marks et al., 2004).

On the other hand, current research literature suggests that Black children actually endorse higher levels of self-esteem in relation to their White counterparts (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Crocker & Lawrence, 1999; Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Twenge & Crocker, 2002). However, despite evidence that Black children are possessing higher rates of self-esteem, it is important not to generalize that self-esteem is not an issue in the Black community. Presently, there is not a self-esteem measure that has been designed specifically for Black children. It is therefore unknown if one's culture or ethnicity impacts the answers to current self-report measures. For instance, in the Black community, children are socialized at a young age to not share their personal feelings and thoughts with people outside of their family. Therefore, it is possible that Black children often inflate their answers on self-esteem measures in an attempt to conceal their personal thoughts. To further understand issues related to identity development, a review of several identity theories are provided.

Limitations of Existing Identity Development Theories

Traditionally, research on identity development has centered on individuals from the dominant culture (Gibbs, 1987). As the pioneer of the concept of identity, Eric Erikson (1959, 1968) has been influential in the work of psychosocial development. His eight-stage theory of psychosocial development consists of several psychosocial crises that emerge at certain periods within the life cycle due to biological and social interactions. According to Erickson's theory, people move through the following eight interrelated stages over their life cycle: Basic Trust vs. Mistrust, Autonomy vs. Shame, Initiative vs. Guilt, Industry vs. Inferiority, Identity vs. Identity Diffusion, Intimacy vs. Isolation, Generativity vs. Self-Absorption, and Integrity vs. Despair.

Erickson describes identity development as a psychosocial task of striving for a sense of unification and cohesiveness in the self. Erickson theorizes that identity provides meaning, direction, and purpose while also serving a critical function for the individual's adaptive functioning (Allen & Majidi-Ahi, 1989). Identity development is part of the psychosocial crisis of the fifth stage, Identity vs. Identity Confusion, which centers on establishing a coherent identity. Identity is characterized as the search for an integration of self-images necessary to attain social adulthood (Kamptner, 1988). Erikson (1959) described this stage as the time in which a young person develops a sense of ego identity as he or she receives confirmation of integrated self-images from society. He also highlighted how personal and group identity are important factors in the shaping of a mature and healthy personality. Personal identity centers on the "Who am I" question and relies upon family relationships to help answer the question. Erikson (1968) stressed how several important tasks were involved in establishing an independent identity during adolescence. As cited in Poston (1990), the most important tasks included: (1) establishing a personal identity, (2) gaining autonomy and independence, (3) relating to members of the same and other sex, and (4) committing to a career choice. Erikson (1968) noted that identity establishment is a major development task for all children. However, despite the various components mentioned in Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development, there is no mention of race as being an important factor in developing identity. There is an emphasis on relating to one's sex, but nothing about being able to relate to one's own race. Therefore, for purposes of this study, it is important to also provide background on ethnic and racial identity theories.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity refers to one's self-identification with a specific ethnic group, the sense of belonging to that group, the perceptions, behaviors, and feelings one has due to such membership, and involvement in the cultural and social practices of the group (Phinney, 1992). Ethnic identity theory is an important concept in regards to Black children because it specifically includes the obstacles faced by people who have the status of "minority" in a society and how that impacts sense of self (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996). Ethnic and racial identification implies a consciousness of self within a particular group. Rotheram and Phinney (1987) define self-identification as "the accurate and consistent use of an ethnic label based on the perception and conception of themselves as belonging to an ethnic group" (p.17).

Furthermore, over 50 years ago, Clark and Clark (1939) suggested that racial identification was indicative of a particularized self-consciousness. During the 1930's, a commonly accepted procedure in studying ethnic and racial identification was to present a child with dolls and pictures that are representative of his or her own group and of the majority group. Mamie and Kenneth Clark conducted one of the first doll test studies to utilize this method in 1947. Clark and Clark (1947) presented Black children between the ages of three and seven with a Black and White doll and asked them to identify the doll they preferred. Results indicated that Black children did not have a preference for the Black doll and preferred the White doll. The Clarks hypothesized that the preference for the White doll was due to the history of prejudice, discrimination, and segregation experienced by people of color. It is their assertion that the previous experiences had a negative impact on the psyche of Black children and instilled a feeling of inferiority and damaged their self-esteem.

Later studies were conducted to investigate racial identification among children of different ethnicities to see if the findings mirrored that of Mamie and Kenneth Clark. Cox, & Le Boeuf (1977), Hunsberger (1978), & Corenblum and Annis (1993), examined racial attitude preference and color connotation among children through the presentation of Indian and White dolls. Comparable to previous studies, researchers found that the children preferred the White doll. In addition, Spencer and Horowitz (1973) examined racial preference among Black and Caucasian preschool children. Results indicated a significant pattern of negative connotations associated with the color black and Black individuals. Preschoolers also displayed a pro-White bias in ethnic and racial preference attitudes and identification, which is likely a result of societal stereotypes (Spenser & Horowitz, 1973).

Therefore, when working with stigmatized groups of children, it is important to consider the stereotypes and attitudes that are surrounding those children and how they may positively or negatively impact their racial identity. Negative and derogative attitudes are most often associated with minorities, while positive attitudes (or at least more balanced perceptions) are associated with Whites. Thus, the ecological niche for minority youth is different from that of nonminority youth. American Indian, Black, and Hispanic youth, unlike Caucasian youth, are more likely to be presented with frequent negative images about their reference group. Accordingly, White youth are less likely to experience the chronic stress and problems associated with an implied group deviance (Moritsugu & Sue, 1983; Constantine & Sha’Kema, 2002).

In order to alleviate this issue, ethnic identity can often serve as a protective factor for minorities. Cox, & LeBoeuf (1977) reported that around age 10, American Indian children begin to show a greater preference toward identification with their own group and are less affected by

stereotypes. A parallel pattern of own-group preference has been described for older (ages 10 and 12) Black children (Spencer, 1983). Such advances in cognitive skills are perhaps reflected in a more realistic assessment of oneself and one's group and a greater consciousness of the "referent other" used for comparison purposes when evaluating the self.

Researchers have found that achieving group identity is difficult if there is not consistent guidance from important socializing agents (Spencer, 1983, 1985). Black parents, relatives, and teachers must actively and continually struggle to present evidence to children that confirm the worth of Black culture and people as a mechanism for offsetting cultural identity confusion. The difficulties acknowledged may emanate from the fact that many of the child's socializing adults themselves have "diffused extended identities" marked by lack of a consistent pattern of Afrocentricity (Semaj, 1985). Therefore, it is important to instill positive ethnic identity and ideals in children as young as three to combat the widely adopted racial attitudes that minority children may encounter in American society.

Several studies have shown that ethnic identity is positively and favorably related to psychological and social variables. High ethnic identity has been associated with higher achievement and self-esteem among Black youth (Phinney & Chavira, 1992), increased prosocial behavior and efficacy beliefs (McCreary et al., 1996; Romero & Roberts, 2003), and decreased use of violence (Arbona et al., 1999). One of the limitations to this theory is that it focuses on a multicultural approach to identity and doesn't specifically address challenges or threats to identity that are specifically tied to the Black experience. Therefore, to further investigate issues related to ethnic identity, more specifically Black identity, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (2001) developed a Black Identity Model that specifically focused on the Black experience.

Black Identity

While Erickson created the foundation of identity development, this foundation lacked a discussion of ethnic identity and the negative effects that a lack of an ethnic identity can have on an individual. Dr. William Cross filled in the gap left by Erickson by specifically focusing on the Black experience and the link to identity. One of the leading theorists in the field of Black identity development is Dr. William E. Cross, Jr. Cross defined Black identity development as “psychological nigrescence” or the process of becoming Black. The model of racial identity development that is most often used is the adapted version of Cross Negro-to-Black Conversion model (1971, 1978, 1991, 1995), also known as the Nigrescence model. Nigrescence is the developmental process by which a person becomes Black, and is defined as a psychological connection with one’s race rather than the mere identification of the color of one’s skin (Plummer, 1996, p. 169). According to this model, there are 5 stages of Black racial identity development: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment.

Individuals in the pre-encounter phase adopt the beliefs and values of the dominant culture, thereby actively or passively rejecting their minority group’s beliefs and values. An event or series of events that force acknowledgement of the impact of race (social rejection by White friends or colleagues) prompts an individual to move into the encounter stage. It is common for individuals at this stage to allow negative experiences or events alter how they feel about themselves and how they interpret the condition of being Black in America (Cross, 1971). It is during the encounter stage that Black individuals conclude that they cannot truly be White and therefore will not be viewed as equal to White. At this stage, they begin to ask themselves questions pertaining to what it means to be Black and also discover that their conceptions of

what it means to be Black were misguided. A majority of individuals in the encounter phase begin to harbor feelings of anger, guilt, and hostility (Cross, 1971). These feelings lead individuals to further explore their Black Identity.

The next stage in this theory involves basing one's identity on being a member of a racial group by actively avoiding symbols of Whiteness and being surrounded with visible symbols of racial identity. The immersion-emersion stage is characterized by them seeking out opportunities to explore aspects of their racial history and culture, while simultaneously experiencing negative feelings toward White people and their culture. Although feelings of hostility may still be present, feelings of guilt are replaced by feelings of pride because of the emersion within the Black experience.

Black individuals reach the internalization stage after having resolved any conflict between their old identity and their new worldview. They become secure in their own sense of racial identity and experience an increase in self-confidence. Based upon the outcome of the previous stage (i.e., immersion-emersion), there are three possible outcomes of the internalization stage: disappointment and rejection, continuation and fixation at Stage Three, and internalization. In the previous stage of immersion-emersion, individuals develop an idealistic view of what it means to be Black. Positive experiences at this stage can lead to continued involvement in the Black movement and exploration towards the internalization stage.

The outcome of the internalization stage that finds these individuals with a hopeless, anti-people worldview is labeled "disappointment and rejection." The continuation and fixation at stage three is a result of individuals becoming overwhelmed with anger towards White people. It is possible for these individuals to reach a point of psychological Blackness and not progress any further.

The final stage of internalization-commitment involves the ability to translate a personal sense of Blackness into a form of commitment (i.e., plan of action) concerning Black individuals as a group. Also, as the internalization of a Black identity increases, the negative attitudes toward White people declines. Specific to Black Americans, Cross's (1991) model of racial identity development is viewed as a recurring process rather than a linear one. The objective is for the individual to revisit the stages after facing new encounters and experiences, which results in a continual transformation of the later stages. A limitation to Cross's model of racial identity is that it does not take into account the dynamic nature of identity and places emphasis on specific stages. Therefore, an exploration of further theories is provided.

Guiding Theoretical Frameworks

The objectives in this section are to describe the theoretical frameworks I used in this study. First, I describe the core components of the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity, which serves as the framework for understanding the trajectory of Black identity development in adolescents. Secondly, in order to provide a more in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and issues faced by Black women, I provide an overview of Black Feminist Womanist (BFW) Paradigm, which serves as the leading theory for interpreting the overall experiences of Black girls.

Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI)

Research dating back to the 1960's has outlined the typical progression of Black children through the developmental stages toward achieved ethnic and racial identity (Erickson, 1968; Cross, 1995; Helms, 1995; Phinney, 1989, 1990). Sellers and colleagues (1998) presented a new model of Black racial identity-the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI). Racial identity is defined as the "part of the person's self-concept that is related to his or her

membership within a race” (Sellers et al., 1998). MMRI theory focuses on the significance that an individual places on race in defining himself and the individual’s interpretation of what it means to be Black (p.19). This model conceptualized racial identity as “understanding both the significance of race in the self-concept of Black Americans and the qualitative meanings they attribute to being members of that racial category” (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 19). Previously, the mainstream approach centered on the significance of race in the individual developing person (Cross, 1971, 1995; Helms, 1995; Phinney, 1992).

A distinct difference between the MMRI and previous racial identity models is the incorporation of group identity into the amalgamation of the various historical and cultural experiences that Black individuals experience (Sellers et al., 1998). Scottham, Cooke, Sellers, and Ford (2010) later studied this shift and integrated the process of identity development (e.g., passage through pre-determined developmental stages) with contexts of one’s experience (e.g., identification with and having more positive attitudes toward one’s racial group). The MMRI operates under four basic assumptions: (a) identities are stable properties of a person, but can be influenced by situations; (b) individuals have a number of dissimilar identities that have different levels of importance to them; (c) the most valid marker of one’s racial identity is an individual’s perception of what it means to be Black; and (d) the MMRI is primarily focused on the status of an individual’s racial identity at a given point in time, rather than seeking to place an individual within a particular stage along a pre-determined, developmental process (Sellers et al., 1998).

When developing this theory, Sellers and colleagues did not seek to replace the previous identity models. They sought to illustrate their belief in the dynamic nature of Black racial identity, specifically “the significance and the meaning that individuals place on race are likely to change across their lifespan” (Sellers et al., 1998). A distinct difference between the MMRI

and earlier theories is that MMRI did not seek to define what a psychologically “healthy” or “unhealthy” identity looked like. Instead, the MMRI focused on differentiating between the significance and meaning that individuals placed on one’s racial group membership.

The MMRI recognizes four dimensions of racial identity: (a) racial centrality, (b) racial salience, (c) racial regard, and (d) racial ideology (Sellers et al., 1998). The MMRI refers to racial centrality as a measure of whether race is a core part of an individual’s self-concept over time. Conversely, racial salience describes the extent to which a person’s race is a relevant part of his or her self-concept at a particular moment in time and can be influenced by the situation. The term racial regard refers to a person’s affective and evaluative judgment of his or her race. Racial regard contains two subcategories: (a) private and (b) public. Private regard refers to the extent that individuals feel positively or negatively toward Black Americans and their membership in that group. Public regard refers to the extent that individuals feel that others view Black Americans positively or negatively. The MMRI’s fourth dimension of racial identity, racial ideology, describes an individual’s beliefs, opinions, and attitudes regarding the way that Black Americans should live and act.

Based on their personal connection to Black culture, Sellers et al. (1998) identified four ideological philosophies within the dimension of racial ideology that seem to be the most relevant: (a) a nationalist philosophy, (b) an oppressed minority philosophy, (c) an assimilation philosophy, and (d) a humanist philosophy. Once again, the MMRI recognizes the dynamic nature of racial identity, noting that while some individuals can be categorized as possessing one particular ideology, “most individuals hold a variety of philosophies that can vary across their different areas of functioning” (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 27).

One of the tenets of the nationalist ideology is an emphasis on the uniqueness of being Black. Individuals that adopt a nationalist philosophy view the Black experience as being notably different from any other group's experience. This philosophy postulates that Black individuals ought to be in control of their own destiny with minimal input from other groups. This ideology is associated with a preference for Black social environments, as well as a focus on support and patronage of primarily Black organizations (Sellers et al., 1998). In contrast to the nationalist ideology, the oppressed minority ideology emphasizes the similarities between the oppression that Black individuals face and that of other groups. An individual possessing the oppressed minority ideology is more likely to view coalition building as the most effective strategy for social change and make a connection between themselves and people from other racial backgrounds (Sellers et al., 1998). From a cultural perspective, these individuals are equally interested in the culture of other minority groups and do not show a preference for Black culture.

Lastly, the assimilationist ideology is described as having an emphasis on the similarities between Black individuals and the rest of American society. An individual who possesses an assimilationist ideology views his or her status as an American and attempts to enter into mainstream society. A person with this ideology can be an activist for social change, but would likely believe that Black individuals ought to work within the system to change it. The fourth ideology, the humanist ideology, emphasizes the similarities among all humans. Individuals who adopt this ideology do not think in terms of race, gender, class or other distinguishing characteristics. Instead, they are likely to view all people as belonging to the same race, the human race (Sellers et al., 1998). Individuals with a humanist ideology view race as being of minor importance with respect to the way they lead their lives (e.g., low centrality). These

individuals are more likely to emphasize the characteristics of the individual person, regardless of race (Sellers et al., 1998).

The MMRI considers racial centrality, regard, and ideology to be steady constructs across situations. This suggests that these constructs should remain relatively the same over time and across different situations (Sellers et al., 1998). While this does not mean that these three dimensions are resistant to change, it suggests that they are unlikely to change over time unless a particularly intense or important developmental or racial event occurs (Shelton & Sellers, 2000). Conversely, the MMRI views the dimension of racial salience as variable across situations and greatly influenced by context. The MMRI further hypothesizes that racial salience and racial centrality are interrelated.

Racial salience refers to how relevant race is to one's self-concept, while racial centrality is "a stable manifestation of how significant race is in the individual's definition of self across numerous situations" (Shelton & Sellers, 2000, p. 34). Shelton and Sellers (2000) investigated the stable and situational properties of Black racial identity in two separate studies. One study found that in ambiguous situations for people whose race is a central component of their identity, race is more likely to be salient than for people whose race is not a central identity component. As a result, they found that high race central individuals were more likely to interpret ambiguous situations as being race relevant (Shelton & Sellers, 2000).

Shelton and Sellers's second study revealed that racial identity has both stable and contextually dynamic properties. Specifically, being placed in a race-salient study condition did not change one's racial ideology or beliefs about racial regard in reference to participants' beliefs using a race-ambiguous situation. Racial ideology and racial regard remained stable regardless of

context, which made them reliable predictors of an individual's future behavior (Markus & Kunda, 1986, as cited in Shelton & Sellers, 2000, p. 40).

Knowledge of racial development theories remains a crucial area of study for understanding some of the problems encountered by Black children. This is especially true regarding academic achievement. Researchers have proposed that minority students who do not hold positive racial identities are vulnerable to negative peer pressures; they may also equate achievement with "acting White" or "selling out" which contributes to low achievement (Fordham, 1988). Specifically, Lindstrom and Van Sant (1986) reported that a lot of gifted minority students have to choose between the need for achievement and need for affiliation. These students often succumb to negative social pressures, which suggests that the need for affiliation outweighs the need for achievement. Researchers assert that Black students tend to devalue domains that they have been traditionally unsuccessful like schools, to protect their self-esteem (Hughes & Demo, 1989). Due to inaccurate perceptions of academic ability, Black students often reject achievement related attitudes and behaviors; as a result, the achievement gap between Black students and their White counterparts remain (Haycock, 2001).

In order to counteract these negatively held notions, it is important that Black children hold accurate beliefs and notions regarding their racial group. For a healthy racial identity, children and adolescents must be able to disassociate themselves with the negative stereotypes portrayed in mainstream society and replace them with positive characteristics. This process is detailed in many of the racial identity theories previously discussed as an important step in developing a strong sense of identity but has not explicitly been attached to Black female identity. Therefore, in order to fully understand the education crisis along with other societal issues facing Black individuals, specifically women, Black female identity development must be

taken into consideration when working towards a solution to some of the current issues faced by Black female students. One framework that has been very useful in tackling issues pertaining to Black woman is Black Feminism.

Black Feminism

“The colored girl is not known and hence not believed in”

-Fannie Barrier Williams

To date, there has been a lack of culturally relevant research paradigms for women of color. One theory that has been utilized to highlight the experiences of Black women is Black feminism. One of the early voices of Black Feminism was Maria Stewart, who was coined as America’s first Black feminist. Maria Stewart advocated for fair and equal treatment not only for Black men but for Black women as well. She spent her life’s work challenging negative stereotypes of Black women and she advocated for Black women to form their own self-definitions of Black womanhood. Black Feminism was brought about to address the unique context that Black women found themselves situated in. Neither the Black Liberation Movement or the Women’s movement addressed the critical issues facing Black women and these issues remained dormant for many years. The woman’s movement was grounded in ideals that related to White middle-class women and often excluded issues that pertained to race or ethnicity. Similarly, the Black Liberation movement focused primarily on Black males and neither of these movements addressed the interplay of both race and gender and how that impacted Black women. Therefore, the Black feminist movement was a response to the plight of Black women being repeatedly ignored. One of the goals of the Black Feminist movement was to develop a theory that addressed the issue of intersectionality in regards to Black female identity. This is best illustrated by Black feminist Pearl Cleage, who stated, “We have to see clearly that we are a

unique group, set undeniably apart because of race and sex with a unique set of challenges” (Cleage 1993). The term intersectionality is described as a way of understanding social location in terms of intersecting systems of oppression (Collins, 2000).

Intersectionality was first introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1991, to describe how race and gender interact to shape one’s identity. In specific, Black women are often faced with two prevalent systems of oppression: race and gender (Collins, 2000). Due to their gender identity, Black women are likely to combat both racism and misogyny, which can pose a threat to positive self-identity. It is important to understand the interplay of both race and gender in regards to Black womanhood because they are experienced simultaneously and cannot be teased apart. Black women are often tasked with negotiating what it means to be a Black woman rather than what it means to just be a woman and must distinguish the difference between being a Black woman versus a Black man. Black Feminist thought seeks to address not only the intersecting nature of Black female identity, but also seeks to empower Black females to interpret their reality (Taylor, 1998). A key tenet of Black feminist thought is that the intersecting modes of oppression i.e. racism and bigotry, shape the worldviews and behaviors of Black women (Collins, 2000). Additionally, this theory expresses the commonality among all Black women due to their shared experience of living in a society that has devalued women of African descent and seeks to challenge the oppressive systems in place.

Black Feminist Womanist (BFW)

Rooted in the principles of Black feminism, the Black Feminist-Womanist (BFW) research paradigm has been the recommended theory to consider when conducting research on Black girls. BFW is a culturally congruent model that accounts for both gender and race and seeks to provide a more in depth look into the lived experience of Black women (Lindsay-

Dennis, 2015). One of the strengths of this theory is that it challenges researchers to view their research on a continuum and acknowledge the intergenerational transmission of worldviews, experiences, and behaviors that affect the trajectory of Black female development (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Collins, 2000). According to BFW theorists, researchers studying Black girls have a responsibility to conduct meaningful research with the aim of bringing about social change and improved outcomes for Black women. BFW calls for a passionate approach to research with the goal of bringing about change and making a personal connection with the research material (Dillard, 2000). Utilizing BFW as a framework for the present study allows for greater understanding with unearthing the unique nature of Black female identity. Black women are the only group of people that are situated among several oppressive systems and thus face unique obstacles. Within this framework, the researcher seeks to understand why Black girls are exhibiting certain behaviors in relation to their experiences and they do not solely focus on deficits. For instance, A BFW researcher seeks to uncover the “why” behind certain behavioral problems exhibited by Black girls to help inform future intervention and takes a more solution-focused approach. BFW aims to provide an avenue for self-definition for marginalized individuals (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Similar to the early goals of the Black feminist movement, the present study seeks to empower Black females to re-write the stereotypes placed upon them by society and define for themselves the meaning of Black female identity.

Although a specific model for Black female identity development has yet to be developed, incorporating the principles of the Black Feminist Womanist theory along with the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) provides a solid foundation for the present study. Utilizing both theories allows for a more comprehensive framework for understanding identity and psychosocial development of Black adolescent girls. Despite the work of several

Black feminists such as Maria Stewart and Pearl Cleage, Black females continue to face several obstacles. Evidence of these obstacles is highlighted in disproportionate educational opportunities and increased involvement in the judicial system.

Behavior Problems and Black Girls

The effects of racial identity or the lack thereof in the Black community affects the behavior of Black adolescents because it shapes the way they think about themselves and other Black individuals. Historically, most of the research on behavior problems has focused on male students and girls are often characterized as being less likely to exhibit problem behaviors. While Black males are the largest subpopulation in detention, the issues facing Black girls cannot be ignored. Between 1985 and 1997, Black girls were the fastest growing segment of the juvenile population in secure confinement (Puzzanchera & Adams, 2011). In 2010, Black girls were 36 percent of juvenile females in residential placement (Sickmund, Sladky, Kang, & Puzzanchera, 2011). Based on results from the National Longitudinal Study on Youth Delinquency, delinquency rates appeared to vary by race and more Black women reported committing assault when compared to White and Hispanic women. This study also indicated that Black girls were more likely to receive harsher punishments for their crimes and they make up almost half of all girls in detention. Based on these findings, there is a strong need to offer social and emotional prevention programs to Black girls in an attempt to prevent later involvement in the judicial system. In addition, there is consistent evidence for high rates of both minor as well as serious delinquent behaviors among girls residing in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Girls living in disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to be exposed to a higher level of risk factors such as violence and family dysfunction. It is posited that growing up in underprivileged neighborhoods places girls at a higher risk to exhibit behavior problems,

which stresses the importance of providing those children with early intervention (Kroneman, Loeber, & Hipwell, 2011).

Disproportionate Discipline Practices

To date, there has been very limited research on behavior problems exhibited by Black females. It is hypothesized that the lack of emphasis on behavior problems of Black girls is due to the perception that girls in general pose less risk for behavior problems given their greater academic achievement (Olser, 2006). However, one area that has recently garnered national attention in regards to Black girls is disproportionality. Concern regarding disproportionate discipline practices for Black children is a longstanding issue dating back to the 1970's (Children's Defense Fund, 1975). These practices were exacerbated in the late 1990's, due to widespread implementation of zero-tolerance discipline policies and the criminalization of student misbehavior. Disproportionate suspension rates have become a major concern for educators and were recently examined by the Department of Education. It was revealed that Black girls are more likely to be suspended at every grade level when compared to White male students (Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). Statistics show that Black girls have the highest rate of out-of-school suspensions among female students and are often evaluated more critically by school officials (Annamma, 2016; Hines-Datiri & Andrews, 2017). According to a recent study, Black girls are more likely to be cited for less serious but more ambiguous behavioral infractions, whereas White female students were mainly disciplined for more serious offenses like substance abuse (Morris & Perry, 2017). These disparities are likely attributed to racial and gender biases and reveal the harsh realities that are faced by Black girls in the school system (Wun, 2016).

One reason that is believed to account for this problem is that Black female identity often differs from traditional or mainstream notions of femininity. Therefore, the traditional assertive nature of Black girls is often misinterpreted as being aggressive or confrontational, which in turn generates harsher punishments from school officials (Blake et al., 2011). Between 2002 and 2006, per-district suspension rates of Black girls increased 5.3 percentage points compared to the 1.7 percentage point increase for Black boys (Losen & Skiba, 2010). A review of the literature indicated that aggression is the most widely studied problem behavior in Black girls. They are often perceived by teachers and peers as having higher levels of relational and physical aggression (Putallaz et al, 2007; Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012). In addition, Black girls are often viewed less favorably than girls from other racial and ethnic backgrounds with regards to disruptive behavior (Francis, 2012). This assertion was based on national data collected on teacher perceptions of student behavior. Results indicated that teachers had less positive perceptions toward Black females that misbehaved in comparison to other races (Francis, 2012). In regard to school discipline, race and gender stereotypes particularly function to criminalize the behavior of Black female students (Wallace et al., 2011; George, 2015). Thus, the very nature of Black female identity, automatically places Black female students at risk for receiving inequitable educational opportunities (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012).

However, developing a positive racial identity has been proven to serve as a protective factor for combating negative stereotypes (Neblett et al., 2012). Racial Identity is defined as the degree to which an individual feels a connection with and an attachment to his or her racial group based on a common history and shared values (Hughes et al., 2015; Jones & Neblett, 2016). Given the fact that Black women have historically been devalued in American society, their self-esteem is often at risk (Marks et al., 2004). Research has shown that Black girls that

endorse higher levels of Pro-Black attitudes, reported lower levels of distressing psychological and physical symptoms, and were more likely to have higher levels of self-esteem and self-acceptance (Allen, 2001; Buckley & Carter, 2005; Constantine et al. 2006).

Due to the number of obstacles and social restrictions that Black adolescent girls face, enhancing their ability to develop a positive racial and gender identity is crucial. Enhancement will allow Black girls to remain aware of society's stigmatizing beliefs while establishing a positive definition of what it means to be a Black girl. This development will serve as a protective factor against future experiences of racial discrimination (Sellers et al., 2006; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). Plybon, Edwards, Butler, Belgrave, and Allison (2003), conducted a study on the role of social support among Black adolescent girls. Findings suggest that school-based mentoring programs that connect adolescents with adult role models increase school-related outcomes. Therefore, group interventions can be used to fulfill the need for social support and provide a basis for integrating the sociocultural realities that Black youth face. Thus, in order to help improve the outcomes for Black girls, Afrocentric principles that build on the positive aspects of racial identity and social support can play a critical role.

Afrocentric Intervention

While Black individuals are frequently classified as resilient, many of the problems they face are imbedded in impoverished living conditions and stressful life events resulting from historical oppression and loss of culture and identity. In response to traditional Eurocentric theories that consistently neglected to account for the obstacles and barriers faced by people of African descent, the Afrocentric worldview emerged. The term "Afrocentricity" emerged in the late 1980's and was first defined by Moelfi Asante as a set of African ideals that are used to influence African culture and behavior (Asante, 1988). According to the literature, the

Afrocentric worldview consists of a set of values and beliefs that are grounded in African history and acknowledge the experiences of oppression and discrimination faced by Blacks throughout the diaspora (Akbar, 1984; Asante, 1988; Nobles, 1986; Phillips, 1990). From an Afrocentric perspective, psychosocial issues confronting Black individuals are caused by historical oppression and systematic racism. The group's resilience rests on the development of an identification and acceptance of a culture based on knowledge of its African heritage and the promotion of behaviors, thoughts, and emotions that foster the liberation of African people from oppression.

The reclamation of African culture is key to the survival and positive existence of people of African descent and is a healing phenomenon (Hilliard, 1997). One value system (set of guiding principles) for people of African descent that addresses the root cause of social problems in the Black community is the Nguzo Saba. The Nguzo Saba consists of a “minimum set of values that people need to rescue and reconstruct their lives in their own image and interest” (Karenga, 1996, p.543). The seven principles of Nguzo Saba include: unity (striving for unity in family, community, and race); self-determination (defining, naming, and creating, for oneself); collective work and responsibility (building and maintaining community and solving problems together); cooperative economics (building and maintaining the economic base of the community); purpose (restoring people to their original traditional greatness); creativity (enhancing the beauty and benefits of self and community); and faith (belief in the righteousness of the Black struggle). The Nguzo Saba seeks to promote positive behavior change and empower communities by reaffirming traditional African values in their daily lives and transferring these beliefs to their children (Graham, 2005). Afrocentric beliefs teach people of African descent to redefine their identity and denounce negative characteristics perpetuated by

mainstream society.

Although Black individuals are diverse and vary in the extent to which they endorse these principles, Afrocentric interventions form the cornerstone of behavior change and empower communities to reaffirm their purpose and position in society (Gilbert, Harvey, & Belgrave, 2009). Interchangeably referred to as “Afrocentric, or African centered”, these interventions are based on the principle of instilling traditional African and Black cultural values in people of African descent. Interventions that infuse Afrocentric values (such as interdependence, collectivism, transformation, and spirituality) have been shown to create significant change across a number of areas (Akbar, 1984; Asante, 1988; Nobles & Goddard, 1993; Karenga, 1996).

An Afrocentric intervention was selected for use in this study due to the fact that it considers the worldview of historically oppressed people. Afrocentric programming challenges oppressive systems and works to break down structural barriers such as racism and discrimination. Afrocentric interventions are especially crucial for Black Americans due to the history of slavery, which resulted in a stripping of their African culture. In addition, Afrocentric programs acknowledge the importance of oral communication and interrelatedness within African culture and promote the formation of positive relationships with others (Randolph & Banks, 1993). While similar, Afrocentric interventions differ from Black history interventions because they are specifically tied to the continent of Africa and African value system (Nguzo Saba) and Black history focuses solely on the African American experience in America.

As a group, Black girls benefit from an environment that allows them to validate their personal experiences and collaborate with one another to resist barriers to their success (Nicolas et al., 2008). In a supportive environment, Black girls have the opportunity to share their personal experiences and work together to provide resources and generate a collective

understanding of self-knowledge and self- acceptance (Belgrave et al., 2004). Afrocentric interventions can serve a key role in helping Black girls gain a greater understanding about themselves through a lens that values and cherishes who they are as people from African descent. While other Afrocentric interventions exist, Sisters of Nia, is a manualized intervention that has supporting evidence regarding its effectiveness and is more applicable to school settings.

Sisters of Nia

Sisters of Nia is a group intervention that has been specifically designed for empowering Black girls. The intervention is based upon the 7 principles of Nguzu Saba, which are: *unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith*. One of the overarching goals of the intervention is to bridge the gap between African and Black culture through activities that seek to heighten one's cultural beliefs (Belgrave et al., 2004). Furthermore, the intervention aims to increase cultural values and promote positive gender roles and relationships (Belgrave et al., 2004). The program is comprised of 14 sessions, which are led by Black female facilitators. Some of the session topics are culture, relationship, appearance, media messages, Black women in leadership, and faith. The principles of Nguzo Saba and African proverbs are used along with relational and Afrocentric methods. Intervention group participants have demonstrated significant increases in ethnic identity, androgynous gender roles, and decreases in relational aggression. This program allows for the incorporation of additional female roles models to serve as additional mother figures in the lives of Black girls. These role models are referred to as "othermothers" and provide a safe space for Black girls to discuss issues and reprogram the negative stereotypes that society often places on Black females.

To date, there have been several studies that evaluated the effectiveness of the Sisters of Nia program. Over 300 girls' have participated in the Sisters of Nia curriculum and have showed

desired changes. Belgrave, Chase-Vaughn, Gray, Addison, and Cherry (2000), investigated the effectiveness of a culture-and gender specific intervention for increasing resiliency among Black girls. The study included 55 Black girls between the ages of 10-12. The girls that received the intervention met once a week for two hours over a four-month time period. They were engaged in exercises and activities designed to increase feelings of self-worth, Afrocentric values, and ethnic identity. The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of an intervention on strengthening resiliency among Black preadolescent girls using a relational and Afrocentric focus. Findings indicated that intervention participants scored significantly higher on measures of Afrocentric values, ethnic identity, and self-concept than comparison participants at posttest.

Similarly, Belgrave (2002) evaluated the effectiveness of the Sisters of Nia curriculum for increasing cultural values and decreasing relational aggression in a sample of girls in Richmond, Virginia. For this study, 59 girls ages 11-12 participated in either a two-hour cultural curriculum group or tutoring session (comparison group). Measures of ethnic identity, gender roles, and relational aggression were administered to both groups at the beginning and end of the intervention. Findings showed significant differences in ethnic identity and marginally significant increases in androgynous gender role beliefs for girls in the cultural curriculum group but not the comparison group. Androgynous gender roles refer to those that endorse both feminine and masculine gender roles. These beliefs are linked to higher school achievement, higher life course expectations, and less-risky sexual behaviors. Participants in the Sisters of Nia group also showed a decrease in relational aggression (verbal insults, gossiping, putting others down, and so forth), which was not the case for the comparison group.

Additionally, Belgrave et al. (2000) conducted an evaluation of the Sisters of Nia curriculum for strengthening cultural beliefs among Black girls in early adolescence. The three

cultural variables that were considered for this population were ethnic identity, gender roles, and relational orientation. The researchers found that after the cultural intervention, participants in the program showed decreased aggression toward their female peers when compared to a control group. Findings from the aforementioned studies suggest that early adolescence may be an opportune period for implementing prosocial cultural interventions for girls. Despite the proven effectiveness of Sisters of Nia in community settings, there is a current void of studies that implement Afrocentric interventions within the school day. Given the fact that Black students are often faced with threats to their racial identity in school settings, there remains a critical need for school-based culturally focused intervention options for students of color. Therefore, the present study will help inform future studies regarding the feasibility and benefit of implementing Sisters of Nia within a school day.

Summary

As Black girls face the critical task of identity formation, the primary developmental task in adolescence (Erikson, 1968), they do so with influences from the many environments in which they are embedded. Research has underscored the importance of family, community, and school contexts in creating resources and/or barriers to success for Black girls (Langhout, 2005; Evans-Winters, 2007; Morris, 2012; Nicolas et al., 2008).

Likewise, researchers have examined the community contexts in which ethnic minority youths live in to determine the impact they have on promoting or impeding paths to positive development (Miller & Townsend, 2005; Zalot, Jones, Forehand, & Brody, 2007). For Black female adolescents, schools are also a significant socializing influence (Morris, 2007; Ellis-Christensen, 2008). Yet, theorists and researchers describe the school socialization of Black girls as virtually opposite of their home and community experiences. For example, although Black

girls receive much of their race/gender socialization from Black women in their home and communities, they rarely encounter Black women in school environments (Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Evans-Winters, 2007). Therefore, school-based application of programs such as Sisters of Nia is imperative to the identity development of Black girls.

Some theorists have criticized the developmental literature for labeling Black youths as resilient when they succeed and at-risk when they don't (Nicolas et al., 2008; Morales, 2010). Such labels not only minimize the accomplishments of Black youth, but also treat the barriers as forces by which one either bounces back from or is destroyed by. Nicolas et al. (2008) argue that the capacity to resist barriers (e.g., change one's context) is a vital aspect of Black girls' success in schools. Several researchers propose that resilience skills can be fostered through group interventions that provide safe havens. These interventions can be utilized to teach Black girls to resist the racism and sexism they encounter in daily life and promote positive identity development (Darling et al., 2006; Belgrave & Allison, 2009). Therefore, the present study seeks to empower Black females to re-write the stereotypes placed upon them by society and define for themselves the meaning of Black female identity. Currently, there has not been a school based application of the Sisters of Nia to examine school related outcomes. Thus, this study will be the first to investigate the interventions impact on classroom behavior.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

Research on the psychosocial development of Black girls has been limited and thus represents an area in need of more research. Given the complexity of the issues investigated in this study, a complementarity mixed-methods design incorporating both qualitative and single-subject information was utilized. Greene et al. (1989) described the complementarity design as one whose common purpose is to utilize different methods to measure different facets of a phenomenon. The results from one method (i.e., qualitative) can then be used to enhance the findings from the other (i.e., single-subject). Therefore, mixed-methods allowed for the use of separate methodologies to more accurately expound obtained findings (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004). Inclusion of both qualitative and single-subject analyses allowed me to examine the lived racial and gendered experiences of Black adolescent girls in urban academic settings and measure the treatment effect on verbal aggression.

Participants

A total of twelve adolescent girls in grades 7th and 8th (ages 13-15), were randomly assigned to either the first or second intervention group. Each group was comprised of a total of 6 students. The students in this study were selected by the school counselor to participate in a program aimed to increase racial identity, self-concept, and school based outcomes. To be included in the study, the students had to be identified as at-risk due to either social-emotional or behavioral concerns. The primary investigator along with the school counselor screened all participants for eligibility. Based on response on the demographic forms, all of the girls classified themselves as Black or African-American and lived in single-parent homes. All of the participants classified their community as an inner-city community. Additionally, five of the

participants disclosed that they received home-based Wraparound services, in the form of Mobile Therapy for Depressive Disorders. Wraparound services are often referred to as Behavior Health & Rehabilitative Services (BHRS) and deliver trained staff to the home, school, or community to help children with emotional or behavior problems.

Prior to the start of the intervention, the principal investigator met with each participant to explain the intervention program and sent home parental consent (Appendix A). Parents were given an informational guide detailing all relevant information as well as contact information for the principal investigator for future reference. Participants were then asked to sign a consent form to verify their willingness to participate in the study (Appendix B).

Context Characteristics

The study took place in a school located in a city in western Pennsylvania with a population of approximately 305,841 people. More than half of the population is White 66%, 26.1% are Black, 4.4% are Asian, 2.3% are Latino, and 0.2% are American Indian/Alaskan Native. The median household income is \$57,000 with the Black poverty rate being more than twice that of Whites.

The participants for the current study were selected from an urban charter school situated in a low-income area. Approximately 304 students attend the targeted school with Black students making up 86%, Multiracial Students representing 11%, and White students representing 3% of the total student body. Overall, the ratio of male to female students is approximately 1:1 (Males=48%; Females=52%). A majority of the students that attend this school are economically disadvantaged with 86% of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Academically, state assessment data reports that 61% of their students were not proficient in Math and 49% were not proficient in reading. Despite a statewide achievement gap between Black students and

their White counterparts, Black students are 60% more likely to be at grade level when attending the targeted school.

Demographic Information

Each participant completed a brief demographic data sheet (Appendix C). Participants were asked to write their name, age, and self-identified racial/ethnic classification.

Qualitative Aspect of the Study

Qualitative studies operate under the assumption that reality is subjective and seeks to investigate the quality or qualities of an experience or phenomenon. For this study, six of the participants from the study were invited to participate in the entrance and exit interviews. The six participants were randomly selected from the pool of 12 study participants prior to the start of the study. This information was used to assess intervention effectiveness through analysis of themes that arose during the entrance and exit qualitative interviews. Each interview was transcribed and reviewed by a peer reviewer. All suggestions from the peer reviewer were taken into consideration and used to either re-conceptualize or reorganize the content and presentation of the findings.

Conducting group interviews instead of individual interviews allowed me to provide a safe environment where the student participants could share their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences in the company of people from the same socioeconomic, ethnic, and gender backgrounds (Madriz, 2000). The foci of the interview included racial experience in and outside of school, issues related to gender, perceptions of Black woman, Stereotypes regarding Black women, issues surrounding identity, racism, and parental racial socialization (Appendix D). The interviews were based on consent and availability during the school day and all interviews were

recorded for analysis purposes. The primary investigator, who is a Black female doctoral student conducted all interviews.

Grounded Theory

For analysis purposes, Grounded Theory was selected as the theoretical framework to interpret the qualitative data. Grounded Theory was established in 1967 by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. This theory presents the guidelines for how to identify categories, make links between categories, and how to establish relationships with them (Willig, 2013). The qualitative interview data was analyzed by utilizing the qualitative procedure for coding and developing themes, which is a very traditional approach in qualitative research (Creswell & Clark 2007; Creswell, 2013). Specifically, the constant comparative analysis technique guided the coding process to account for all instances of variation (Willig, 2013). Constant comparative analysis allowed me to break down categories in smaller units of meaning by moving back and forth between the identification of similarities and differences between emerging categories (Willig, 2013). Once all the interviews were conducted and transcribed, a group of researchers reviewed the transcriptions. Codes were refined throughout the coding process as new ideas emerged, and similar codes were ultimately grouped together in broader themes. Each theme was discussed and clarified until a final set of themes emerged that best represented the positions of the participants.

In addition to the qualitative interview data, researcher journal notes, which reflected descriptive and reflective notes from each group intervention session, were documented in writing. The researcher's journal detailed the process of each group session including: (a) participant attendance, the intervention activity, and sub-sections that detail relevant issues related to the major constructs of the overall study. The researcher's journal was divided into two

subcategories: Racial Identity and Self-Concept. In each subcategory, the principal investigator wrote reflective notes, speculations, issues, ideas, and impressions of the group process, relative to the topic. Researcher journal notes were typically written no more than 48 hours after the respective weekly group session.

Single-Subject Aspect of the Study

To further illuminate the findings in this study, single subject data was collected for 4 randomly selected participants to further investigate the interventions effectiveness. A single-case design was ideal for exploring the research question regarding the effect of the *Sisters of Nia* intervention on verbally aggressive behaviors. After reviewing the various single case designs (Kennedy, 2005; Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007; Kazdin, 2011), the unique structure and constraints of the current study made a non-concurrent multiple-baseline across-subjects design the appropriate single subject method.

Multiple Baseline Design

One of the beneficial aspects of multiple baseline designs is that it provides an alternative to the reversal design (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968). Multiple baseline designs are utilized when two or more baselines are simultaneously established, with the intervention or treatment applied to one baseline at a time (Kazdin, 2011; Kennedy, 2005). Change in the targeted behavior occurs only when the intervention has been applied, while the other baselines stay relatively stable. This allows for the data to demonstrate that the treatment, rather than external factors, is the cause of the change; thus, these designs are especially adept at controlling for threats to validity (Kennedy, 2005; Kazdin, 2011). Furthermore, multiple baseline designs are especially appropriate for program evaluations given that they do not require withdrawal, repeated alternation, or reversal, none of which are usually possible in the context of one-time

interventions (Gast & Ledford, 2010; Kazdin, 2011). In social sciences, multiple-baseline-across-subject designs are the most common method (Cooper et al., 2007).

This design violates the notion of single-case designs in that it utilizes two or more participants (Kennedy, 2005). Therefore, in addition to having each participant serve as his/her own control, participants who have not yet received the treatment also serve as controls (Cooper et al., 2007). An A-B design was chosen because it offered a practical yet defensible method to demonstrate an intervention effect without requiring a sudden withdrawal of the intervention. Additionally, this design did not require delaying intervention services for the target students'. Certain aspects of the current study that would be considered limitations from an experimental standpoint (i.e., small numbers of participants, absence of a control group, and conducting the intervention at different time points for each participant) become beneficial in the context of a multiple-baseline-across-subjects design. One of the benefits of the present design is that it does not require data to be collected during equivalent time frames (Gast & Ledford, 2010). Thus, given the restraints of school-based research, it proved to be a practicable method for documenting behavior change. One disadvantage of non-concurrent designs is they are unable to provide as much experimental control as concurrent designs, due to an inability to evaluate the effects of the dependent variable upon the independent variable within the same time frame (Gast & Ledford, 2010). However, when three or more participants are used, it is highly unlikely that an uncontrolled extraneous variable caused the change in behavior (Winn, Skinner, Allin, & Hawkins, 2004).

Despite the possible limitation mentioned, a non-concurrent multiple-baseline-across-subjects design was deemed most appropriate because it is an ideal fit for studies being undertaken in everyday life settings. In addition, this design does not require extensive time and

resources, which is important when working in schools that have many duties and responsibilities.

Dependent Variable

While the Sisters of Nia intervention has been implemented with success in community settings, only one study has evaluated this intervention within a traditional school setting. Specifically, Aston and Graves (2016), examined the feasibility of implementing an 8-week culture and gender specific intervention with a group of fifth-grade students. Participants from this study showed significant gains in regards to their racial identity and self-concept and added support for the use of culturally focused programs in schools. One significant limitation of that study was the authors did not evaluate the effect of the intervention on verbally aggressive behaviors. Verbal aggression is a commonly cited behavior in relation to Black female students, and is subjected to harsh disciplinary action. As such, the current study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of a manualized Afrocentric enhancement program called *Sisters of Nia*, and be the first study to evaluate the impact of the intervention exclusively on verbally aggressive behaviors. It is hypothesized that at the end of the intervention phase, participants will engage in fewer verbally aggressive behaviors due to increased awareness of their cultural and racial identity. Given the significant discipline crisis currently facing Black females, providing schools with an intervention that leads to positive behavior change is crucial. Therefore, verbal aggression has been selected as the dependent variable for the current study. Consistent with the work of Xie et al. (2003), verbal aggression was defined as verbalizations, such as arguing, teasing, taunting, threatening, or speaking in a hostile tone.

Intervention Procedures

All the groups were led by the primary investigator, a self-identified Black woman, who

is obtaining her doctoral degree in school psychology. The Sisters of Nia program is a group intervention that has been specifically designed for empowering Black girls. Furthermore, this intervention aimed to increase cultural values and beliefs such as ethnic identity and positive gender roles and relationships. (Belgrave et al; 2004). Students participated in one 35-minute group session per week for a total of eight weeks. The group intervention was delivered during the school day but not during core classes. Some of the session topics are culture, relationship, appearance, media messages, and Black women in leadership. Due to the time constraints of operating within a school, several of the original 14 lessons were modified or removed and condensed into eight sessions. The lessons that were excluded from the intervention were deemed inappropriate for the academic setting (i.e. faith, personal hygiene). The principles of Nguzo Saba and African proverbs were incorporated within each lesson, along with relational and Afrocentric methods.

The total duration of the study spanned approximately 2 months. The Sisters of Nia intervention was delivered to two separate intervention groups. The 12 participants were evenly assigned to either the first or second intervention group. All sessions required that the interventionist utilize all components of the *Sisters of Nia* intervention with fidelity, allowing for the pre-planned adaptations that were made prior to the start of the study. In regard to single subject analysis, four students were randomly selected from the 12 females who participated in the Sisters if Nia intervention groups. The baseline condition lasted for 5, 7, 9, and 11 weeks respectively for Hailey, Tanaya, Naryah, and Kedeja. The baseline length for each participant (5,7,9, and 11) was randomly selected a priori (Christ, 2007). All sessions required the interventionist to utilize the components of Sisters of Nia with fidelity, allowing for the pre-planned adaptations that were made prior to the start of the study.

Baseline. After target students were identified and parental consent was attained, baseline data was collected on the student's verbally aggressive behavior through frequency recordings. The interventionist observed each student for a minimum of 5 sessions.

Intervention. Intervention implementation was staggered across participants in a predetermined fashion to provide a demonstration of the intervention's affect across participants. Two of the single subject participants were randomly selected to receive the intervention with the first intervention group. The remaining two students received the intervention with the second intervention group once the pre-assigned baseline data points were collected; with the condition that their data was stable prior to entering the intervention condition. The procedures for this study mirror those outlined in Riley-Tillman & Burns (2013). During the intervention phase, the interventionist met with each student for one class period (35 minutes) each week to complete one of the Sisters of Nia lessons. Each student received a total of 8 intervention sessions.

Analysis. Direct observations of behavior were conducted throughout the study by both the primary investigator and graduate research assistant. Observations spanned 20 minutes and were conducted 1-2 times per week in the participants' academic settings (reading, math, etc.). During the intervention condition, each participant was observed for a total of 8 sessions to correspond with the length of the Sisters of Nia intervention. The observations would occur 1-2 days after the implementation of the weekly lesson to assess for immediacy of change. To ensure interobserver agreement, 25% of the data collection sessions were conducted by both the primary investigator and graduate research assistant. Data was collected using a frequency recording system (Appendix E). Visual analysis is recommended as a practical method for analyzing single-case designs (Gast & Spriggs, 2010). Therefore, once data was collected and graphed, visual analysis was employed to analyze the treatment effects. Analysis included changes in

mean, level, trend, and immediacy of change, and percentage of non-overlapping data (PND). PND was calculated by identifying the lowest data point at baseline and determining the percentage of data points during intervention that exceeded that level (Riley-Tillman & Burns, 2011). In addition to PND, TAU-U calculations were also conducted to assess the effect size of the intervention for each single subject participant (Parker, Vanest, & Sauber, 2011). Tau-U is a nonparametric technique that measures non-overlapping data between two phases (A-B), and accounts for level change and positive baseline trend (Parker, 2011).

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the methods that were used to investigate the efficacy of the Sisters of Nia intervention in a sample of adolescent Black girls. Based upon the research questions selected for this study, a mixed methods approach utilizing both qualitative and single-subject data was determined to best fit the aims of this study. The following research questions will be discussed in the next two chapters:

1. Will the *Sisters of Nia* intervention increase positive racial identity among intervention group participants?
2. Does participation in the *Sisters of Nia* intervention increase positive self-concept among participants?
3. Does participation in the *Sisters of Nia* intervention improve school related outcomes in terms of academic achievement and classroom behavior?
4. Does participation in the *Sisters of Nia* intervention result in decreased verbally aggressive behaviors?
5. Is the Sisters of Nia intervention a feasible option for schools that are seeking culturally relevant interventions for Black girls?

Chapter 4: Results

Single Subject Visual Analysis of Data

Research Question:

Does participation in the *Sisters of Nia* intervention result in decreased verbal aggression?

Hypothesis: Participants in the Sisters of Nia program will demonstrate a decrease in verbally aggressive behaviors.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Sisters of Nia intervention on verbal aggression, a multiple-baseline (MB) across-subjects design was employed. The design involved 2 conditions: (A) baseline and (B) intervention. Keeping with the structure of MB designs, a series of 4, A-B designs using the same outcome variable and treatment were assessed (Riley-Tillman & Burns, 2011). The Sisters of Nia intervention was delivered to two separate intervention groups. Two students from each group were randomly selected for the single subject aspect of this study. For confidentiality purposes, student names were changed to protect their identity. The baseline condition lasted for 5, 7, 9, and 11 weeks respectively for Hailey, Tanaya, Naryah, and Kedeja. Hailey and Tanaya were apart of first intervention group and Naryah and Kedeja were assigned to the second group. The lag between each A-B design allowed for experimental control and replication of results. Once baseline data were collected for Hailey and Tanaya, the intervention was immediately delivered to the first participant group. The second intervention group begun when 9 and 11 baseline data points were collected for Naryah and Kedeja.

Analysis included changes in mean, level, trend, and immediacy of change. Percentage of non-overlapping data (PND) was used to measure effect size.

Interobserver Agreement (IOA)

Interobserver agreement was obtained by a second trained observer who independently and simultaneously coded for skill accuracy with the primary observer by watching a sample video. Prior to the collection of baseline data, observers were trained to a level of 95% interobserver agreement. Interobserver agreement was based on the percentage of agreement. IOA was collected for 25% of the probes during each condition and across all participants. Interobserver agreement during all phases (Baseline and Intervention) resulted in a mean of 96.3% with a range from 88 to 100%.

Treatment Integrity

The primary investigator followed a printed lesson plan to guide her intervention sessions. A second experimenter monitored all the sessions utilizing an integrity checklist. The steps included in the intervention checklist corresponded to the main steps outlined in the intervention manual (Appendix G). Across all sessions, there were no procedural errors recorded by the second experimenter, which suggests that all sessions were implemented with integrity 100% of the time.

Data Analysis

The data collected for each of the four participants were graphed and vertically aligned to allow for visual inspection. To illustrate, Figure 1. and Figure 2. displays the total number of times each participant engaged in verbally aggressive behavior during the baseline and intervention conditions. To provide more in-depth analysis, a breakdown of the data collected for each individual participant is explored.

Figure 1: Frequency Recording of the number of Verbally Aggressive Behaviors across baseline and intervention conditions for Intervention Group 1.

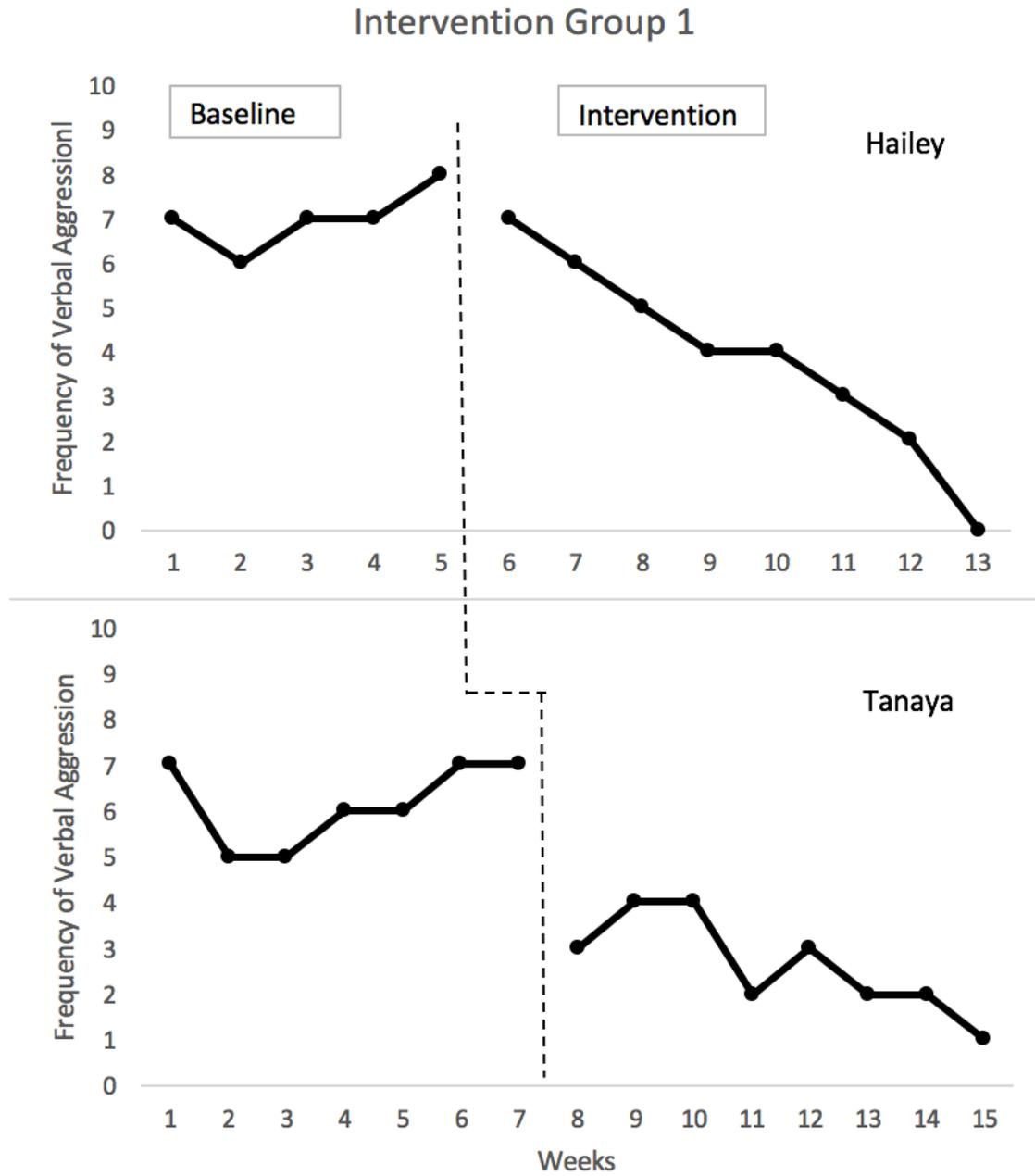
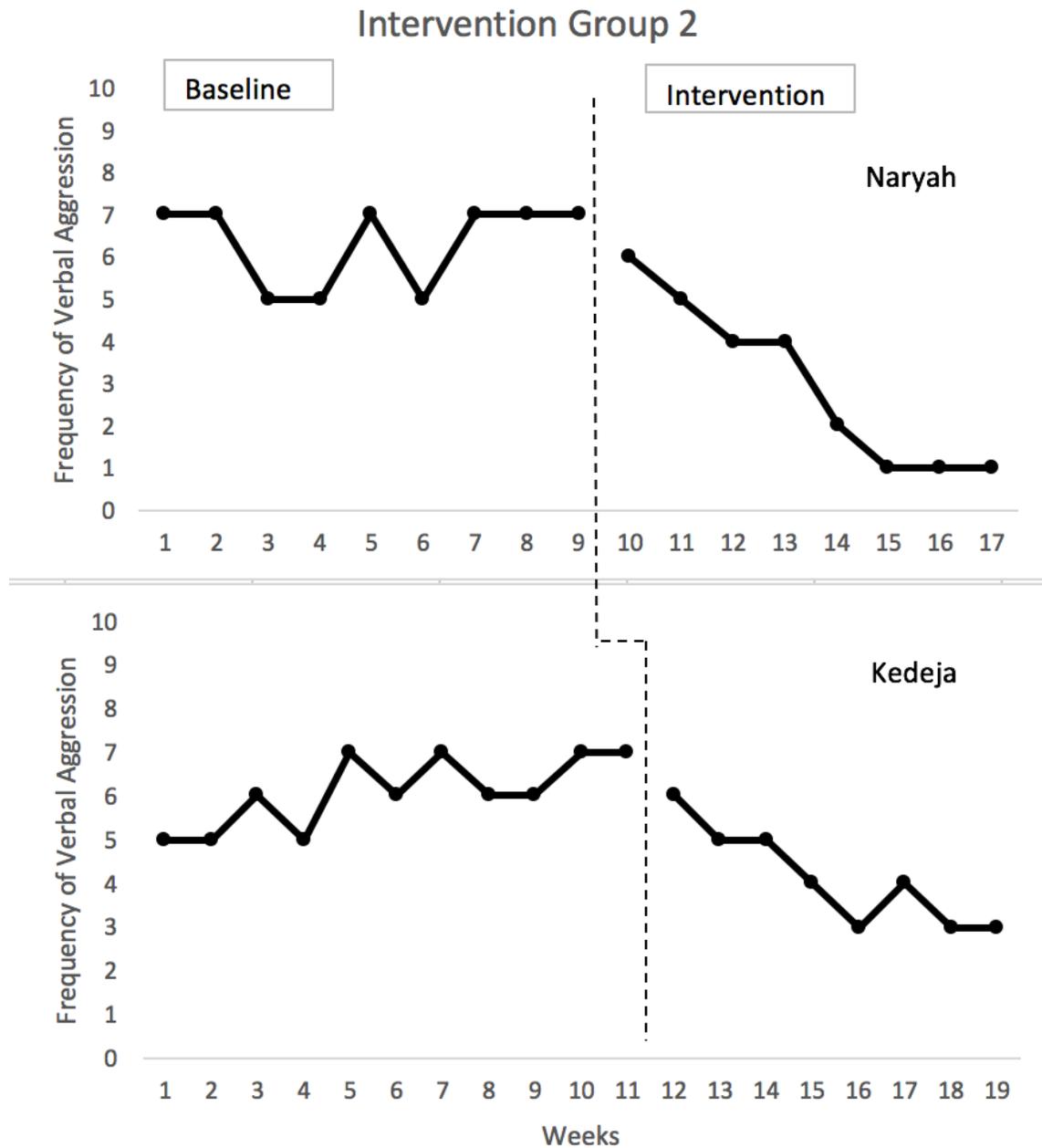


Figure 2: Frequency Recording of the number of Verbally Aggressive Behaviors across baseline and intervention conditions for Intervention Group 2.



Hailey

Baseline condition. Hailey's baseline condition spanned 5 sessions. She demonstrated moderate levels of verbal aggression during baseline. Level stability was stable, with 100% of the data points falling within 25% of the median value (Mdn=7). According to Gast & Leford (2009), this meets the stability criterion of 80%. Hailey's mean score during the baseline condition was the highest of all participants (M=7, range = 2). Based on visual inspection of the trend line, data presented with an accelerating trend.

Intervention condition. The intervention condition spanned 8 sessions. During the intervention phase, a decelerating trend indicated that Hailey exhibited fewer verbally aggressive acts as the intervention progressed. Hailey's mean score decreased from 7 to 3.9, indicating a significant change in behavior that is consistent with the aims of this study.

Changes between the baseline and intervention condition. The percentage of change scores were calculated to show the differences between the baseline and intervention means (Table 1). Hailey's percentage of change from the baseline to the intervention phase was 44.3%. Trend analysis revealed an overall decrease in the frequency of negative behaviors across the baseline and intervention condition. To interpret immediacy of change, the last three data points of the baseline condition were compared to the first 3 data points of the intervention condition (Kratochwill et al., 2010). Based on visual analysis of the data, change is immediate with an increasing effect as the intervention progresses. Hailey gradually displayed less verbally aggressive behaviors as the intervention continued with a majority of the intervention data moving from the moderate to low level. Median level change (-3) and mean level change (-3.1) indicate an overall improvement in behavior as a result of the Sisters of Nia intervention.

Table 1. Verbal Aggression Mean Scores and Percent Change Across Phases for All Participants

	Baseline	Intervention	% Change
Subject 1	7.0	3.9	44.3
Subject 2	6.14	2.63	57.2
Subject 3	6.3	3	52.4
Subject 4	6.09	4.13	32.2

To assess for effect size, the percentage of non-overlapping data (PND) method was utilized. Calculating the percentage of non-overlapping data (PND) indicated 88% of the responses in the intervention condition were less than the lowest response obtained during the baseline condition. Based on criteria set forth by Scruggs, Masropieri, Cook, and Escobar (1986), 88% falls within the fairly effective range. In addition, Tau-U scores suggests that the intervention had a moderate treatment effect (Tau-U=-0.85; p=0.01).

Tanaya

Baseline condition. The baseline condition for Tanaya spanned 7 sessions. During the baseline condition, Tanaya demonstrated moderate levels of verbally aggressive behavior. Level stability was stable during the baseline condition, with 100% of the data points falling within 25% of the median value (Mdn=6). Tanaya’s mean score during the baseline condition was 6.14 with a range of 2. Based on visual inspection of the trend line, data presented with a stable accelerating trend.

Intervention condition. During the intervention condition, a total of 8 data points were collected. Based on visual inspection of the trend line for direction and stability, data presented a decreasing trend. Data was considered stable, despite a slight increase in frequency of behavior

for observation session 9 and 12. Results indicate that once the Sisters of Nia intervention was implemented, Tanaya quickly showed a significant change in behavior. Tanaya's mean baseline score of 6.14 decreased to 2.63 during the intervention condition.

Changes between the baseline and intervention condition. Tanaya's percentage of change from the baseline to intervention condition of 57.2% was the highest of all participants'. This change is indicative of a significant reduction in verbally aggressive behaviors displayed by the participant. Trend analysis indicated an overall decreasing trend in the data. When assessing immediacy of change, Tanaya showed an immediate drop in the frequency of verbally aggressive behaviors upon being introduced to the intervention. After one week of receiving the intervention, Tanaya dropped from 7 verbally aggressive acts to 3. Data moved from the moderate to low level at the completion of the intervention program. Median level change (-3.5) and mean level change (-3.51) indicate significant improvement in behavior as a result of the Sisters of Nia intervention.

Calculating the percentage of non-overlapping data (PND) indicated 100% of the responses in the intervention condition were less than the lowest response obtained during the baseline condition. Based on PND results, the Sisters of Nia intervention is highly effective for this participant. Tanaya's Tau-U scores also fell within the highly effective range and suggest a strong treatment effect (Tau-U=-1; p=0.01).

Naryah

Baseline condition. The baseline condition for Naryah spanned 9 sessions. During baseline, Naryah demonstrated a moderate level of verbally aggressive behaviors. Level stability was fairly stable during the baseline condition, with 67% of the data points falling within 25% of the median value (Mdn=7). Her scores were slightly variable at the onset of the baseline phase

but stabilized shortly before the start of the intervention ($M=6.3$, $range=2$). Visual inspection of trend line indicates stable accelerating data.

Intervention condition. The data collection for the intervention condition spanned 8 sessions. Visual analysis of the data indicates a decreasing trend. Naryah showed a steady decrease in the frequency of verbally aggressive acts as the intervention progressed. The largest reduction in behavior is seen during observation session 14, which is marked by a decrease of 2. Upon completion of the 8-week intervention program, Naryah's frequency of verbally aggressive acts shows a significant decrease in verbal aggression. Her mean score decreased from 6.3 to 3 during the intervention condition.

Changes between the baseline and intervention condition. Naryah's percentage of change signifies a 52.4% change in behavior. Trend analysis revealed an overall decreasing trend and data dropped to the low level range during the intervention phase. Naryah showed an immediate positive response to the introduction of the intervention and demonstrated fewer and fewer verbally aggressive behaviors as the intervention persisted. A median level change (-4) and a mean level change (-3.3), reveal an overall improvement in behavior.

Calculating the percentage of non-overlapping data (PND) indicated a result of 88% and Tau-U scores fell within the moderate range ($Tau-U=-0.87$; $p=0.00$). Based on these results, this intervention is considered to have a fair effect for this participant.

Kedeja

Baseline condition. The final baseline condition spanned 11 sessions. Kedeja demonstrated moderate levels of verbal aggression during the baseline period. Level stability was stable during the baseline condition, with 100% of the data points falling within 25% of the

median value (Mdn=6). Her mean score during the baseline condition was 6.09 with a range of 2. Based on visual inspection of the trend line, data showed a slightly increasing trend.

Intervention condition. The intervention condition spanned 8 sessions. Visual analysis of the data reveals a slowly decreasing trend. Kedeja showed a gradual decrease in the frequency of verbally aggressive acts as the intervention condition progressed. Her mean score decreased from 6.09 to 4.13 during the intervention condition.

Changes between the baseline and intervention condition. Kedeja's percentage of change signifies a 32.2% change in behavior. In comparison to the other participants, Kedeja showed the lowest rate of change. Upon completion of the intervention program, Kedeja was still displaying a relatively high rate of verbally aggressive behaviors. During the last three observation sessions, data shows Kedeja was engaging in at least three verbally aggressive acts per session. Although the rate of change in behavior was lower than the other three participants, trend line analysis indicate a decreasing trend in the data. A median level change (-1.5) and mean level change (-1.96), reveal a modest improvement in behavior as a result of the Sisters of Nia intervention. Effect size calculations indicate a moderate treatment effect (PND=63%; Tau-U=-0.86; $p=0.00$).

Overall, the weighted average Tau-U score across participants (Tau-U = 0.88) indicates that the intervention had a moderate effect on the behavior of the participants. The results suggest that the *Sisters of Nia* intervention can be utilized as a school-based intervention to decrease the frequency of verbally aggressive behaviors.

Summary

Based on the data presented in this multiple-baseline design, the Sisters of Nia intervention is determined to be an effective intervention to target verbally aggressive behaviors.

An analysis of level and trend for all four participants show an immediate decrease after the condition change (Baseline-Intervention), despite a lag of 2 data points between each successive student. Additionally, baseline data for all of the participants remained stable and did not show a change until the implementation of the intervention. Participants 2, 3, and 4 (Tanaya, Naryah, and Kedeja) served as verification of the treatment effects for participant 1 (Hailey). Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that applying this intervention with similar participants will lead to similar effects. These results serve as evidence that the Sisters of Nia intervention is a viable treatment option for verbally aggressive behavior.

Qualitative Interview Data

In this section, the responses of a subgroup of six interviewees are reported. These participants were randomly selected from the poll of 12 study participants. Qualitative data was used to further explore themes related to Black female identity and self-concept. This information was used to assess intervention effectiveness through analysis of themes that arose during the entrance and exit qualitative interviews. Each interview was transcribed and reviewed by a peer reviewer. All suggestions from the peer reviewer were taken into consideration and used to either re-conceptualize or reorganize the content and presentation of the findings.

Data Analysis

Each pre-post interview was analyzed to identify themes related to the aforementioned research questions. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe data analysis as a process of breaking down, organizing, and reassembling data to develop a different understanding of phenomena. In accord with procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin regarding data analysis for grounded theory research, the following coding procedures were implemented in the current project: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The first step of the analysis process consisted of

reviewing and summarizing each interview transcript to identify and isolate the uniqueness of each participant's experience. During this process, notes were carefully taken and summarized. Content analysis was utilized to make sense of and identify consistencies among the respondents' experiences in regards to their lived experiences of being a Black female. The next step involved grouping similar non-repetitive significant statements into meaning units that, when grouped together, represent different data categories (Moustakas, 1994). This process is often referred to as axial coding, which is the process of re-building the data in new ways to establish relationships between categories. Connections amongst similar categories formed the foundation of theme development (Moustakas, 1994). As data were amassed, new meaning units emerged, requiring the development of new categories using the constant comparative technique. Patterns that were found amongst the data were grouped into thematic categories.

After further review of thematic categories, I began the process of meaning interpretation. Essentially, interpretation consisted of identifying the meanings of the phenomenon for participants, as well as using my own perspectives to make sense of and to attach significance to the meanings of the phenomenon for participants.

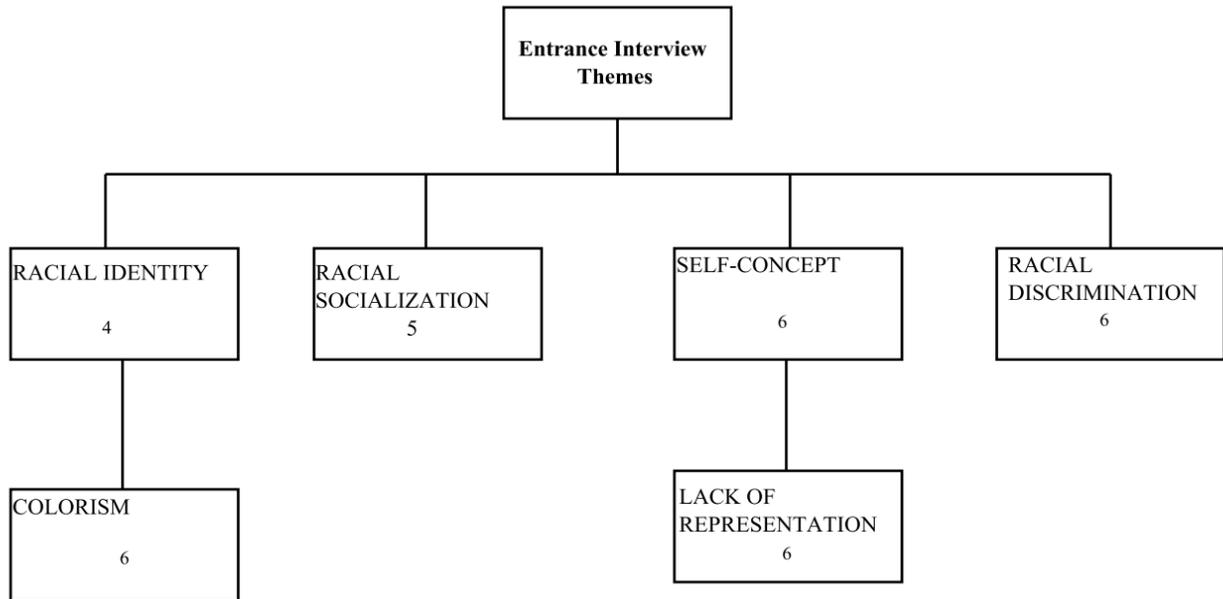
Findings

Entrance Interview Themes

The entrance interview was conducted in a large classroom situated on school grounds. For time purposes, this interview was broken up into two 30-minute interview sessions. A total of six students were present for both interview days. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. There were four focal themes that emerged during the pre-intervention interview: Racial Identity, Racial Socialization, Self-Concept, and Racial Discrimination. Racial Identity and Self-concept also have one secondary theme (Figure 2.). Secondary themes are utilized to

provide further details about the focal themes which allow for greater understanding. These are discussed in the proceeding sections.

Figure 3. Visual Depiction of Entrance Interview themes and subthemes. Numbers indicate the number of participants who indicated each theme.



Racial Identity. Four participants (Mia, Hailey, Amira, and Jade) expressed how they felt about their racial background. Immediately after hearing the question, Mia expressed the following sentiment:

It's real hard, I like being Black but sometimes I think things would be easier if I wasn't.

Sometimes I'm tired of being different. Being Black means that you will always stand out and that makes you a target. We don't mean much to White people.

While Mia was speaking, all of the participants nodded their head in agreement with what was being said. Hailey expounded on what Mia stated by describing her frustration with being judged. She spoke about how growing up she was taught to work harder because of her race. She stated "Being Black means I'll just have to work harder for everything I'm going to get in life." To further explore their feelings about racial identity, the participants were asked to think of one word that comes to mind about their experience of being a Black girl. Amira and Jade used the words "strong and tough" and Mia and Hailey both used the word "hard". Jade then articulated how she has both good and bad sentiments about being Black. She made the following statement:

On most days I feel good about being Black, I think that we are just as good as anyone else. It's outside people that make me feel bad about being Black. Like when I go to the mall and see the way the people in the store look at me. It's even harder when your dark skinned like I am. I get teased from both White and Black people. The closer you are to White, the better people will treat you.

To follow up on Jade's comment, Mia stated "Most of the time I don't even think about being Black because so is everyone around me. It's not until I get around a lot of White people that I feel uncomfortable and judged." All of the participants were in agreement that when they are in their communities and schools, which are majority Black, they are protected from society's view

of them. It isn't until they are in spaces in which they are in the minority, that they feel the burden of being Black. It is during these experiences that feelings of discontent emerge. For instance, given that all the participants spend the majority of their time in environments that are primarily Black, it is not until they are put in spaces in which they are different that their racial identity come into question. Jade states "Most of the time, being Black isn't a big deal because so is everyone around me. But when I am around a lot of White people that's when I feel like being Black is all they see, and not in a good way."

Colorism. During the conversation regarding the participants' racial identity, one of the participants brought up the concept of skin color in relation to how you are treated as a Black female. All six participants expressed strong sentiments regarding how their skin color affects their life. The idea of skin-color related to the issue of colorism, which has been a long rooted issue in the Black community that dates back to slavery. Colorism refers to skin color bias based on how dark or light one's skin tone is; with people of lighter skin receiving preferential treatment (Harris, 2008). To discuss the issue of colorism, participants were invited to share their personal ideals regarding skin color. Three participants (Jade, Kedeja, and Keely) told their accounts of how colorism has affected them. Kedeja started the conversation by describing her experience of having a light complexion:

Most people think that dark-skinned girls have it worse. I think there is good and bad on both sides. Because of my light-skin, I am often seen as less Black. It's hard to find where I fit because I don't fit in with White people and am not dark enough for Black people. I think dark skinned girls get jealous because they think we have it easy but we don't, I don't at least.

In reference to Kedeja's response, two participants disagreed and stated that being dark-skinned comes with more hardships. They both stated that they feel less attractive as dark-skinned females and they are less desirable to males. Specifically, Keely stated "If I could change anything about my appearance it would have to be to have lighter skin." Jade agreed and stated "If I was lighter, things will be better, everyone would think I was pretty." At the end of the discussion, all of the participants were in agreement that having lighter skin in the Black community is considered as prized and at times can lead to better treatment.

Racial Socialization. With the exception of one participant (Jade), all the participants' recalled being taught that it was important to "Not Act White" and to always work "twice as hard" by their family members. In addition, one participant shared a conversation she had with her mother:

My mom told me that because I'm Black, there are certain things I have to keep in mind. She said that people think that because we are Black we aren't smart so we have to show them different. She doesn't want me to act how White people think I will be.

Keely described that in her family, she was always told how easier it would be to be White. She states "My mom often says things would be different if she were White, they have it easy and don't have to struggle as much." A majority of the participants agreed that if they weren't Black they would have more opportunities. Mia shared her sentiment in the following excerpt:

Most Black people grow up poor and we always have to struggle. Nobody in my family has a lot of money and when I see like White people they always have nice cars and probably live in big houses. In my neighborhood, there are no White people because they have too much money to live where I do.

Throughout the conversation, it was evident that all of the participants received parental messages regarding the need to work harder because of their ethnicity. In addition, none were in disagreement regarding the fact that their White counterparts have an easier life and that their parents wanted to instill in them that they will have to be tough. Another interesting aspect of this conversation was how “Acting White” was discouraged in their households. Kedeja shared that she often gets teased by family member’s for talking White. She discussed her frustration with having to talk or act in a certain way to fit in:

If I like any music that differs from rap or R&B, my mom says I’m trying to be White.

That’s the hardest thing about being Black, feeling the need to conform.

This topic led into an in-depth discussion of stereotypes of Black females and how they are affected by them. All of the participants agreed that when they do things or like things that are in contrast to their Black identity, they receive negative feedback from their same race counterparts.

Self-Concept and the Adoption of Negative Stereotypes. All of the participants (Mia, Jade, Keely, Kedeja, Hailey, and Amira), used a majority of negative words to describe Black women. Jade, Keely, and Kedeja used the words loud and ghetto and Mia, Hailey, and Amira all agreed on the words confrontational and fatherless. Kedeja, was the only participant to use positive attributions as well and stated that Black women are “strong” and “supportive”. When asked whether they felt the stereotypes they listed were true, Mia stated “Yes, most of these things are true. Black girls are always arguing and most of us do live in the ghetto.” The participants were then asked how they felt people outside their race viewed them as Black women. All of the participants were in agreement with Hailey’s comment on the media’s role in shaping how others view them.

In the movies, were always doing bad. We are thugs and criminals. That's how I believe White people see us. They think we can't do anything good and always expect us to be bad. Black girls are always talking real loud and have a lot of kids with no dad around.

Expanding from this statement, Amira talked about the difficulty with defying negative stereotypes:

I feel it doesn't matter what we do as Black girls, even if we don't act loud, that's what White people will expect us to do. We don't get judged freely. It's too much work to change their minds. Even with Black people it's hard because if you don't live in the ghetto or act in a certain way, they think you are trying to be White.

In final reflection, Mia noticed a connection between the way they believed people outside their race viewed them and their own personal views:

Look at the board that has the words we used to describe us and the words other people use to describe Black girls. They are almost the same. How could it be that we see ourselves as negatively as other people?

It was evident in that moment that all the participants were able to understand the impact of negative stereotypes and how it negatively affects their self-concept. A majority of the participants were surprised at the number of negative associations they held regarding their racial identity.

Additionally, when asked what things they would like to change about themselves, all but one selected physical characteristics that were associated with their Black heritage to change. Three participants (Hailey, Mia, and Jade), expressed changing their hair to be more long and straight, Keely wanted to change her wide nose, and Amira wanted to be lighter. Kedeja stated

that she would change her attitude because she is always in fights due to her argumentative nature.

Lack of Representation. To further explore the participants' associations with Black female identity, they were asked to make a list of the careers they associate with Black women. All of the participants agreed on three careers: hair stylist, hospital aide, and fast food worker. One of the determining factors when making the list was thinking about what careers the people in their family and community held. Two participants (Amira and Hailey), talked about how they formed their opinions. Hailey stated "I never had a Black doctor, it's always White women that have the fancy jobs like lawyers or judges. We don't have those opportunities." Amira discussed having no Black female role models to look up to in her community in the following statement:

There are some teachers here that are Black but that's it. I want to be a dentist but I never seen any Black dentists. It's harder for us to get good jobs because you have to pay to go to school and most of us don't have a lot of money. We just can't really do anything that we want like others.

All of the participants agreed that they would like to see more Black females in diverse career fields. While they all had aspirations to enter all different careers, they also believed that it was unlikely to happen for them based on their race and socioeconomic status.

Racial Discrimination. The last focal theme to develop during the entrance interview was experiences of racial discrimination. All of the participants shared experiences of racial discrimination. Specifically, they all described instances in which they were racially profiled by store clerks. Amira gives her account of an experience she had while shopping at her neighborhood corner store:

I live right down the street near a gas station. Me and my brothers and sisters use to always go down there to like to get snacks. Whenever we would go down there for like hot chocolate or something, when we would leave the man from the store would always stop us and like pat us down to see if we stole anything. We went there like every day and it still happened. I would get so mad because I would not steal anything but they treated me like I did.

Following Amira's comment, Jade shared how her brother experienced racial discrimination in the school:

The reason I came to this school was because at my old school, a lot of the Black boys would get tasered when they would get in trouble. My mom said it wasn't safe because what if they did that to my brother. Whenever the White boys were fighting they would just be pushed apart, but whenever the Black boys were fighting, they got the dogs out.

This comment led to a majority of the participants stating that their school also discriminates on students of color. Mia states "The White students here are never accused of doing anything wrong, one of my teachers actually apologized to a White student in my class when a few students got into a fight." In a follow up statement, Keely shared some examples of disproportionate discipline practices:

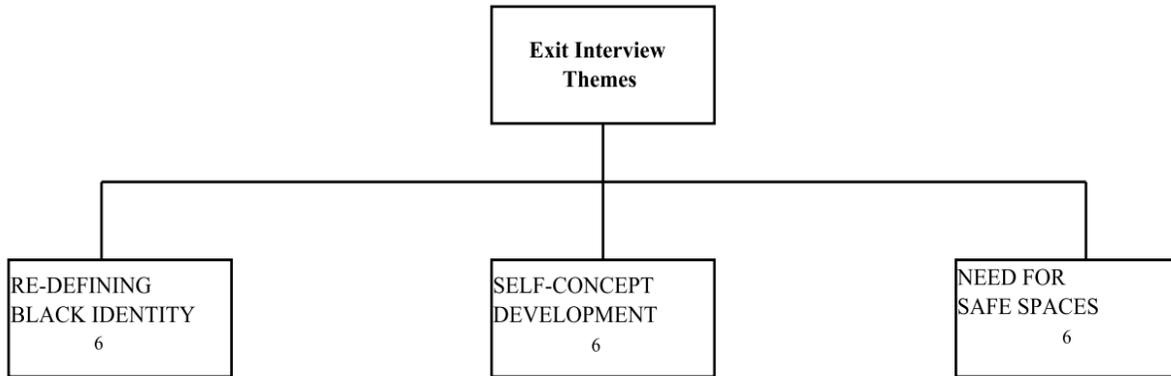
In my science class, someone took the teacher's cellphone from her purse. The teacher made everyone stay in the room for lunch except for the two White students in the class. Another time, I was arguing with this girl who was White and the principal came over and automatically thought I was the one doing wrong. I received detention and the other girl was just told to go back to class. It's not fair. Black people aren't the only ones that act up.

The experiences that were shared by these participants regarding biased discipline practices for Black students, support the idea that racial discrimination is a prevalent issue in the school system as well as society. It was hypothesized that by implementing a program such as the Sisters of Nia curriculum, Black girls would be able to have a safe space in which they can address these very themes that emerged during the discussion.

Exit Interview Themes

At the completion of the Sisters of Nia intervention, the six participants from the entrance interview were invited back for a post-interview. Participants were asked a series of questions aimed to assess the effectiveness of the intervention program as it relates to racial identity and self-concept. Three main themes evolved from the exit interview: Re-Defining Black Identity, Self-Concept Development, and Need for Safe Spaces (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. Visual depiction of Exit Interview themes. Numbers indicate the number of participants who indicated each theme.



Re-defining Black Identity. One of the goals of the Sisters of Nia curriculum was to promote positive racial identity. When compared to the responses during the entrance interview, participants showed positive growth in their racial identity development.

When re-visiting the discussion of Black female stereotypes, all of the participants described positive characteristics about Black Female Identity. Three of the participants (Keely, Hailey, and Mia) described Black women as Strong. Keely noted, “we are able to handle anything, we’re independent.” Amira speaks about how her perception of Black women was re-shaped through this intervention in the following excerpt:

This program taught me a lot. I learned that I don’t have to act a certain way just because it is expected of me. I can help change what it means to be Black. We are smart and can be anything we want. It might be harder but we can do it.

All of the participants agreed that one way they can overcome negative stereotypes is by making better choices. Due to the intervention, the participants gained a new way to frame their Black identity. Amira and Keely discussed having a newfound confidence about being a Black women and a higher level of consciousness. For example, Keely describes how her mindset has been changed:

Prior to starting this group, when I would hear people talk about Black girls or Black people in general it was always bad. Through the activities in this program, I learned about so many things I should be proud of about my heritage. They never teach us good things about Black people here besides being good singers or dancers. I didn’t know that Black women did so much. I really liked learning about the different African Queens, it made me feel special.

Mia described a newfound feeling of self-responsibility and discussed the changes she plans to make as a result of this intervention:

This program makes me want to be better. I can have a better attitude and treat people with respect. I don't have to fight all the time. Fighting just makes me look bad and will give people more reason to think negatively about Black girls.

Self-Concept Development. The second theme that developed during the exit interview related to the participant's positive self-concept. All of the participants expressed feeling better about themselves and who they were as Black women. Mia stated that the most beneficial part of the intervention program was being exposed to other Black female role models. She credits the lesson on Black female leadership for inspiring her to now pursue a career as a lawyer. Her thoughts are captured in the following quote:

I really liked meeting all of the Black Female role models. It felt good to see people that looked like me being successful. It made me think that I could do those things too. I loved how nice they dressed and how they wore their hair. I want to be like them when I finish school. They made me want to do better in school and I hope to have a good job like them.

Additionally, two participants (Jade and Hailey) talked about appreciating their features and not trying to fit in to what other people define as beauty. Jade remarked "I used to hate my hair because it wasn't straight but now I appreciate my hair and realize that just because it's different doesn't mean it's bad." Amira agreed with Jade's response and added that she also learned to be more accepting of herself. She stated that she is still learning how to fully embrace being a dark-skinned woman but this intervention gave her strategies to build up her self-esteem.

Need for Safe Spaces. In conclusion, all of the participants were asked the question: Why do you think interventions like Sisters of Nia are needed in schools. Four of the participants (Mia, Jade, Keely, and Amira) stated that these programs are needed in schools because they never have the opportunity to talk about issues about race and self-identity. Furthermore, Keely stated that this program made her more aware of who she is and she loved learning about African history. Mia agreed and stated:

All we ever learn about in school about being Black is sports and rap music. A lot more girls could benefit from learning things like the African queens and learning about the different careers that Black women can do.

Kedeja stated that she looked forward to having a place to go each week and express how she felt without fear of judgement. She stated that having a Black female role model to meet with each week that she could relate to was beneficial. She describes her thoughts below:

I really liked having almost like a Black woman as my therapist. That's what my mzee (group facilitator) was for me. I have a therapist that comes to my house. I saw her for over a year and haven't shared as much as I did in this group. I felt a bond with the other students in this group and felt like we really were a family. For once, there was a group made especially for girls like me and it felt good to be a Black girl. I know a lot of other girls in this school could really need this group.

All of the participants expressed agreement with Kedeja's response and stated that this group was the first time they were explicitly taught to embrace who they were and discuss the barriers faced by Black women. Amira described this program as "a comfortable place where it is okay to be myself." Both Hailey and Jade nodded in agreement and shared how this group encouraged

them to make better choices and become a role model to Black girls like them one day. Hailey stated:

I hope to maybe be a therapist one day for Black girls and do things like this group. We need this. My mom is always busy with work and trying to take care of me and my brothers so this group gave me the attention I needed. I want to give this to other girls when I'm older.

Teacher Feedback

One of the goals of this study was to assess whether the Sisters of Nia intervention could be used as a tier II behavioral intervention for at risk girls. Two teachers were invited to participate in a 15-minute post-intervention interview to discuss the outcomes of the study. Teachers were given an overview of the intervention and provided a copy of the revised intervention guide. One teacher was selected from the 7th grade team and the other from 8th grade. Each of the teachers see the study participants' at least one time per day for a main subject area. Qualitative interviews revealed that a majority of the students that received the intervention made a positive improvement in regards to classroom behavior. Specifically, both teachers reported that on days when the students received the intervention, their behavior was significantly improved. According to teacher feedback, one area that was not improved upon as a result of the intervention was academic achievement. Due to the timing of the intervention implementation, a complete analysis of before and after intervention grades were not available based on the structure of the school's grading period.

To further investigate the intervention's acceptability, one teacher for each study participant completed a revised version of the Intervention Rating Profile (IRP; Witt & Martens, 1983). Given that this is a specialized group intervention, questions regarding the application of

this intervention in the classroom were removed for interpretation purposes (Appendix I).

Acceptability of the Sisters of Nia intervention in regards to classroom behavior was measured at the end of the intervention by the teacher. After the intervention, acceptability ratings averaged 5.2. Teachers rating suggests that this intervention was considered acceptable by teachers as a target for externalizing classroom behaviors.

Chapter 5: Discussion

“It’s nice to be told you matter for a change and being a Black girl is a special gift. I needed this group, I learned it’s okay to be me”

-Exit Interview Participant Mia

There is growing evidence that Black females are facing an educational crisis in regards to disproportionate discipline practices and are more than six times more likely to be suspended when compared to their White counterparts (Blake et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015). Black females are frequently confronted with deeply embedded negative stereotypes that reinforce racial and gender biases both in and outside the classroom. One way to address this problem is developing a strong sense of racial identity, which can be achieved through cultural enrichment exercises (Bracey, Bamaca, & Umana-Taylor, 2004; Umana-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007).

With the growing attention on the inequities that exist for Black girls in urban schools, it is important for urban schools to address ways in which they can implement culturally focused intervention programs. Chapter 5 will begin by discussing the current state of Black womanhood and the purpose of this study. Additionally, a summary of the findings from Chapter 4 and a discussion of the limitations and future directions for research and practice are provided.

Black Girls Matter

According to critical race theorists, racism in America is so imbedded that it has become ordinary (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). Although the effects may vary, racism especially effects children of color. Specifically, Black children are constantly bombarded with messages from both individuals and institutions that they are not as good, as smart, or as loved as their White counterparts. Research has revealed that these messages do in

fact occur at the school level in the form of low teacher expectations and disproportionate discipline (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

In the past year, the schooling experiences of Black girls has received national attention. Reports revealed that while Black girls comprise 8% of enrolled students, they represent 14% of the total of out of school suspensions (Smith-Evans & George, 2014; Crenshaw et al., 2015). Black girls are constantly faced with systematic barriers in education that are rooted in both racial and gender bias. They are punished for the very qualities that if exhibited by White women would be characterized as assertive or independent. Instead, they are brandished as argumentative, loud, and confrontational. Despite being characterized as resilient, many of the problems Black women face are rooted in impoverished living conditions and stressful life events resulting from historical oppression and loss of culture and identity. They are constantly confronted with contextual stressors that place them at risk for poor psychological and behavioral outcomes (Spitler, Kemper, & Parker, 2002). They are more likely than their White counterparts to attend lower performing schools, receive harsher punishment, and score below the national average for girls on every measure of achievement (Smith-Evans, Graves, Kaufmann, & Frohlich, 2014). To overcome these feelings, Black girls must be explicitly taught that they too matter! One way to uplift Black Girls is by teaching them to value their racial identity.

Many confuse racial identity as simply your race or ethnic background. However, the actual origin of racial identity is based upon how one thinks about their race and their psychological response to being a member of that group. Given the longstanding history of racism and discrimination in America, racial identity is of high importance for Black Americans. Research has proven a positive relationship between racial identity and psychological

functioning (Buckley & Carter, 2005). In addition, racial identity has been linked to higher self-esteem, educational performance, and lower risk for substance abuse and promiscuous behaviors (Belgrave, Brome, & Hampton, 2000). Prominent Black scholars, Du Bois (1935), Karenga (1980), and Asante (1988) all pointed to the failure of the public school system and challenged Black Americans to develop a new system for themselves in which Black people were valued.

Recently, a study conducted at Pennsylvania State University investigated the benefits of a social justice course with a Black student population (Harrell-Levy, Kerpelman, & Henry, 2016). Through this course, Black students were given the opportunity to challenge negative stereotypes and share their perspective of what their “Blackness” means to them. As a result of the course, participants discussed the positive impact the course had on their self-identity. Therefore, this study supports the push for the consideration of culture in schools both at the intervention and curriculum level.

Many Black educators and parents have found Afrocentric teaching to be the most viable option. When implemented, Afrocentric interventions can form the cornerstone of behavior change and reaffirm purpose and meaning (Graham, 2005). Afrocentric interventions are useful to address both structural (macro) and individual (micro) challenges and promote overall well-being (Gilbert, Harvey & Belgrave, 2009). Thus, Afrocentric interventions like the one used in this study can be of great benefit to helping Black girls overcome the many hurdles they are faced with in life.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of an 8-week Afrocentric intervention within a normal school day. This study focused on changing the developmental trajectory of Black female identity through the *Sisters of Nia* intervention

program. Research has underscored the importance of family, community, and school contexts in creating resources and/or barriers to success for Black girls (Langhout, 2005; Evans-Winters, 2007; Morris, 2007; Nicolas et al., 2008). For Black girls, schools are also a significant socializing influence, as it has been estimated that they spend at least 30 hours a week in school (Morris, 2007; Ellis-Christensen, 2008). One way to fix the disconnect between schools and Black students is Afrocentric programming that take into account the unique experiences and background of Black students. In an effort to build upon previous research concerning the need for Afrocentric interventions to counteract the marginalization of Black females, this study focused on changing the developmental trajectory of Black female identity through the *Sisters of Nia* intervention program.

One of the main goals of this study were to empower Black female adolescents to rewrite what mainstream society tells them about their Black female identity. Interventions such as *Sisters of Nia* can also be used to educate Black girls on their history and reframe society's expectations of them. Without the implementation of Afrocentric interventions, Black girls are at risk to internalize the negative characteristics associated with being a Black woman in America and thus highlight the importance of this area of study. As such, implementing these interventions in schools can make a positive change and help Black girls overcome the barriers that have the potential to hinder their success. For Black girls growing up in a world that has traditionally determined worth based off of skin color, programs such as *Sisters of Nia* are critical and can be extremely instrumental in empowering them to reach new heights. Being that education is often a key factor in unlocking new opportunities for Black individuals, it is important to offer schools with viable interventions that address both the cultural and social emotional needs of Black students like the one proposed in this specific study.

A review of the literature revealed a void of school-based interventions that were specifically designed to address the unique obstacles of students of color. Currently in the field of school psychology, there is a need to develop more culturally relevant interventions that can be used at the school level. The lack of research literature regarding this topic is what fueled the motivation to conduct this research study. This study was the first school-based application of the Sisters of Nia program to investigate school-related behaviors (i.e. verbal aggression). In addition, this study provides feedback regarding the feasibility of implementing culture-specific interventions in schools for Black girls. Implications regarding the process of implementing a school-based Afrocentric intervention along with barriers to implementation are provided. As each research question is explored, the implications of this research for the psychology field are also examined.

Key Findings

Research Question 1:

Will the *Sisters of Nia* intervention increase positive racial identity among intervention group participants and influence their perceptions regarding Black female stereotypes?

One of the goals of this research project was to provide participants with the opportunity to advance their thinking in regards to their racial identity. Identity formation is an important area of research in regards to Black Americans because it focuses on the significance and meaning that they attribute to race in defining themselves. Identity development is critical for minority youth because they often have to encounter threats to positive identity development based upon racial prejudices that persist in America. Adolescent children that are unable to resolve these identity crises are likely to developed a low sense of self which leads to increased risk of teen pregnancy, crime, and school dropout (Swanson et al., 2002).

Prior to the intervention, a majority of the participants expressed ambiguous feelings towards their race. Many of the participants expressed that while they didn't take any particular issue with being Black, the burden of being Black in mainstream society often leads to feelings of discontent. During the initial sessions of the program, several students described difficulty with accepting their "Blackness" in a society that tells them they are "unworthy" and "too ghetto" to be cared about. As a result of this intervention, all of the students showed improvement with respect to their racial identity. During the exit interview, a majority of the students expressed a newfound love and attachment towards their race. Mia, an eighth grade student, described her transformation in the following quote:

At first I didn't really feel like it was important to talk about being Black. I didn't really realize how much of who I am and how I think is connected to my race. Prior to being in this group, I just knew that being Black meant things would be hard for me or that I wouldn't be able to do as many things in my life. Now that changed and I feel good about being Black. It was helpful to learn good things about being Black for once. This program is so important because it really helped me get to know myself better. I know that I will always be a Black girl to many, but what being Black means is up to me to define.

Like Mia, this intervention influenced many of the participants to re-write their personal narrative of what being Black means. For instance, a majority of their participants shifted from feelings of hopelessness about being Black to feelings of confidence and pride. Participants in the intervention were challenged to re-define what Black womanhood stands for. To accomplish this, participants were given the space to confront negative stereotypes about Black females and replace them with positive characterizations. Qualitative responses revealed a significant shift in

how participants described Black women before and after the intervention. Participants shifted from describing Black women as “loud” and ghetto” to using descriptions such as “smart” and “special”. Overall, participants expressed an increased connection to their ethnicity. Furthermore, participants became more aware of the racial dynamics in society and the importance of embracing one’s culture. For example, prior to the intervention, Kedeja described her feelings about being Black as “I don’t really feel any way, everyone around me is Black.” However, at the conclusion of the intervention she added “I really see how much my race actually does affect me and how being a Black woman might mean that I have to face more obstacles than a White student will face. One way to overcome is to first believe in myself regardless of what anyone else thinks.” As a result of this study, it is believed that the students benefited from participating in a culture-specific intervention that promoted positive racial identity development. Given that positive racial identity has been identified as a protective factor for Black children, this is a significant finding for this study (Cross, 1991; Phinney & Alipuria, 1996).

Research Question 2:

Does participation in the *Sisters of Nia* intervention increase positive self-concept among participants?

Question two investigated the impact of the Sisters of Nia intervention on self-concept. Based on a review of qualitative responses, participants’ expressed greater feelings of self-worth at the conclusion of the intervention. Specifically, many of the students’ discussed an increased feeling of self-acceptance. For instance, one of the themes that developed during the pre-intervention phase was colorism. Prior to the intervention, a majority of the students discussed skin color biases and expressed their wishes for having a lighter skin complexion. Despite holding these strong notions regarding skin color, all of the participants expressed a greater

acceptance for their skin color and other features associated with Black female identity at the conclusion of the intervention. During the lesson “Mirror, Mirror” which targeted issues relating to self-esteem, the participants were able to gain a new perspective regarding the importance of accepting themselves and appreciating their uniqueness. From hair to body type, all of the participants discussed how they have changed their perception of beauty. Two participants (Keely and Jade) stated that after the intervention they no longer feel the need to change themselves to live up to societies standard of what beautiful means. By showing greater acceptance of their Black physical features and who they were as Black women, it was evident that Sisters of Nia curriculum had a positive effect on the participant’s self-concept. While racial identity and self-concept are two separate entities, it is hypothesized that racial identity serves as a protective factor for self-concept. In other words, the adoption of positive feelings towards ones’ race will also likely result in increasing feelings of self-worth. This notion adds support to the current literature base supporting the benefits of positive identity. Thus, there is a strong rationale for cultural interventions such as *Sisters of Nia* to be implemented with Black girls.

Research Question 3:

Does participation in the *Sisters of Nia* intervention improve school related outcomes in terms of academic achievement and classroom behavior?

Given the current state of education for Black children in the United States, it was important to investigate if culture-specific interventions could also make a positive impact on academic achievement. Consistent with national data regarding poor academic achievement of Black girls, all the participants selected for this study were failing at least two core subjects. Based on qualitative interviews with both the participants and their teachers, there is no data supporting any academic change in the student’s achievement. Teachers reported that none of

the students that received the Sisters of Nia intervention made any significant gains in regards to their test scores and classroom assignments. While a direct change in academic status was not apparent, it is important to note that all of the participants described wanting to make a positive change regarding their academics but cited a lack of support both at home and in school. Unfortunately, many of the participants expressed a learned hopelessness in regards to their academic achievement. Prior to the intervention, many of them stated that most of their teachers have given up on them and refuse to help so “why even try”. While the Sisters of Nia intervention instilled a new value on education, no real change could occur without external support from teachers and staff. Given the research regarding teacher perception of Black females in regards to both their behavior and academic talents, there must be systematic efforts to truly overturn the academic outcomes for Black girls. Teacher interviews revealed seeing a positive change in classroom behavior following the intervention but these gains slowly diminished once the intervention ended and the participants were no longer receiving the positive reinforcement and support regarding making positive changes.

Research Question 4:

Does participation in the *Sisters of Nia* intervention result in decreased verbally aggressive behaviors?

One of the components of Sisters of Nia is building a sense of community and sisterhood among one another. To do this, several team building exercises were built into each lesson requiring them to work together and treat each other kindly. They were constantly reinforced to use these same skills outside the group with peers and teachers. After analyzing single-subject data for four of the study participants, it was evident that the Sisters of Nia curriculum was a useful tool for decreasing verbal aggression. All of these participants showed a significant

decrease in regards to the frequency of verbal altercations with others. During the last session, one of the single subject participants stated, “The biggest change from this program was my attitude, I always thought I had to act extra tough but now I realize it is more important to have a reputation for being nice or good.”

Research Question 5:

Is the Sisters of Nia intervention a feasible option for schools that are seeking culturally relevant interventions for Black girls?

This study serves as evidence that implementing *Sisters of Nia* and similar culture-specific interventions should be an option that urban schools consider. Like most school-based interventions, the success of implementing a program like Sisters of Nia relies on prior planning and organization. Given that the manual is already broken down in lesson form, the interventionist would first need to determine what specific lessons will best fit the need of their students and revise accordingly. This was determined to be the biggest task of the implementation process. As such, the process of revising the curriculum is described below.

To implement the Sisters of Nia program, the main resource needed was the intervention manual, which includes all the printable activity materials. From the manual, there were journal pages that were provided to compose a journal for the group participants. In addition, to the lesson activities, the manual listed several cultural emersion activities. Due to the constraints of operating within a school and limited outside resources, several modifications were made so that the participants were still able to engage in culturally rich activities. Several media clips and literary works of Black women were infused into each lesson. During the lesson devoted to the country of Africa, students were presented with a video that detailed current life in Africa so that they could gain a better understanding of African people and their traditions. Also, to

incorporate the Afrocentric ideology of Umoja (community), several Black women from the surrounding communities were invited to the school to discuss their careers and serve as additional positive role models for the students. Establishing these community partnerships were shown to be beneficial and has encouraged the school administrators to take a more proactive approach to establishing community-school partnerships.

While time is a major constraint within the schools, with adequate planning and organization it is feasible to successfully implement Afrocentric interventions over the span of a lunch period. Pre-planned arrangements were made to allow the interventionist to gather the lunches for the girls prior to the start of the session. In addition, the school counselor was also assigned the role of escorting the students to the area designated for the group. These arrangements conserved valuable intervention time and allowed for the intervention to be implemented for the total allotted time. In addition, this intervention is cost effective and provided printable reproducible materials in the manual for each individual session. The biggest obstacle to the implementation of this intervention was adapting hour long lessons for use within a 30-minute class period. However, given the manualized structure of the intervention, the lessons were able to be easily broken into smaller parts. The key to any school-based intervention is flexibility, this is especially true for Afrocentric interventions. The benefits highlighted in this study support the continued need to push for integrating Afrocentric programming in urban schools.

Implications for Research

For so long, the unique obstacles faced by Black girls had been an invisible problem that was rarely discussed. Many claim the reason the plight of Black girls has been ignored is due to the ongoing struggles plaguing Black males. While none can argue that Black males are indeed

facing a crisis in American society, Black women are also under attack in more ways than one. Society's preoccupation with the obstacles facing Black males often conceals those invisible struggles of Black women.

Being that school serves as an important socializing agent for children, finding culturally relevant interventions that can be implemented in schools remains an undeveloped area of research. Consistent with existing research on racial identity, the results from this study suggest a positive correlation between racial identity and psychosocial functioning. These results help support existing literature regarding the protective aspect of positive racial identity for Black youth. Despite the knowledge that racial identity development is an important developmental task for children of color, there remains a disconnect with addressing this issue at the school level. To fill this void, additional studies must be conducted to further show the connection between racial identity and positive school outcomes. In addition, there needs to be an increase in the amount of resources that teachers and counselors can utilize regarding racial identity that have been specifically designed for school-based use.

When examining the research regarding the specific issues associated with Black female identity, there are even fewer studies available. Historically, Black girls have always been underrepresented in educational research (Rozie-Battle, 2002; Lindsay-Dennis, 2010). This shifted in 2009, when the Institute for Women's Policy Research released *Black Girls in New York City: Untold Strength and Resilience* (Jones-DeWeever, 2009). This report was one of the first extensive works of research regarding the issues and experiences of Black girls. This report was ground-breaking because it took a strength-based approach to looking at Black womanhood and sought to uncover positive qualities of Black girls along with the systematic barriers that hinder their success. In addition, this report fueled a new surge of attention on Black

girls that was followed up by several different reports and calls to action (Frazier, Belliston, Brower, & Knudsen, 2011; M. W. Morris, 2012; Smith-Evans & George, 2014; Crenshaw et al., 2015). These reports documented the complex and unique experiences of Black girls.

Implications on Practice

While research has now advanced to discuss the lived experiences of Black girls, having a culturally relevant theory to study Black girls was missing. To fill this void, the Black-Feminist Womanist research paradigm was instituted to guide the practice of work with Black girls. The goal of this theory is to contextualize Black girlhood and provide Black girls with social experiences in which they can negotiate their identity. Black Feminist Thought centers on using experiences and empowers Black girls to interpret their reality and define their experiences (Taylor, 1998). This theory served as one of the guiding theoretical orientations and provided insight on conducting research for Black girls. Future investigation on how the Black-Feminist Womanist theory can be incorporated into future curriculums designed for Black girls will serve to be helpful. In addition, taking a strength-based versus deficit approach will help reframe the perception of Black womanhood.

The results of this study indicate a definite need for Black girls to be provided with safe spaces to help navigate the multifaceted problems associated with Black womanhood. One way this can be achieved in the schools is through group counseling interventions like Sisters of Nia. Findings from this study highlight the benefit of giving Black girls an outlet for processing their experiences around race and identity. The findings also show that the participants' benefited from the collective support offered through the group intervention and they were better equipped to cope with the unique struggles of Black girlhood. An important next step to addressing the needs of Black girls in school is increasing the training of future school psychologists regarding

culturally-focused practices. Through this change, practitioners will be better equipped to work with a diverse student body.

Limitations/Future Directions of Research

Based on this sample of participants, findings may not be generalizable to a larger population of schools. For instant, this study occurred at a predominately Black inner-city school. Future research should be conducted on Black girls from a variety of educational settings: parochial, suburban, vocational. However, based on the positive results revealed through both single-subject and qualitative data, the results suggest that the likelihood of similar results being reproduced in studies with samples of girls from different education backgrounds are highly probable. Given the limited research base for Afrocentric interventions, this study is important because it adds additional research support regarding the effectiveness of culture specific programs like *Sisters of Nia*. In addition, this study has shown the practicality of implementing Afrocentric interventions within the school system. Future research may involve a larger poll of participants to provide generalizable data regarding the effectiveness of *Sisters of Nia* and similar Afrocentric interventions. In addition, quantitative measures may also be utilized to assess program effectiveness.

Two components that were missing from the Sisters of Nia intervention was a focus on mental health and an academic component. In this study, more than half of the participants revealed that they were diagnosed with clinical Depression. Given the lack of mental health care in the Black community, it is important that there are also culturally-focused programs that touch on psychological health. Many of the participants discussed difficulty connecting to their therapist due to cultural barriers. One participant stated that she didn't not believe her counselor truly understood her and the obstacles she faced. Similar to research regarding a lack of mistrust

between mental health and the Black community, the participants described not trusting their therapist. A future intervention study that combines components of programs like Sisters of Nia with a mental health program should be investigated for its effectiveness of psychological outcomes. This line of inquiry will provide insight on whether or not adding a culturally-focused lens to mental health interventions increases the likelihood of positive results.

Similar to the lack of mental health focus within culturally-focused interventions, academics is also an area that is often neglected. Given the growing trend of academic failure for Black female adolescents, finding a way to link culturally-focused programming with a study-skills intervention could prove beneficial. All of the participants in the current study expressed a desire to achieve academically but lacked the resources and support to do so. Therefore, a future study should be conducted to analyze the effects of a cultural-enrichment program that contains elements of both racial socialization and academic skill-building. If no child is truly to be left behind, the next step to providing equitable education opportunities for Black children is bridging the gap between culture and schools.

Summary

The overall findings for the subgroup of six qualitative interviewees indicated a more mature and positive expression of racial identity schemas after the Sisters of Nia intervention. Post-intervention interviews revealed that participants had an increased understanding of the impact of race and racial dynamics on their lives. They were able to see how they could re-negotiate their ideals about what it means to be a Black woman. Prior to the intervention, all of the participants struggled to identify positive characteristics of Black female identity. However, during the post-interview, all of the participants were able to highlight positive qualities of Black women and expressed a more complete understanding of Black female identity. The interviewees

presented with a variety of familial racial socialization experiences. However, despite the nature of their racial socialization experiences, they were still ill-equipped to process the racial dynamics of their school environments. For instance, despite being told messages of having to work harder because of their race, all of the participants struggled to adopt those principles in the school setting. Out of six participants, four participants revealed that they were failing at least one course due to relational issues with their teachers or classmates. Having a space where these students had the ability to reflect and process their personal experience as racial minorities proved beneficial both for their self-concept and self-awareness.

The participants' accounts of racial discrimination in the school setting combined with their lack of critical awareness and coping devices proves to warrant the need for programs like Sisters of Nia to be implemented within a school setting. The results of the qualitative analyses also suggested that exposure to the Sisters of Nia intervention helped participants develop a sense of value with regard to their racial identification. This sense of cultural pride was not evident during the pre-intervention phase.

Additionally, single subject evidence supports the use of this intervention as an approach to also impact behavior. All four of the single subject participants' showed a significant reduction in verbally aggressive behaviors. Based on the results of this study, there is a strong rationale for preventive interventions such as *Sisters of Nia* to be implemented with Black girls.

Final Remarks

“Deal with yourself as an individual worthy of respect, and make everyone else deal with you the same way.”

– Nikki Giovanni

In closing, this study provides insight into the often unheard experience of Black girls. All of the participants were able to re-define Black female identity. They gained a renewed connection with their culture and African heritage. It is hoped that encouraged by this study, more researchers will explore this specific population, capturing their stories and uplifting them to reach new heights.

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Appendix A
Parental Consent



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

PARENTAL PERMISSION FOR A CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Culture Counts: Examining the Effectiveness of a Culturally Focused Empowerment Program for At-Risk Black Girls

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CO-INVESTIGATORS: None

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in School Psychology at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE: Your child is being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to better understand how culture focused intervention programs affect girls' thoughts and behaviors. Specifically, this study aims to understand the effectiveness of the Sisters of Nia intervention on female students' racial identity, relational aggression, self-concept, and school-based outcomes. The study also aims to determine whether the Sisters of Nia intervention can be adapted to be used within a traditional school day.
In order to qualify for participation, your child must be: a female student attending Propel Homestead, between the ages of 12-15, and referred by the school counseling team

based on social and emotional concerns relating to self-esteem and identity development.

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:

The program that will be offered to your child is the Sisters of Nia cultural program. Sisters of Nia presents a unique cultural enrichment program designed to reinforce and bring out the strengths of Black preadolescent and adolescent girls. This group counseling program helps girls plan and achieve their future goals as they make the transition from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school. Group sessions cover topics such as African and Black culture, positive female role models, leadership, relationship skills, analyzing community and media messages. The program promotes positive self-esteem and relationships with others, greater ethnic pride, and higher expectations for future accomplishments. Your child will be asked to 1) give us demographic information about her age, race, grade, and socioeconomic status 2) participants may be asked to participate in a qualitative interview to discuss issues regarding identity and self-concept. Each interview session should take approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted in person by the student investigator. Interviews will be conducted twice, once prior to the intervention and again at the conclusion of the intervention. 3) To understand if the intervention has a positive effect, the school counselor will provide us with your child's academic and attendance records immediately before and after the Sisters of Nia project

The Sisters of Nia intervention will focus on: 1) positive self-concept and racial identity 2) positive relationships 3) academic success. The Sisters of Nia intervention will consist of a group of 7 girls. Each group will meet once a week, for 8 weeks. Each meeting is approximately 35 minutes. All treatment sessions will be conducted at the Propel Homestead School District during regular school hours. Students will not miss any of their core academic subjects. Students in this study who are not selected for the intervention during the first round will receive the intervention during the second round after the first group of girls completes the 8-week program.

These are the only requests that will be made of your child.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

Your child might find some of the questions are about sensitive issues such her racial identity. If she is uncomfortable, she can decline to answer any question.

Participation is no riskier than other activities offered at the school and everyday life activities.

Studies like this help us to better understand how to make treatment programs more helpful and this study in particular seeks to illuminate the unique needs for students of color in regards to school-based interventions. In addition, students will benefit from team-building exercises and learn prosocial skills to utilize in their everyday life. The purpose of this study is to learn how to better help Black girls with issues surrounded racial identity and positive self-concept. Because we plan for all of the information from the girls to be considered as a group, we are not going to talk with you about your specific child's progress.

COMPENSATION:

There is no compensation available to your child for participation in this study; however, there is no cost to your child to participate in this study. During the days of data collection, your child will be provided a small snack. Prior to the start of each group session, your child will retrieve their lunch from the cafeteria and bring it with them to group to have during the group session.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your child's participation in this study and any personal information that your child provides will be kept confidential at all times and to every extent possible.

Your child's name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Your child's response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. Any study materials that could possibly identify your child will be maintained for three years after the completion of the research and then destroyed.

Your child will be given an identification number that is matched to her name that is kept in a separate book called a codebook. A codebook will be used to ensure organization of data and it will be locked in a separate cabinet from the data in the faculty advisor's office, located off of the school grounds. Once the study is finished, the codebook will be destroyed so your daughter's name cannot be traced to her identification number. The study results may be published or presented at professional meetings but at no time will your child's identity be shared or known. The student investigator has received her certificate for completing appropriate training in ethics and research and will abide by the ethical standards of confidentiality to make sure your child's information is kept private. All written materials

and parent permission/child assent forms will be stored separately in a locked file cabinet in the faculty advisor's office, which can only be accessed by the student investigator, faculty advisor, and research assistant. All written materials will be destroyed after three years of completion of the study.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

Your child is under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your permission, and your child is also free to withdraw her assent to participate at any time by contacting the primary investigator. If you or your child chooses to withdraw from the study, any data already collected will not be used for the research. Also, if you decide to change your mind about her participation, you may withdraw your permission at any time.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this research (this will not include information about how your individual child answered) will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of my child. I also understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my permission at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am allowing my child to participate in this research project.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your permission means that we will collect information from your child along with other girls so that we can learn how to better help Black girls deal with issues regarding positive identity development. The information collected will not be part of her school record.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my child's participation in this study. Should I have questions regarding protection of human subject issues, I may call Dr. Linda Goodfellow, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at 412.396.1886.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix B
Student Assent



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282
ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** Culture Counts: Examining the Effectiveness of a Culturally Focused Empowerment Program for At-Risk Black Girls
- PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR:** Candice Aston, MEd
Duquesne University
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education
Canevin Hall
Pittsburgh, PA 15282
(astonc@duq.edu)
- ADVISOR:** Scott Graves, Ph.D.
Duquesne University
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education
Canevin Hall
Pittsburgh, PA 15282
(412) 396-4477
gravess@duq.edu
- CO-INVESTIGATORS:** None
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being performed as one of the requirements to receive a doctoral degree in School Psychology at Duquesne University.
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a program that seeks to better understand how cultural lessons and activities benefit Black girls that attend urban schools. This project will help schools discover ways to increase the available culture based programs offered by schools. In order to participate in the group, you must be: a female student attending Propel Homestead, be between the ages of 12-15 years old, and selected by your school counselors.

**PARTICIPANT
PROCEDURES:**

To participate in this study, you will be asked to answer some questions about yourself regarding your age, race, and neighborhood.

You may also be asked to participate in an interview to talk about issues about Black identity. To answer these questions, it will take around 60 minutes. These interviews will be done twice: once at the beginning of the intervention and once at the end of the intervention.

The program that will be offered to you is the Sisters of Nia cultural program. Sisters of Nia is a program for Black girls that are 12-15 years old. For this program, you will meet with a small group of your peers once a week to talk about what it means to be a Black girl. You will also learn about African history, positive female role models, and leadership.

The Sisters of Nia lessons will focus on learning about forming healthy relationships and making positive decisions. In addition, you will be able to learn about Black female leaders and the importance of college. To participate in this program, you will meet once a week in a group with 7 other girls. You will meet during your lunch period for a total of 8 weeks. Before each group, you will get your lunch from the cafeteria and bring it with you to group to have during the group. You will not miss any of your core academic subjects.

These are the only requests that will be asked of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

Your participation may potentially help us to better understand how cultural programs can be used in schools. This program may also improve school-related outcomes and promote positive peer relations.

You might find some of the questions are about sensitive issues such as your race. If you are uncomfortable, you may refuse to answer any question. Also, if you decide to change your mind about your participation, you may end your participation in the group at any time by notifying the primary investigator or school counseling staff. In the event you withdraw your permission, any information collected will be destroyed and you will not be required to attend any further sessions. No information regarding your time as a participant will be analyzed.

If at any time you give your group leader, Candice Aston, concerns regarding your health or safety (e.g., you reported that you were a danger to hurting yourself or others), she will talk with Dr. Scott Graves, a school psychologist trained in child health and safety. She will also speak to your school counselors, and if needed, the school will also speak with your parents. If you threaten to harm yourself, or someone else, we are required to report that to our supervisor.

COMPENSATION:

There will be no payment for your participation in this project. Participation in the project will be free of charge. During the days of the group sessions, you will be provided a small snack.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your participation in this study and any personal information that you share will be kept private at all times and to every way possible.

Your name will never appear on any of the questionnaires that you completed during the project. Anything you write will be protected and kept safe. Only your response(s) will be used when reviewing the results. Any materials from the project with your information will be kept for no more than five years and then destroyed.

Any paperwork that you complete will be given an identification number that is matched to your name and kept in a secure lockbox in the faculty advisor's office, located away from your school building. The results of this project may be published or presented as a presentation, but at no time will your name be given to anyone. The group leader is trained in keeping your information private and she will not share personal information discussed in group unless it involves a matter related to your safety or safety of others.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no commitment to participate in this project. You are free to remove your participation in the group at any time by contacting the group leader or school counselor. If you choose to remove yourself from the study, any information already collected will not be used for the research.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

At the end of this research project, a summary describing the results of the project will be provided free of charge.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read the above information and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation

is voluntary and that I am free to end my participation at any time, for any reason. After reading what is required of me, I agree that I am willing to participate in this research project.

Should I have questions regarding protection of human subject issues, I may call Dr. Linda Goodfellow, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at 412.396.1886.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Demographic Form

Demographic Form

1. Gender: M or F
2. Age: _____
3. Grade: _____
4. Did you ever repeat a grade ? _____
5. Primary Social Group (Mostly Black, Mixed, Mostly White)
6. Racial Composition of your school (Mostly Black, Mixed, Mostly White)
7. Description of Your Community (Rural, Suburban, Urban, Inner-City)
8. How many racial/ethnic organizations are you involved with?
9. Who do you reside with in your home? Check all that apply
 - Mom
 - Dad
 - Sister: if so, how many _____
 - Brother: if so, how many _____
 - Other _____
10. What is the job of your parent or guardian?
 - Mother _____
 - Father _____
 - Parental Guardian _____
11. How would you classify your ethnic background?
 - Black
 - African American
 - Mixed Race
 - Other _____

Appendix D
Qualitative Interview Questions

Entrance Interview Questions

1. What words would you use to describe Black Women? How do you think people outside your race describe Black Woman?
2. What does being Black mean to you? Is it different from living as a White woman?
3. What have your parents or family members taught you regarding what it means to be Black?
4. Have you ever been treated differently because you were a Black? If so, describe these experiences and share how they made you feel.
5. What obstacles do you face because of your ethnicity? This could be in the community or at school.
6. What is one misconception of Black women that you would like to be changed?
7. What messages have you received from your parents regarding race/ethnicity?
8. Do you think Black women are portrayed positively or negatively in the media?
9. Have you ever felt that your skin was too light or too dark? Have you ever been teased due to your skin complexion? What messages have you heard regarding complexion and beauty?
10. Is there something you would change about your appearance? If so, why?
11. What careers do you associate with Black Women? What careers do you associate with White women?

Exit Interview Questions

1. What words would you use to describe Black Women? How do you think people outside your race describe Black Woman?
2. What does being Black mean to you? Is it different from living as a White woman?
3. What is one misconception of Black women that you would like to be changed?
4. How do you feel about the way Black women are portrayed in the media? Is it problematic?
5. How do you feel about your skin complexion?
6. Is there something you would change about your appearance? If so, why?
7. What careers do you associate with Black Women? What careers do you associate with White women?
8. What was the most important lesson you learned from the Sisters of Nia intervention.
9. Do you think it is important for programs like Sisters of Nia to be offered in the schools?
10. Did you enjoy participating in the intervention? Would you change anything? If so, what?

Appendix E
Data Recording Sheet

Frequency Recording

Date: _____ Observer: **Candice Aston** Experimental condition:
 Student: _____ Session number: _____ Time/Class: _____

Procedures:

- Make a tally mark every time that the behavior occurs (if the behavior does not occur, make sure to enter “0”– zero)
- At the end of your observation period, total the number of tally marks for that day

Behavior Definition: Verbal aggression is defined as verbalizations, such as arguing, teasing, taunting, threatening, or speaking in a hostile tone. Other examples include: name-calling, and inappropriate language.

Time Started	Time Ended	Tally for each verbally aggressive behavior	Description of behavior	Total amount of verbally aggressive behaviors	Notes:

Appendix F
Fidelity Checklist

Sisters of Nia Intervention

Date: _____ Session: _____ Interventionist: _____

Group Members Present (Initials): _____

Directions: Please complete this form each session. Record a “Y” if the component was implemented; if the component was not implemented, record an “N”.

Intervention components

1. Completed opening ritual (gathered everyone for the durara umoja). Y or N
2. Perform the tambiko. Y or N
3. Introduce weekly Nguzo Principle and Proverb. Y or N
4. Complete Jamaa work (Main activity). Y or N
5. Processing of the activity (Ask students to reflect on activity). Y or N
6. Completion of weekly journal assignment. Y or N
7. Perform closing ritual (use of call and response method). Y or N
8. Re-form the durara umoja and have students read Sisters of Nia Creed aloud. Y or N

Appendix G
Teacher Interview Questions

Teacher Interview Questions

1. What are your thoughts regarding the benefits of programs like Sisters of Nia in the school.
2. Did you notice any behavioral changes with the students that participating in the Sisters of Nia intervention?
3. Were there any academic changes for the students that participated in the intervention?
4. Did you notice any changes regarding self-growth or self-esteem development after the intervention.