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For Black Girls, By Black Girls: Examining the Experiences of Black Women in Historically White Learning Spaces and Reimagining Spaces With Our Needs in Mind

Florence Takeshia Brown

FOR BLACK GIRLS, BY BLACK GIRLS: EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN IN HISTORICALLY WHITE LEARNING SPACES AND REIMAGINING SPACES WITH OUR NEEDS IN MIND

by

F. TAKESHIA BROWN

Under the Direction of Sabrina Ross

ABSTRACT

This study examined the experiences of Black women in historically white learning spaces and our needs in reimaged learning spaces developed for us. The conceptual framework for this study was Black Feminist Thought, critical geography, and Afrofuturism. Using sister circle methodology, participants discussed the simultaneous racialized and gendered experiences that Black women navigate in learning spaces and how technology and Afrofuturism could be beneficial in creating spaces for Black women. Despite our achievements in academic spaces, Black women experience microaggressive environments that have traumatic impacts on our psychological health and our overall experiences in learning environments. Our successes are acts of resistance that are often overlooked and ignored. Three findings were identified in this study: 1. Black women's experiences in learning spaces continue to be defined by controlling images. 2. Community support is critical in helping Black women navigate the challenges of predominantly white learning spaces. 3. Technology through virtual sister circles are spaces for Black women with our needs in mind and not limited by geography. Learning spaces designed for Black women afford the space to tell our own stories from racialized and gendered experiences. Essentially, Black women need support from allies to aid in making learning spaces more inclusive and safer of our learning needs.

INDEX WORDS: Black women, Black feminist thought, critical geography, Afrofuturism, curriculum studies, sister circles, intersectionality, technology

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by

F. TAKESHIA BROWN

B.A., College of Charleston, 2010

M.Ed., The Citadel Graduate College, 2013

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F. TAKESHIA BROWN

Major Professor:	Sabrina Ross
Committee:	Ming Fang He
	Delores Liston
	Fayth Parks

DEDICATION

To my matriarchs – Willetta, Juliann, Florence, Daisy, Rebecca, and Maude, I write humbly in your honor, acknowledging my roots as a strong Black girl who came from strong Black women who exist in a world that was not built for us, but you bent for us. Thank you for your wisdom, grace, and wisdom. I am because of you all.

To my nieces and God sister – Saniya, Jada, Saniya, and Javeah – may the world be a kinder place for you all as the future Black women. Be bold, be smart, and take up space. Be a Black girl, Black girls.

To my angel niece baby, Jaleesa – you will always illuminate our hearts.

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No one arrives at the end of the journey alone. When I showed up in this doctoral program, I brought a few things with me – my family, my faith, and my friends. Along the way, I collected more things that carried across the finish line to complete this journey.

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To my family – as much as this degree is mine, it is yours. Thank you for always believing in me, especially when I had no belief in myself. Thank you for enduring the conversations about classes and research and understanding when I could not always be there. Your love and support have always been the anchor in my life. Thank you, Mommy, Daddy, Henry, Shajunia, Jalen, Damon, and all my extended family members.

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To my chair, Dr. Sabrina Ross - thank you does not feel adequate to express my appreciation to you for guiding me through this journey. As a first-generation doctoral student, I had no idea what to expect. You were my guiding light and guard rails for this journey. Your scholarship has inspired many Black women. I hope to make you proud. Thank you for all the things you do for the Curriculum Studies program, the College of Education, and Georgia Southern. I will always celebrate and appreciate you.

To my committee, thank you for serving on the team to get to the finish line. Each of you are amazing scholars who are dedicated to student success. You all challenged me to be a better scholar, reader, and writer, and I appreciate the push.

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INTRODUCTION

"Since the second grade when I began being bused into White schools, I have been fighting against people who did not think a Black girl like me belonged, people who tried to control what I did, how I spoke, how I looked, the work I produced."

- Nikole Hannah-Jones, July 6, 2021

The opening quote is from Nikole Hannah-Jones, a Black woman journalist, scholar, and founding curator of Project 1619, which chronicles the experiences of the descendants of enslaved Africans in America and highlights the prevalence of institutional racism since before the founding of the United States. Hannah-Jones was initially denied tenure at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, a historically white (HW) institution. After much publicity and protests, Hannah-Jones was finally granted tenure and ultimately turned the institution down to accept a similar position at Howard University, which is a prestigious historically Black university (Johnson, 2021). In her response, Hannah-Jones alluded to the unfair, inequitable expectations that have been placed on Black women in academia and society at large. Hannah-Jones was the first Black woman to hold the position of endowed chair at UNC-Chapel Hill and the first scholar to be denied tenure. This opening quote is poignant as it speaks to the problem that was explored in this study as Hannah-Jones' words describe the oppressive environments that exist for Black women as students in P-12 and higher education as well as scholars and employees.

Black women are subjected to learning in spaces that were not created with us in mind, wherein we receive messages about who we are and our places in society. These spaces are often created amid white supremacy and patriarchy, which ignores and erases the intersectionality of Black women's experiences. Ultimately, this also impacts how Black women see ourselves, our

perceived positionality, and public policies and practices that shape our experiences (Ricks, 2014). Learning spaces and places are important to explore as Black women receive messages about who we are and how to endure challenges in those spaces as well. Learning spaces and places are both geographical and symbolic locations wherein learning and meaning-making occur. While part of defining place is geographical and related to maps and landscapes, it is also important to explore the history, sociopolitical, and power dynamics that impact understandings of place. What would the educational experience be like for Black women if we had the agency to create spaces for ourselves with our needs at the center? In this work, I sought knowledge articulating Black women's educational experiences as a means of understanding Black women's visions for re-imaged learning spaces with our needs at the center.

At the intersections of our identities, Black women simultaneously experience racism and sexism in ways that create lived experiences that are best expressed and understood by other Black women. In her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston (1937) described Black women as "the mules of world" and a people who do most of the work without receiving much support of credit for our labor (p. 14). Hurston articulated the simultaneous racialized and gendered forms of oppression experienced by Black women daily as well as the lessons that Black women adopt to live, learn, love, and thrive in these environments. As the quote mentions, Black women are known for working to make things happen for everyone around them with little to no credit for our work and contributions. This work is often achieved amid oppressive environments that were not created with our needs and desires in mind. As mules and workhorses, it is as if Black women are expected to work without compliment or praise while others profit from our labor. Patton and Haynes (2018) stated:

Black women's work extends beyond paid labor. It is also characterized by unpaid labor in their homes (and oftentimes the homes of others), not to mention the labor required toward the continued uplift of Black people. Black women's work is frequently a thankless form of labor, where their work is primarily about doing without acknowledgment or reward. (p. 8)

The exploitation of Black women's labor is vital to understanding our experiences in learning spaces as it highlights the hidden, often ignored work that Black women are expected to perform without recognition, which creates unequitable environments. Despite subpar attempts at being safe, inclusive, and the great equalizer for everyone, education was not and continues to not be operated with the needs of Black women and girls in mind. As such, it is necessary for Black women to create spaces of reimagined opportunities for ourselves.

Statement of Problem

When they confront race and gender stereotypes, Black women are standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some Black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion.

(Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 29)

According to the American Association of University Women (2020), while Black women are more likely to attend and graduate college and earn advance degrees than Black men, white women attend and complete college at higher rates than Black women. To support this, the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (n.d.) disclosed:

JBHE has consistently documented the fact that Black women hold a large lead over Black men in almost every facet of higher education. Black women currently earn about two thirds of all African-American bachelor's degree awards, 70 percent of all master's

degrees, and more than 60 percent of all doctorates. Black women also hold a majority of all African-American enrollments in law, medical, and dental schools. (para. 1)

While Black women's achievements in education should be celebrated, the statistics should not be used to ignore the challenges that Black women often experience in these environments. Ricks (2014) stated, "Although Black girls have adopted coping and defense mechanisms to deal with gendered racism, these methods are often misinterpreted by teachers and school personnel as personality and/or cultural characteristics instead of responses to living with daily microaggressions…" (p. 11). As such, Black women's successes in education are often because of the acts of resistance that were taught from other Black women (Roseboro & Ross, 2009).

Despite Black women statistically outperforming Black men, White students still outperform all Black students. Yet, comparing Black women and Black men's educational progress can have the demographics at odds or in situations wherein Black women may feel guilty for our collective successes, and ultimately choosing our gender identity over our racial identity. Patton and Haynes (2018) stated, "Black women are depicted as outpacing Black men by attaining good and respectable jobs to legitimize the American dream and illustrate that equity is possible" (p. 7). Essentially, these statistics contributes to a narrative that Black women do not struggle in education, particularly in higher education. This narrative is false. The statistics do not capture the essence of Black women's experiences and the challenges that are experienced in these places and spaces that were not created with our needs in mind.

The lack of resources and support for Black women's successes have contributed to the harmful environments that have been created; as such, Black women consistently and stereotypically create something out of nothing to exist in these spaces. A plethora of stereotypes have been created about Black women and often used to police our behavior. This notion of

controlling Black women's behavior is the manifestation of White supremacy and patriarchy (Collins, 2009). These controlling stereotypes force us to operate within boxes that shape our perceived identities and influence how people treat us. It is important to note that despite the commonality in our experiences, all Black women are not the same and should not be regarded as such. How might these experiences be different if Black women were given the agency to redefine the spaces we occupy and reject the controlling images that seek to define us? This study sought to explore spaces of possibility for Black women to reimagine learning spaces for ourselves despite historical and political oppression.

Black women have unique experiences that often cannot be explained by race and gender separately. The intersections of those identities along with a myriad of other expectations like family and labor connected to Black and womanhood is often unnoticed and unappreciated. Unfortunately, education is no different from other places in society though many view schools and learning to be the one size fits all solution for everyone. Much like the foundation of the United States, schools and most other formal learning spaces were not created with the existence and the needs of Black women in mind. As such, Black women feel unseen, unsupported, and are expected to fit narratives that are not reflections of who we are. How does this impact how Black women see ourselves and interact and engage with others as a result of being in these environments? Furthermore, how can we ensure that the perspectives and needs of Black women are considered in education? These questions guided this inquiry into the experiences of Black women within educational spaces. As such, the creation and evolution of spaces and places for Black women is laden with the intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other identity markers that Black women embody. This study employed a conceptual framework based on Black feminist

thought, critical geography, and Afrofuturism to understand Black women's intersectionality and learning spaces for us.

Conceptual Framework

"An oppressed group's experiences may put its members in a position to see things differently, but their lack of control over the ideological apparatuses of society makes expressing a self-defined standpoint more difficult." - Patricia Hill Collins

Black Feminist Thought, Controlling Images of Black Women, and Intersectionality

Black Feminist Thought is essential to this study as it centers the experiences of Black women. Black Feminist Thought is a comprehensive theory "…that it is not only concerned with oppression, but equally concerned with resistance, activism and politics of empowerment" (Alinia, 2015, p. 2334). Black Feminist Thought scholars examine Black women's experiences through power relationships shaped by white supremacy and patriarchy and examine in the ways Black women seek to fight against oppressive structures. Black women's experiences need to be told through our lenses and voices. Often our stories are silenced, distorted, or exploited for material gain due to white supremacy.

Controlling Images

Black Feminist Thought scholar Collins (2009) wrote about stereotypes that are used to control the images and actions of Black women. These stereotypes reflect the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and sexuality, and how these identifiers connect to make meaning for Black women and how they may be perceived. These controlling images are limiting and oppressive to Black women as they contribute to narratives that are misrepresentations of who we are. As such, a centrifuge of Black Feminist Thought scholarship is to reject, refute, and resist these stereotypes that have been created for us.

In her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Collins (2000) discussed five controlling images that are most commonly used to describe Black women. These controlling images are mammy, matriarch, the welfare queen, the Black lady, and Jezebel. Controlling images are reflections of our perceived places in society as created and dictated by white, patriarchal standards and expectations of femininity that places white women as the standard of womanhood. Collins (2000) stated:

> The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination. Moreover, since Black and White women were both important to slavery's continuation, controlling images of Black womanhood also functioned to mask social relations that affected all women. (p. 72)

In the United States specifically, these controlling images are used to justify the poor treatment of Black women as well as to unduly place blame on Black women for the downfall of the Black community at large (Collins, 2000). To support this, Collins (2000) argued,

> As part of a generalized ideology of domination, stereotypical images of Black womanhood take on special meaning. Because the authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power, elite groups, in exercising power, manipulate ideas about Black womanhood. (p. 69)

The agency to create false stereotypes without accepting responsibility for the actions that led to conditions that impact Black women's experiences is troubling. There is an othering, a sense of alienation, that takes place when Black women's identities are defined by individuals who do not understand our lived experiences and contribute to these controlling images. This alienation also contributes to Black women's miseducation, misunderstanding, and objectification (Collins,

2000). Essentially, how can one help us, educate us, or even be in community with us if we do not have the agency to define ourselves for ourselves?

Furthermore, these stereotypes along with the learning spaces we inhabit were not created by Black women; as such, Black Feminist Thought scholarship is necessary as it helps challenge these false narratives that have been created about Black women. Black Feminist thought creates spaces for us to reclaim and tell our own stories. This study discusses these controlling images and articulates the ways in which they are harmful to Black women's self-efficacy and experiences in learning spaces as these controlling images impact our interactions, how we see ourselves, and how others may perceive us as well.

Intersectionality

Black Feminist Thought is integral to situating, explaining, and understanding the intersectional experiences of Black women through race and gender, instead of race or gender. This theory bridges the connection between critical race theory and feminism with the experiences of Black women at the center of the conversation rather than the margins or as after thoughts of Black men and White women. One could argue intersectionality is the core of Black Feminist Thought as it centers the experiences and voices of Black women in ways that other theories that are solely focused on either race or gender ignore. Intersectionality puts forth the notion that "certain ideas and/or practices surface repeatedly across multiple systems of oppression" (Collins, 2009, pp. 47–48). These ideas and practices are perpetuated in everyday life such as family, work, and education.

In a 2020 interview with Time Magazine, Kimberlé Crenshaw, who is credited for coining the term *intersectionality*, described it as "a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other" (Steinmetz, 2020, p. 82).

Crenshaw's definition corroborates this notion of race, gender, class, and other identities being viewed as a collective and not separate as a means of examining the experiences. Intersectionality does not negate the experiences of race or gender: instead, it highlights the compounded inequities experienced by people who experience oppression from multiple lenses simultaneously. To support this, Crenshaw (1990) states:

> Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. (p. 1242)

Crenshaw reinforced the need to examine the experiences of Black women connected to our race and gender collectively and not separately to more accurately understand our experiences. Crenshaw argued that the experiences of Black women differ from white women. Without looking at the issue from a compounded lens, the needs of Black women would not fully be addressed by merely applying the same remedies for white women as the groups (Crenshaw, 1991). Politically, it must be acknowledged that Black women experience racism differently than Black men and sexism differently from white women (Crenshaw, 1991). By devaluing one for the other, Black women's experience becomes ignored, silenced, or erased.

Though CRT scholars provide a cogent argument to explain racism and white supremacy as the backdrop of society and acknowledge the impacts of other identities such as gender and classism, CRT does not center the experiences of Black women and the intersectionality of our

experiences. While there is certainly an issue of race, the experiences of Black women are not singularly racialized or gendered; they are simultaneously racialized and gendered. Collins (2009) stated, "For Du Bois, Black women carried a special burden-not only were they Black, poor, and second-class citizens, but they were female as well. Du Bois identified Black women's suffering as a 'social fact'…" (p. 42). As such, Black women's experiences necessitate frameworks that articulate our experiences from intersectional perspectives as Black women are expected to choose between our race and gender while experiencing simultaneous versions of oppression at the hands of white feminism and Black men.

Ultimately, Black Feminist Thought is a standpoint theory that fuels the ability of Black women to tell our stories from our lived experiences and to challenge the narratives set forth for us. Black Feminist Thought helps articulate the essence of Black women's experiences, particularly in learning spaces that are oppressive and resistant to Black women's existence. The discussion of controlling images and intersectionality is integral to this study as a means of furthering the exploration of how meaning is shaped by our experiences in these spaces that are often impacted by how others may or may not see us.

The Critical Geography of Black Women's Learning Spaces and Places

Critical geographers seek to explore and understand the power dynamics of place and space to better understand the lived experiences of those in a place as well as to expose the inequities that are present. Connected to education, Helfenbein (2021) suggests that critical geography in education focuses "on the simultaneous attention to space, place, power, and identity…" and emphasizes that educational researchers should "(take) 'the spatial' aspects of these forces seriously in the study of the lived experiences of schools'" (p. 319). Essentially, a part of

understanding one's experience is also understanding the experiences of the environments one inhabits.

As they exist in these spaces, identity, access to resources, and the distribution of power impact how individuals experience place and space. Critical geographers are concerned with how individuals connect with those spaces and places, and particularly how spatial relations are connected to power and how they influence meaning-making. For people from historically oppressed backgrounds, particularly Black women, our experiences of space are often shaped by those in power. McKittrick (2006) stated, "Interplay between domination and Black women's geographies is underscored by the social production of space" (p. 13). Despite our labor and contributions, Black women are often invisible within dominant spaces and our contributions to support and maintain the environments frequently goes unnoticed.

Spaces, even those considered to be welcoming were not created with the needs of Black women in mind. The psychological impacts of being in these spaces can be troubling for Black women to negotiate a response or even their presence in those spaces. Jones (2022) stated:

As a Black woman in America, I experience racism, sexism, and gendered-racism on a regular basis. It is commonplace for me to hear or see things that attempt to dehumanize me as a Black person, objectify me as a woman, or disregard me as a Black woman. (p. 1)

The experience of being constantly subjected to racial and gendered microaggressions along with overt acts of racism and sexism can lead Black women to question our fit, purpose, and belonging in spaces or can cause some to speak up despite the response or violence that may result in defending oneself, as talking back is not also safe.

As a scholarly project, critical geography, and particularly the work of Black women critical geographers, offers two important contributions to the proposed study of understanding

and re-imagining Black women's educational spaces. First, critical geography highlights the importance of spatial thinking and its use for understanding social challenges and potential solutions in different ways. Second, the work of Black women critical geographers highlights the significance of understanding Black women's experiences as geographic (McKittrick, 2006).

Related to this thought, McKittrick (2006) stated, "[traditional geography] for the most part, incorrectly deems Black populations and their attendant geographies as "ungeographic" and/or philosophically undeveloped" (p. 14). As this quote demonstrates, the existence and contributions of Blackness (and of Black women) have been historically ignored and contemporarily erased.

Essentially through violence, forced removal, and enslavement, the Black diaspora has contributed physically to space-making through our labor as well as through acts of resistance despite colonialism and enslavement (McKittrick, 2011). To be disconnected geographically means to be denied connection, history, heritage, and genealogy. The power of place and space is essential to understanding the experiences of Black women.

Without context of the space, it is challenging to uncover the patterns, barriers, and inequities that impact society. For Black women to dismantle and recreate new narratives of geographical space, new alternatives to the traditional modes of geography must be created through "communicative acts— such as poetry, fiction, film, theory— can uncover the particularities of Black cultures" (McKittrick, 2006, p. 177). As such, Black women must use our own resources and self-determination to redefine and recreate spaces for ourselves to exist in spaces that are unfettered from white supremacy and patriarchy.

Black to the Future: Re-Imagined Learning Spaces with Afrofuturism

Place and space are essential to understanding and situating the experiences of Black women. These physical, psychological, and symbolic ways of existence speak in ways that contribute to the fiber of Black women's souls. While all Black women are not the same, there are common themes of family, resistance, and creativity that are prevalent throughout each woman's story as reflected in our connection to place. The arts and literature are repositories of Black women's experiences that capture and recall our experiences and retell our stories. Both historical and futuristic, the arts and literature are forms of resistance that challenge the essence of the experiences that are often missed or erased in mainstream culture. With additional theoretical lenses such as Afrofuturism, Black women use the arts, literature, technology, and our knowledge of past and present experiences to reimage a future that allows us to have spaces for ourselves unfettered from oppressive forces.

According to Womack (2013):

> Afrofuturism is a free space for [Black] women, a door ajar, arms wide open, a literal and figurative space for Black women to be themselves. They can dig behind the societal reminders of Blackness and womanhood to express a deeper identity and then use this discovery to define Blackness, womanhood, or any other identifier in whatever form their imagination allows. (pp. 100–101)

Afrofuturism is the space of possibility for Black women where we can unhinge ourselves from the harmful, oppressive environments created by racism and sexism and use arts and technology to create our spaces reflective of our voices and experiences. These are spaces wherein Black women through self-definition create our own narratives without concern for white feminism and patriarchy. Womack (2013) stated:

In Afrofuturism, Black women's imagination, image, and voice are not framed by the pop expectations and sensibilities of the day. The Black woman is not held to Middle America's norms, trying to prove that she's not government dependent or aspiring to the beauty ideals in the latest blogs. Nor is there some uniform expectation of Blackness that she is called to maintain. Women develop theories, characters, art, and beauty free of the pressures of meeting male approval, societal standards, color-based taxonomies, or run-of-the-mill female expectations. The results are works that some critics call uncategorizable. (p. 101)

Having origins in scientific fantasy, Afrofuturism is a challenge, for many as it challenges the expectations set forth for Black women and encourages us to use the past and present to create a future for ourselves based on the promises of our ancestors.

Using Afrofuturism, Black women can connect with the past to envision futuristic learning spaces that center our experiences through various forms of art and technology. Boyd (2020) stated that Afrofuturism, "…can offer Black students opportunities to construct new ways of existing and invent new ways to visually present themselves…" (p. 18). In education, more specifically Curriculum Studies, Afrofuturism is a newer concept that challenges the gendered, racialized, and geographical learning experiences for Black women that also contributes to the space of possibility wherein Black women can have the agency to reimagine learning spaces for ourselves.

Collectively, Black Feminist Thought, critical geography, and Afrofuturism create a conceptual framework that articulates the complex connection Black women have in learning spaces and places as reflected by dominant narratives that were created for us. Yet, Afrofuturism provides a challenge to those narratives and gives the opportunity for Black women to create for ourselves. Moreover, these theories support this study's goal of understanding Black women's experiences in learning spaces and providing spaces to explore Black women's ideas for

reimagined learning spaces of possibility that center our needs. Figure 1 provides a graphic summary of the conceptual framework that will be used in this study to understand and reimagine Black women's educational spaces.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Model
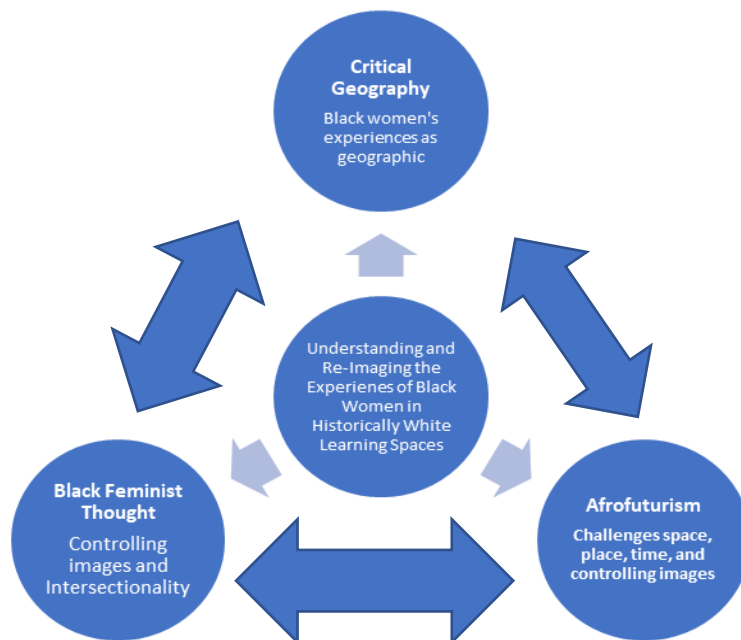
Methodology: Sister Circles

Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group. This requirement often changes the meaning of our ideas and works to elevate the ideas of dominant groups. -Patricia Hill Collins

The process of collecting data is essential in understanding and explaining phenomena. As a researcher and writer, it is pertinent to choose a methodology to bolster the conceptual framework and the lens of the study to provide better insight into human experience. My work was centered

on understanding the experiences of Black women in predominantly white spaces and exploring our ideas for learning spaces with Black women's needs in mind; as such, the conceptual framework through which I examined these experiences are Black Feminist Thought, critical geography, and Afrofuturism. Through my work, the goal is to center the experiences and voices of Black women in challenging and dismantling the dominant narratives that have been created and presented about and for Black women because of white supremacy and patriarchy.

Black women often simultaneously experience racism and sexism in ways that are not easily explainable and able to be ascertained by those who are not Black women. As a result, these experiences can be trivialized or ignored as unimportant, which can silence, oppress, and marginalize the experiences of Black women. Additionally, Black women are often undercompensated and underappreciated for our labor because we are expected to perform without applause. The everyday impact of race and gender are ingrained in the fabric of the United States and into the threads of institutions, practices, and policies. As such, is necessary to create spaces to share the experiences from historically oppressed groups such as Black women to better understand our experiences and challenges the stories that have been told without the contributions of Black women.

Sister circle was the chosen methodology for this study because of its alignment with Black Feminist Thought as a methodology that centers the voices of Black women and approaches this work from an intersectional lens. Johnson (2015) described the sister circle methodology as "a qualitative research methodology and support group for examining the lived experiences of Black women" (p. 43). Adding to this definition, Neal-Barnett et al. (2011) stated, "Sister circles are support groups that build upon existing friendships, fictive kin networks, and the sense of community found among African Americans females" (p. 268). The community

aspect is essential to Black women's identity development, and survival, and is often a space for empowerment and learning. Supporting this thought, Collins (2009) argued, "Women feel that way because knowledge comes from experience, the best way of understanding another person's ideas was to develop empathy and share the experiences that led the person to form those ideas" (p. 259). Sister circles uses empathy and the shared experiences of race and gender a safe place for Black women to participate in research. The spelling – sister or sista – is used interchangeably at the discretion of the writer, but ultimately references the use of language by Black women who often refer to other Black women as her sisters or sistas.

Three central themes guide sister circles as methodologies, which are communication dynamics, the centrality of empowerment, and the researcher as a participant (Johnson, 2015). These three themes center Black women's voices by emphasizing our unique communication patterns that are both verbal and non-verbal, the need to uplift and encourage one another, and having the researcher engage as a participant. Using this methodology, is it necessary for the researcher to be a Black woman to accurately decipher and explain the interactions from a racialized and gendered experience. As a methodology, sister circles enable researchers to reclaim space and chip away at the power structures that often act as gatekeepers to Black women in research. This power dynamic has impacted who controls our narratives and shares our stories. Essentially, because of the lack of access to power, Black women's voices and perspectives are left out. Sister circles tell the stories that disrupt historical fallacies and challenge controlling images that were created to oppress Black women.

Consider this – If historically white spaces were created without Black women in mind, how then can the narratives and historical accounts emanating from these spaces speak to the

experiences of Black women? According to Ards (2016), "Using lived experience as a source for research is a central methodology in Black feminist thought" (p. 6).

Through this work, I used sister circles as a means of negotiating and understanding the experiences of Black women in predominantly white spaces, specifically the messages they received about ourselves and how that shapes the ways in which we see ourselves in these spaces and within our overall place in society. Through sister circles, I hoped to create space, a community wherein Black women could express our pain, celebrate our triumphs, and articulate areas where additional support and tools were needed for the overall holistic support of Black women. The following research questions were used:

1. How do Black women define our identities?

2. How do Black women describe our current learning spaces?

3. What type of learning spaces do Black women identify as beneficial for our needs? These research questions aided me in achieving the goals of the study.

Significance of the Study

"Nevertheless, while occupying a critical and sometimes marginal space, Curriculum

Studies, like other fields, struggles to identify an intellectual tradition marked by Black

female subjectivity. Our field's epistemic amnesia is an ongoing reminder of the strength

*of 'imperialist White supremacist capitalist patriarchy." -*bell hooks

According to Edwards et al. (2016), "…the most critical spaces fail to recognize the contributions, and even the very existence, of Black women" (p. 707). With the education of Black women, scientific reasoning solely based upon objective, positivist, and quantifiable data points did not include our needs. During the time of these conversations, Black women were property, and certainly not considered to be humans or citizens. The early framers of education were only

concerned about poor people, women, and people of color when it benefitted profit margins and social capital; thus, education and schooling became forms of oppression (Watkins, 2001). The purpose of this study was to explore the ideas that Black women have for learning spaces created with our needs in mind. Ultimately, this study will add to the field of Curriculum Studies by exploring curriculum as a racialized and gendered text and using the critical geography of space and place that reflects Black women's intersectionality. It is necessary to continue to add the voices and perspectives of Black women to Curriculum Studies as a means of creating spaces for ourselves and by ourselves.

Curriculum as a Racialized and Gendered Text

Part of the failure of institutions of higher learning at addressing issues that impact Black women is the failure to examine our experiences and our solutions from the lens of intersectionality as our experiences are neither singularly racialized nor gendered (Patton & Haynes, 2018). Similarly, Curriculum Studies have historically examined the experiences of Black women through a single lens as well. Though Pinar et al. (1995) primarily discussed race through the scholarship of Black men, the notions of race still impact Black women. Pinar et al. stated, "…race represents a quintessential instance of the social construction of reality, the primacy of discursive formations over biological 'facts'" (p. 357).

Black Feminist theorists support the notion of the everyday, commonality of racism and gender. Ross (2015) stated, "Work for social justice engaged by individuals embracing womanist and/or Black feminist epistemologies strengthens the field of Curriculum Studies through the introduction of culturally derived forms of knowledge that influence how the curriculum is understood and enacted" (p. 359). As such, this work will explore curriculum through the intersectional, lived experiences of Black women and our ideas about reimagined learning spaces

for ourselves by using technology and other mediums that foster centering our needs. The purpose of education for Black women has always been liberatory. Spaces that recognize and celebrate our cultural capital and contributions are vital to Black women's holistic success (Roseboro & Ross, 2009). To do so in ways that are reflective of the needs of Black women, these spaces must be redefined with our needs at the inception and not as afterthoughts.

Curriculum as Geographical Text

It is innate for humans to make meaning of places and spaces – both physical geographical spaces and emotional, symbolic spaces. As such, Black women's experiences in place-making are connected to the aesthetics as well as the historical and sociopolitical influences of space and places. Stovall (2019) said critical geography is "attuned to the inseparability from places and spaces of political-historical-economic-sociocultural constructions of classed, abled, gendered, sexed, sexualized, racialized, and/or cultured hierarchies" (p. 51). Essentially, spatial experiences are not just a matter of happenstance. They live in patterns that have historical connections to place.

Without the context of space, it is challenging to uncover the patterns, barriers, and inequities that impact society. Consider the pictures and paintings on the walls in the hallways of schools, in your classrooms, and in offices. Additionally, consider the book titles, covers, and storylines that are often shared or considered a part of the canon. Do those pictures and voices reflect the diversity in the room, more specifically the faces and stories of Black women? Do they trigger images that can cause harm or reproduce painful moments and memories for Black women? These aesthetic qualities may impact how Black women see ourselves and experience our various learning spaces.

For Black women, these issues are manifested and reflected in our everyday lived experiences. To dismantle and recreate new narratives of geographical space, new alternatives to the traditional modes of geography must be created through "communicative acts— such as poetry, fiction, film, theory— can uncover the particularities of Black cultures" (McKittrick, 2006, p. 177). Afrofuturism is instrumental in helping Black women reimagine and recreate learning spaces with our needs at the center of the discourse. Through Afrofuturism, Black women can use various conduits such as arts, literature, and technology to debunk the fallacy that Black culture in the United States began with enslavement while also giving individuals hope and assurance that Blackness is more than a fad. As such, Afrofuturism can create places of possibility for Black women to reimagine our learning spaces and challenge the power structures that have made the straight crooked, the homeplace foreign, and the safe space dangerous (Helfenbein, 2021).

Through this study, I explored historical and political learning spaces as a means of exploring new ideas for learning for Black women, thereby adding to Curriculum Studies of place and space. From these spaces, messages are received about who we are and our perceived places in the world, our behaviors and mannerisms, and the treatment we should receive. Geography in a spatial sense is curricula, hidden curricula, that shape how we navigate the world. In the traditional sense, geography and defining space have devalued and dismissed the experiences of Black women. Collectively, the purpose of this study as guided by the theoretical frameworks is vital for Black women's agency to reimagine our learning spaces.

Organization of the Dissertation

"Black women are serious thinkers, and it is their scholarly duty to take them [us]

*seriously." -*Anna Julia Cooper

Chapter 1 introduced this study about Black women, our learning spaces, and the importance of developing reimagined learning spaces with our needs in mind. This chapter also explored the problem of the study and articulated the significance of this work. Chapter 2 reviewed relevant literature to further support and justify the need for this work. Chapter 3 explored the sister circle methodology used in this study and discussed the process through which the data were collected and analyzed using this methodology. Chapter 4 presented the data collected for this study and identified themes that emerged from the process. Chapter 5 discussed the study's findings, implications, and possibilities for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

"It's not that they haven't always been here, since there was a here. It is that the letters

of their names have been scrambled when they were not totally erased, and their fingerprints

upon the handles of history have been called the random brushings of birds." –

Audre Lorde, preface to Wild Women in the Whirlwind

Ultimately, this study sought to explore and understand Black women's experiences in learning spaces that were not created with our needs in mind and to explore our ideas for reimagined spaces with our needs at the center. Literature relevant to Black Feminist Thought, intersectionality, controlling images, Afrofuturism, and critical geography will be discussed in this chapter with a focus on the contributions of each to reimagined learning spaces for Black women.

I Know Who I Am. Give Me Space to Tell You: Black Feminist Thought

It is important to note that Black Feminist Thought is concerned with exploring or understanding Black women's experiences and creating spaces for us to articulate our experiences from our own lenses and spaces. Our experiences are simultaneously racialized and gendered and are often a source of conflict within our own identity development and perceptions Concepts such as beauty, and specifically Black women's hair can be confusing to explain and understand to some individuals who may interpret Black women's images as a reflection of whiteness or a rejection or Blackness. Being too independent and too Black were simultaneously rejections of Blackness and femininity, which often meant no places for Black women to safely exist.

Essentially, Black women are often accused of being a traitor to our race or gender while others fail to realize that our experiences make it challenging to set parts of who we are aside for

the sake of others (Collins, 2000). Black men are often just as complicit in harmful, objectifying treatment of Black women as much as other non-Black individuals (Wallace, 1982).

In the United States specifically, Black women have been ignored and unprotected legally and socially in ways that neither defended our humanity nor protected our femininity (Perkins, 1993). The tenets of feminism did not intrinsically include the experiences of Black women, but rather held Black women to standards of whiteness that used white women as the measuring stick for femininity (Collins, 2009). Additionally, Black women are rendered invisible or secondary to the needs and demands of Black men. Patton and Ward (2016) emphasized this point by writing, "…despite the fact that the rates of police brutality, state surveillance, and predatory enforcement of regulatory laws are deployed disproportionately against Black females as well as Black males" (p. 194).

Despite being othered by whiteness and patriarchy, Black women understand our right to exist, live, and thrive in these spaces in the face of simultaneous racialized and gendered oppression experienced in learning spaces and places (McKay, 1997). The oppressive environments that Black women experience contribute to the controlling imagines and narratives that have been used to influence Black women's identities and lives, ultimately created environments where we are "marginalized, misnamed, maligned, and made invisible in the academy" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 2).

Despite the challenges, Black women in the academy and in everyday life are creating spaces of resistance and pushing back against whiteness and patriarchy (Edwards et al., 2016). This study will add the spaces and voices of Black women who are resisting and pushing back as an integral experience of Black women's identity.

Controlling Images and Learning Spaces

Dominant narratives and controlling images of Black women have been created and maintained by white supremacy and patriarchy and serve as reminders to Black women of our subservient places in society. They impact relationships that are formed with others and are used to justify oppressive treatment of Black women (Collins, 2009). Collins (2009) identified five controlling images used in the subjugation of Black women including the mammy, the matriarch, the Black lady, the Jezebel, and the welfare queen.

The mammy image depicts a well-behaved Black woman who serves her family and whites with little concern of white Supremacy and patriarchy. In her role as a nurturer, caregiver, and educator, mammy-like figures are used to teach Black children and their families about our place in society, which is subservient and obedient to whiteness. To support this, Collins (2009) stated, "Employing Black women in mammified occupation supports the racial superiority of white employers, encouraging middle-class white women in particular to identify more closely with the racial and class privilege afforded their fathers, husbands, and sons" (p. 80).

As such, the mammy stereotype creates and reproduces the belief that Black women are happy in our roles of taking care of everyone and are fully loyalty to white people. Mammy-like Black women are rewarded by whites for good behavior despite the detrimental impacts to our personal identity development, self-efficacy, economic development, sexual expression, and other Blacks. While more Black women are currently achieving roles outside of home in the workforce, the stereotype of mammy is present in the workplace as Black women are often expected to take on more tasks and nurturing roles such as a mentor for no additional compensation or support.

A similar image to mammy's matronly role in white spaces, the matriarch is the Black women who oversees nurturing Black spaces; however, the matriarch is not seen favorably and is

often considered the antithesis of mammy. Matriarchs are portrayed as less desirable women who cause their children to fail at schooling and life overall due to her "spending too much time away from home" and are "overly aggressive, unfeminine women…" who "allegedly emasculate[d] their lovers and husbands" (Collins, 2009, p. 83). The softer spoken or more silent a Black woman appears to be, the more acceptable she is to whites and Black men. On the contrary, Black women who are more vocal and pushback against white supremacy and the patriarchy are problematic because we cannot be controlled and used to advance power, dominance, and subservience. Black women who cannot be controlled by the white supremacy and the patriarchy are threats to the status quo and thereby labeled aggressive, controlling, and problematic.

Other controlling images such as welfare queens, Black ladies, Jezebel, and hoochies are stereotypes steeped in morality, sexual expression, and economic value of Black women. These stereotypes shame Black women for living our truths and deny us access to the same benefits of life that are gifted to white women. These stereotypes support the objectification and othering of Black women by only focusing on one's financial and physical assets and ability to produce for others.

These stereotypes also contribute to gatekeeping practices like respectability politics for and against Black women, whereby our behavior and appearance are policed for what is considered appropriate and correct. Harris (2003) stated:

> By linking worthiness for respect to sexual propriety, behavioral decorum, and neatness, respectability served a gatekeeping function, establishing a behavioral "entrance fee," to the right to respect and the right to full citizenship…leaving some out of the circle of worthy, respectable citizens. (p. 213)

Controlling images are used to create spaces where Black women's stories are to be dictated by others. Respectability politics posit that Black women must behave in proper ways to be acceptable to dominate culture, that is "non-confrontational and White as possible, pressing our hair, pulling up our pants, and speaking "properly," [which] are a lasting remnant of the Jim Crow South…" (Jeffries, 2020, p. 2). These images, which have negative connotations are used in ways that foster hate for Black women from other Black women and non-Black women. As a result of the simultaneous racialized and gendered oppression, Black women's experiences are overlooked in real life and lumped into the experiences of other groups in research.

In K-12 learning spaces, Crenshaw et al. (2015) stated, "…implicit biases, stereotyping, and other cultural factors may play a role…" in the ways in which Black girls are disciplined in schools and the ways that teachers and administrators perceive Black girls (p. 140). The most common challenges are that Black girls are often perceived through the stereotypical Jezebel and Sapphire caricature being considered, loud, uncontrollable, loose, and rude, and causing those in authority to respond more harshly to Black girls; in reality, Black girls are rejecting the standards of feminism that are steeped in whiteness and inauthentic to who they are (Blake et al., 2011).

The failure to acknowledge Black women's experiences as real and intersectional contributes to the harmful environments in which Black women live. Despite the data that are limited and often do not include Black girls' voices in the research, Black girls' challenges are as grave as Black men and white women. Black women should not have to seek approval from others to be deemed worthy of basic treatment. Our survival should not be linked to the acceptance of others, particularly oppressors. To challenge and debunk these controlling images, self-definition is essential to the survival of Black women.

Self-definition most commonly occurs amid oppressive spaces and places that were not created for Black women. Self-definition comes in the form resistance and behavior shifting to create tools of survival, or what is also known as Black women making ways of out no way to have access to life. This experience of enduring oppression and suffering in silence is a moniker of Black women's experience in the United States historically and contemporarily.

Collins (2009) described Black women as not victims, but survivors, and that the strength in our collective every experience was powerful in defining who they are. These controlling images are often used as justification for Black women to be forgotten or even an afterthought. Through the politics of disposability, Black women are not as valued as white women in ways that our bodies are not essential because society lacks the understanding of our racialized and gendered existence. Patton and Ward (2016) stated:

> Crenshaw contends that society lacks the necessary framing to explicitly name the injustices Black women endure. Thus, when issues such as school suspension, state-sanctioned violence, mass incarceration, and sexual violence arise, Black women's lives are rarely, if ever, featured. Such non-recognition has detrimental implications for Black women who must operate in a society where their lives do not matter. (p. 331)

This erasure and lack of mattering can have detrimental social and psychological impacts on Black women's self-efficacy and self-worth.

Black Girls Are Magic?: Psychological Impacts of Controlling Images and Learning Spaces for Black Women

In the early 2010s, the hashtag #Blackgirlmagic became a regular trending topic across social media platforms and was used a celebratory slogan to uplift Black women's resilience in the face of racism and sexism. CaShawn Thompson created the phrase in 2013 and the slogan was

used by Beverly Bond, a Black woman entertainer and founder of Black Girls Rock, an awards show that creates space to acknowledge Black women's contributions to various sectors of society (Hobson & Owens, 2019). As a hashtag, #BlackGirlMagic acknowledges how Black women as a collective pushback against controlling images and invisibility and pushes through to advocate for issues that impact Black women and the Black community at large (Stewart, 2019). While Black women should be celebrated for our contributions in the face of challenges, it cannot go without notice that Black women still experience challenges despite our perceived resilience, particularly in learning spaces that were not welcoming to our presence. It is important to remember that is it only through legal action that Black women were granted admission and access to learning spaces in K12 and higher education (Williams et al., 2020).

After more than 50 years post *Brown v. Board of Education*, which legally granted us the ability to attend predominantly white institutions, Black women still experience psychological, microaggressive trauma in learning spaces because of our race and gender. Williams et al. (2020) argued "…Black college women experience ongoing identity processing that is filtered through the world around them, complete with the biases, misogynoir, and otherwise negative attitudes that cause them to second-guess themselves" (p. 467). Black women often experience challenges in environments that do not understand our intersectionality and resulting in us feeling unsafe and often disproportionally disciplined in comparison to white women and men (Williams et al., 2020). In collegiate settings, Matthews et al. (2021) argued Black women often struggle with imposter syndrome, tokenism, discrimination, stereotyping, and mental health issues. As such, these challenges may impact how Black women set goals for ourselves, our levels of participation in the learning spaces, and our overall self-efficacy in and external to learning spaces.

Specifically in subjects connected to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, Black women report suffering through racialized and gendered microaggressions. Morton (2021) stated, "Black women contend with having their intelligence questioned or undermined by peers and faculty or being outright ignored in academic environments" (p. 307). Black women experience that our colleagues, instructors, and administrators have preconceived notions about our speech patterns and attire that are beyond mere curiosity.

Black women's successes in education and resilience through mantras such as #BlackGirlMagic and the "strong Black woman" stereotype contributes to Black women being ignored and silently enduring harmful environments, and ultimately pushed to the margins. Ricks (2014) argued:

> Although Black girls have adopted coping and defense mechanisms to deal with gendered racism, these methods are often misinterpreted by teachers and school personnel as personality and/or cultural characteristics instead of responses to living with daily microaggressions (e.g., administrators, counselors, assessment personnel). (p. 11)

Interpreting acts of resistance as a means of survival has grave impacts on how Black women are perceived and how we navigate learning spaces. Educators must be careful to not interpret Black women's resistance or magic as strength.

Intersectionality and Learning Spaces

A key component to understanding Black women's experiences is intersectionality – a concept for which Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited for naming in academia. Intersectionality posits that Black women's lives are not merely gendered or racialized; instead, our experiences are simultaneously gendered and racialized with identities that experience interlocking oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Related to Black women's experiences, intersectionality creates space for our

voices and experiences to be heard. Cooper (2016) stated, "The idea that patriarchy interacts with other systems of power—namely, racism—to uniquely disadvantage some groups of women more than others has a long history within Black feminism's intellectual and political traditions" (p. 2).

In the United States particularly, Black women have always existed at the conjunction of what Cooper (1988) called "both a woman question and a race problem…" (p. 134). Interconnected systems of racism and sexism have grave impacts on individuals, like Black women whose identities lie in oppressed positions. Crenshaw (1989) stated frameworks that ignore intersectionality "erased Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged member of the group" (p. 140).

Essentially, it was not enough to merely add Black women to theoretical ideologies that already exist without truly considering the ways in which our race and gender show up in these studies. As such, Crenshaw's work gave scholars a new term to articulate the foundational work laid by SoJourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, and the scholars from the Combahee River Collective. Intersectionality became a new way of examining the world as "the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw, 1990, p. 1245).

Ultimately, intersectionality is instrumental in understanding the power dynamic in social groups. Our identities cannot be viewed separately as race or gender. To understand the essence of our existence, race, gender, and other identity groups in oppressed positions must be clearly identified and articulated in studying Black women. Intersectionality is a gateway to understanding experiences that have been ignored and pushed to the margins and calls for a constant commitment to understanding those who experience intersectionality as a part of our lived experiences.

Harris and Leonardo (2018) contended:

> Intersectionality reminds them of the inexhaustibility of the struggle for social justice. Forgiven analysis, initiative, or campaign of resistance at any given point in time, no matter how narrowly or broadly specified, there will always be a remainder, some identity or experience that is marginalized or made invisible. Intersectionality is in this way well suited to the postmodern view that political and social groups are continually emerging and making claims for recognition and redistribution—that there is no point at which all identities will be recognized and all justice claims satisfied. (p. 42)

While the struggle is incessant, the work of scholars in the academy is necessary to continue to have Black women's voices included in our work so that our voices can be included in classrooms, boardrooms, and courtrooms.

Criticism of Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality

Despite the contributions of Crenshaw's work regarding intersectionality, there is scholarship that posits intersectionality is not scientific in ways that pose questions to re-examine and test the validity as a theory. Cooper (2016) stated:

> So while Crenshaw used intersectionality to demonstrate certain fissures in identity politics and the ways that these kinds of group politics were frequently unable to meet the needs of certain putative members of the group, the theory has been accused of fomenting unhelpful and essentialist kinds of identifications. (p. 4)

There is concern that intersectionality as used by Crenshaw is a parochial frame that is limited only to structural approaches and does little to articulate the emotional and physiological experiences that impact Black women's lives. Essentially, unpacking intersectionality and the interlocking oppressive forces exposes more about the systems of oppression rather than the

individual experiencing the oppression (Kwan, 1999). The epistemological groundings are unclear to critics who question the validity of intersectionality as a theory.

In relation to Black Feminist Thought, intersectionality is not meant to describe the totality of Black women's experiences; instead, it adds to the conversation to help unpack and engage in meaning-making to better understand multidimensional aspects of Black women's lives. Additionally, Nash challenged Black Feminist Thought and intersectional in the sense that the myriad of definitions for the term has created spaces where the term has been appropriated by groups for whom intersectionality was not intended.

Nash (2019) challenged Black Feminist Thought scholars to reimagine intersectionality in spaces that give way to more freedom that is often not found in academic spaces. The process of freedom to reimagine and recreate our identities as Black women is necessary to share our voices and perspectives. The agency to imagine the existence of the intersections of Blackness and womanhood is a luxury and an act of resistance in the face of whiteness and patriarchy. As such, the defensiveness that Nash discussed in her critique of intersectionality is perhaps a byproduct of higher education environments that are generally oppressive to Black women.

While there is not one way to exude femininity, it is evident that Black women's experiences are consistently omitted from the narrative of mainstream feminism; as such the work of Black Feminist Thought scholars and those who emphasize intersectionality is a necessity to add Black women's experiences to the discourse. Collins and Bilge (2016) said, "Black women would never gain their freedom without attending to oppressions of race *and* class *and* gender" (p. 66). The emphasis on the *and* is important as it signifies the connection between identifiers for Black women. It is necessary to define and articulate Black women's experiences as racialized and

gendered and centering our voices while doing so as a means of understanding the essence of our identities.

Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism, much like Black Feminist Thought, has existed far before the academy's attempt to give it a formal definition and an articulation to how Afrofuturism informs the study of individuals connected to the African diaspora. Scholars such as Dery believed that Afrofuturism's origins are connected to science and speculative fiction. Dery (1994) argued that Afrofuturism is the connection between speculative fiction and technoculture that explores the future of Blacks. Upon reading Octavia Butler's literary works and examining the works of musical artists such as Sun Ra and Parliament Funkadelic, Dery noticed a body of work that did not quite fit in the mainstream, white male-dominated Sci-Fi paradigm. Dery noticed a throughline of African cosmologies and symbols that disrupted Eurocentric images and that centered Blackness and Black cultural lenses. These cultural curators imagined a future that was informed by the past of Africans before the horrors of colonialism and the Transatlantic Slave Trade and that defied space and time.

This future wherein Blacks exist in ways that are free from all forms of violence and creativity through technology is paramount because the stories from the past and present that center trauma make the future seem nonexistent. Afrofuturist musician Sun Ra was known for telling his story of being an alien who came to Earth from Saturn, sent on a mission to preach peace through music (Barrett, 2018). His attire and music reflected African attire and symbols that were a bridge for the African diaspora, connecting us to a past stolen by colonialism and marred by violence to a future reflection of peace, fellowship, and community.

Without the voices and creative lenses of Afrofuturist artists, the future for Black people would potentially repeat the past and the present, which is often full of violence and limited in

representation of Black women. According to Schwartz (2007), "It's tough to ignore the fact that popular culture is heavily rooted in White culture" (p. 2). Afrofuturism is necessary as it creates spaces for Blacks to imagine an existence that defies past and often present, oppressive conditions.

The lack of representation for Black women in media, literature, the curriculum, and other aspects of life creates environments wherein we may attempt to recreate ourselves after images that do not support who we really are. Thus, like Black Feminist Thought, Afrofuturism is an act of resistance against the dominant narrative created by whiteness. The imagination process is vital to seeing oneself beyond current conditions. Imarisha (2015) described Afrofuturism as a form of visionary literature that distinguishes itself from mainstream science fiction due to its bend towards justice. According to Imarisha:

> We believe this space is vital for the process of decolonization, because the process of decolonialization of the imagination is the most dangerous and subversive there is: for it is where all other forms of decolonization are born. Once the imagination is unshackled, liberation is limitless. (p. 9)

Acknowledging the limitations of white supremacy and patriarchy on the formation of Black women's identities and experiences is necessary in articulating the need for spaces and narratives that center our needs and experiences. Afrofuturism provides a conduit to reimagine learning spaces with our needs in mind.

Afrofuturism and Colonialism

The impacts of colonialism are tangible and deeply entrenched in the experiences of those who have been colonized, particularly Black women. While post-colonialist and post-modernist studies are relevant to the reimagination of spaces and experiences shaped by whiteness and other oppressive forces, for this study postcolonialism and postmodernism are not

a part of the conceptual framework. The goal of this work is to center the experiences and voices of Black women, which is done primarily by Black Feminist Thought scholars. It is important to note that the struggle between Black futures exists without acknowledging Black pain and suffering because of colonialization. Can Blackness exist without this frame of reference? Afrofuturism scholars believe that the ability to imagine and connect the past before colonialization can create new futures.

Guthrie (2019) argued that the Marvel film and comic Black Panther display of Afrofuturism and strong Black women leads was a launching board for the world to begin to see Blackness unfettered from the guise of colonialism. Black Panther was a powerful depiction of African culture that did not center suffering and slavery and highlighted the vibrancy of African culture and technology. To support this, Womack (2013) stated:

> As a mode of self-healing and self-liberation, it's the use of imagination that is most significant because it helps people to transform their circumstances. Imagining oneself in the future creates agency and it's significant because historically people of African descent were not always incorporated into many of these storylines about the future. (p. 9)

It is this agency that is integral for Black women to create spaces with our needs in mind. The freedom to see oneself in the future is a privilege that has been denied for generations of Black women, and yet for some individuals, the thought of a better tomorrow was motivation to endure the hardness of the day. By creating spaces for Black women to imagine, this will allow for those reveries to become reality for future Black women and girls.

The Mother of Afrofuturism: Octavia Butler's Contributions to Afrofuturism

Known as the mother of Afrofuturism, Octavia Butler "was writing Black women into imaginary worlds with aliens, giving us powers of telepathy and sending us back to the slavery era

to try to fix a horribly broken past" (Due, 2019, p.73). Butler's work inspired a generation of speculative fiction writers to use their pens and imagination as acts of resistance to challenge white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and other forms of oppression that stymied the vitality of the Black experience. Butler created space to "explore the intersections of identity and imagination, the gray areas of race, class, gender, sexuality, love, militarism, inequality, oppression, resistance, and – most important – hope" (Imarisha, 2015, p. 9). Hope amid complexities and invisibility gives one courage to reimagine futures that include our humanities. Butler, who was well before her time, was a harbinger of sorts. It is as if she created a future for Black people based on society's inability to see us for who we are in the present. In her 1993 work *The Parable of the Sower*, set in the futuristic time of 2025, Butler urged readers to embrace diversity and resist othering the aliens in the story who were Black people, to prevent societal destruction (Frederick, 2018; Hall, 2021).

Butler was also known for making Black characters the lead character in her work, which was uncommon in mainstream science and speculative fiction. In *The Parable of the Sower*, the main character, Lauren, is a Black woman who is highly empathetic to the needs of the community and through her religious beliefs, works to create a sense of community, stability, and prosperity for her community to survive amid the chaos of the world around them (Frederick, 2018). Consistent with the themes of Black Feminist Thought and Afrofuturism, Butler's writing centers the resiliency of Black women and highlights that liberation must include Black women. Butler wrote about Black women in the future when other science and speculative fiction left Black people out of their narratives or created new species that replaced Blackness. As such, Butler's work and legacy inspired a generation of artists who through Afrofuturism pushed back on the notions of alienation, othering, and erasure of Blackness by reclaiming Black narratives and

forecasting them. Butler's ability to write us in the future gives Black women hope for liberation and spaces to dream and tell our own stories. According to Womack (2013):

Afrofuturism is a great tool for wielding the imagination for personal change and societal growth. Empowering people to see themselves and their ideas in the future gives rise to innovators and free thinkers, all of whom can pull from the best of the past while navigating the sea of possibilities to create communities, culture, and a new, balanced world. (p. 191)

Through her Afrofuturistic writing, Butler, like Sun Ra, inspired artists such as Basquiat, Erykah Badu, Janelle Monae, and others to see Blacks' pasts and gave hope that the future includes Black existence. Discussing the significance of Butler's work for Black temporal and spatial re-imaginings, McKittrick (2006) stated, "Octavia Butler hooking together of past and present locations, through time-travel, memory, knowledge, and literary production, allows us to imagine that Black geographies, while certainly material and contextual, can be lived in unusual, unexpected, ways" (p. 35). Essentially, connection to the past is the pathway to the future and reimaging learning spaces with Black women's needs in mind.

Afrofuturism and Technology: A Mixed Bag

Artists used the technology of the day to share images of African royalty and glimpses of futuristic Black experiences. Womack (2013) described Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation" (p. 9). Very similar to the previous definitions, this definition emphasizes technology as an important function of Afrofuturism. However, these artists were limited in their reach and impact due to the gatekeepers who had more power to control the creation and access to their art. As technology has advanced, barriers to technology have changed and more Black artists, specifically Afrofuturist artists have space to share their messages in ways that resist and push back against the dominant narrative. Womack (2013) stated:

Unlike previous eras, today's artists can wield the power of digital media, social platforms, digital video, graphic arts, gaming technology, and more to tell their stories, share their stories, and connect with audiences inexpensively— a gift from the sci-fi gods, so to speak, that was unthinkable at the turn of the century. The storytelling gatekeepers vanished with the high-speed modem, and for the first time in history, people of color have a greater ability to project their own stories. (p. 10)

As such, technology has created opportunities for Black creators to circumnavigate the gatekeepers, thereby decreasing the possibility of having to water down or alter our messages to make us more palatable for white audiences. Technology has allowed for Black spaces to be created amid whiteness. For example, Black Twitter, Verzuz online music battles, and video game spaces are all spaces that have been created on digital platforms with messages that cater to the Black experience and connect individuals across the globe. With more Black creatives having the agency to share our stories on digital platforms, it also gives us more opportunities to dispel dominate narratives like the controlling images discussed by Black Feminist Thought scholars, thus highlighting the importance of self-determination and liberation. Ultimately, the Internet and digital platforms do not always provide the safety and security for Blacks to exist without experiencing violence.

As a result of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic, more digital spaces such as Zoom became necessary forms of communication. Violence in the form of Zoom bombings emerged as racist and sexist interruptions to meetings and gathering spaces occurred. I personally experienced a Zoom bombing and the impacts of that psychologically was a reminder that despite the perceived safety of technology, oppressive forces will show up to assert their control. The Gamergate scandal in the gaming industry that targeted Black and Latinx women with violent

racial slurs and sexual harassment in gaming culture is another example of violence experienced in digital spaces Gamergate was a reminder gaming culture is harmful to Black women because gaming culture lacks representation of race and gender (Richard & Gray, 2018). The lack of diversity in characters and gamers along with the erasure of gamers of diverse groups makes gaming and technology a non-inclusive and unsafe place for Black women. The Gamergate scandal presented another challenge to Afrofuturism and the connection to technology. Technology without humanism commodifies Black bodies, making the future a prison of the conduit it used to become free. Lassalle (2020) said, "…if humanity does not think about the meaning it wants to give technology, technology will make them the victims of its irresistible desire for power and its inevitable desire to transcend limits" (p. 5). As such is necessary for Afrofuturists creators to manage technology in ways prevent the commodification and objectification of Black bodies and limit the gatekeepers who attempt to augment their messages. Despite these challenges, it is necessary that Afrofuturists artists continue to produce content as a means of resistance and in the name of imagination for more liberate futures.

Afrofuturism in Teaching and Learning

Most of the scholarship regarding Afrofuturism has been conducted within the realms of scientific fiction and arts education. As such, there is still work to be done to explore the implications of Afrofuturism and its applications through curricula and the impacts of learning through Afrofuturistic lens particularly for Black women. Considering the challenges with access to arts education in some formal learning spaces due to lack of funding or lack of value of arts education, limited exposure to Afrofuturism can be harrowing for Black learners, specifically Black women.

John Hall, an English teacher discussed his use of Afrofuturism in the classroom, particularly in classrooms where students endured the COVID-19 pandemic and the horrors of virtual learning, the public death of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, and a harrowing political climate that targeted education in pejorative ways.

Hall (2021) stated:

> In the imagining of futures with Black perspectives featured prominently, students and teachers alike can resist and critique the present and the past. To give our students the lens of Afrofuturism is to give them a uniquely imaginative and restorative power. (p. 4).

It is this very liberatory education that is misunderstood and under attack, which makes the study of Afrofuturism necessary to include in learning spaces.

Criticism of Afrofuturism

While Afrofuturism scholars have made significant strides in their contributions to scholarship, popular culture, and science fiction, many still question the essence of Afrofuturism's existence due to its conception and relationship to technology. A group of Afrifuturist scholars grapple with Afrofuturism's ability to create futures for individuals of African descent at large because as they do not disconnect from western philosophy. Afrifuturist argue that Afrofuturism scholarship has yet to produce enough scholarship to connect the field to indigenous African motifs to effectively understand the holistic pass of Blacks beyond the international slave trade (Herukhuti, 2022). As such, Afrifuturists challenge Afrofuturists for changing the spelling to divorce itself from westernized idea of the Black diaspora to connect with African motifs and understand African technology.

More contemporary Afrofuturism scholars urge the field of study to move beyond Afrofuturism as a visual aesthetic and towards Afrofuturism 2.0 that acknowledges Afrofuturism

beyond arts and popular culture (Celnik, 2019). Under Afrofuturism 2.0, Celnik (2019) argued

that they are issues connected to othering, alienation, and surveillance with technology that calls

for Afrofuturism to consistently be in negotiation with the past, present, and future, using the

future to create a better different future beyond space and time.

Black Women's Experiences as Ungeographic: Black Women and Critical Geography

The politics of space and place is integral to understanding the experiences of Black women

in learning spaces particularly as it relates to our agency to decide where and when learning occurs

in addition to other decisions such as who is taught, who is teaching, and what is taught. As

aforementioned, critical geography seeks to explore and understand the power dynamics in place

and space to better understand the lived experiences of those in a place as well as to expose the

inequities that are present. Essentially, critical geographers argue that geography is more than maps

and landscapes, and that when the human experience is explored in terms of the individuals who

occupy spaces and how meaning is constructed, they can learn more about the lived experiences

of geography.

There are very few Black women who are cited for their scholarly contributions to critical

geography and geography as a discipline at large. In fact, in the late 1990s, a study conducted by

the Association of American Geographers reported that 90% of the field was white and in 2002,

and another study conducted by the University of Michigan reported there were 46 Black

geographers as full-time faculty as institutions of higher learning (Hawthorne & Meche, 2016). As

such, it is necessary to include the work of Black women geographers to this study as a means of

uplifting their scholarship. Gilmore (2002), a Black woman political geographer stated:

Geographers should develop a research agenda that centers on race as a condition of

existence and as a category of analysis, because the territoriality of power to key to

understanding racism. The political geography of race entails investigating space, place, and location as simultaneously shaped by gender, class, and scale. (p. 22)

Gilmore acknowledged that more scholarship is needed by geographers as it relates to understanding race and place. I would add that additional work is needed to understand and share the intersectional experiences of Black women connected to identity, critical geography, and Curriculum Studies.

As it relates to critical geography, spaces and places refer to physical geography such as landscapes, places on the map, geographical locations, as well as abstract places and the ways that individuals make meaning around space. Additionally, this relationship among the imagination, identity, and time is a lingering thought. Specifically, one questions can Black women defy space and to create identities unfettered from white supremacy and patriarchy? Considering the violent atrocities of the past and present, can safe spaces for Black women truly exist? This work sought to highlight the voices of those Black women scholars as well as articulate the relevance of understanding the politics of space and place in Black women's experiences.

In the sections that follow, spatial theorizing by Black women scholars and the relevance of this theorizing for understanding and reimagining Black women's learning spaces are discussed. This discussion is organized around four areas: (a) Katherine McKittrick and Black women's Geographies; (b) Melissa Harris-Perry and the concept of the crooked room; (c) Patricia Hill Collins and the concept of safe spaces; and (d) bell hooks and the concept of homeplace.

McKittrick and Black Feminist Geography

Katherine McKittrick is a Black woman and leading scholar in exploring critical geography and the lived experiences of Black bodies in the United States and Canada, which is often aggravated by colonialist, patriarchal, and capitalistic versions ownership (McKittrick, 2006). In

her groundbreaking work entitled *Demonic Ground: Black Women and The Cartographies of Struggle*, McKittrick (2006) offered an interdisciplinary critique of human geography using a Black studies and Black Feminist Thought lens to highlight the ways in which Black women make meaning with space (Mahtani, 2014). Mahtani (2014) stated, "Black women have always had a meaningful relationship with geography, she [McKittrick] insists" (p. 697). Part of understanding Black women's experiences is to understand our connections with space in ways that center our humanity instead of commodifying our existence.

Despite the violence of the slave trade and auction blocks, Black women were able to make geographical connections that should be explored and understood in ways that adds value to who we are. McKittrick grappled with Blackness being invalidated and ignored in geography and society at large through examining the work of DuBois, Fanon, Stuart Hall, and Toni Morrison, Dionne Brand. Collectively, these scholars led McKittrick (2006) through the "terrains of struggle" wherein Black geography that is invisible and non-essential is reconciled in ways that create opportunities to reimagine new futures by reclaiming the forgotten or untold past (p. 23). By using these writers to establish her theory, McKittrick reminded readers of Blacks' prescribed place in society, which is a boundary that has been created because of colonialization violence and capitalism. This boundary created a power hierarchy that placed Black women at the bottom. As such, McKittrick's scholarship is necessary as it pushes back against traditional geography that has historically ignored Black women and our narratives.

McKittrick's writing about ownership is relevant to this work as it is connected to Black women's agency to make decisions. Ownership removes agency to choose for one's body and self on all matters. Due to the violence experienced through captivity, enslavement, legal and illegal Jim Crow, spaces are often harmful to Black women. McKittrick (2006) proclaimed, "Ownership

of the body, individual and community voices, bus seats, women, "Africa," feminism, history, homes, record labels, money, cars, these are recurring positionalities, written and articulated through protest, music, feminist theory, fiction, the everyday" (p. 3). Ownership of space is challenging due to the historical barriers that still impede Black women's ability to own spaces and places and claim ownership.

In the United States specifically, Black women's legal recognition to citizenship and access to the rights thereof only came after 13th Amendment, 20th Amendment, and Civil Right legislations in the 1950s and 1960s collectively. To support this, Finney (2014), an African American woman who is a cultural geographer said, "Whiteness, as a way of knowing becomes the way of understanding our environment, and through representation and rhetoric becomes about of our educational systems, our institutions, and our personal beliefs" (p. 3). To reclaim these spaces and disrupt the dominate narrative, it is important for Black women to reconnect with our past, recreate and share our narratives, and demand to be represented in environments that have typically rendered us invisible (Finney, 2014). The reclamation and reconnection processes are vital to the possibility of reimaging new learning spaces with our needs in mind.

A part of understanding Black women's spaces and places is the reclamation and prioritization of our narratives and using our theoretical concepts to analyze us (Black Feminist Project, n.d.). Afrofuturism and critical geography scholars' work is aligned in the quest to reconnect the past as a means of reframing the future for Black identities.

Crooked Rooms, Safe Spaces, and Homeplaces: Black Women's Spatial Thinking

Spatial thinking encourages scholars to explore the ways in which individuals make connections and meaning in the places they occupy. As critical geography scholarship is limited

in representation and contributions from Black women, it is necessary to discuss concepts from other scholarship regarding the ways in which they make meaning and live. Jenkins (2021) argued:

> Since America's inception, anti-Blackness has stood as the dominant societal logic that has shaped the configuration and character of American social intuitions, including K-12 schools, colleges, and universities. In fact, the explicit design of public education was to advance the knowledge and skills of White children and to repress and contain literacy among enslaved Americans. (p. 109)

I extended this argument to include anti-womanhood rhetoric coupled with anti-Blackness have created spaces for Black women that are harmful, especially those that woefully promise safety. This section further discusses crooked rooms, safe places, and homeplaces as geographic possibilities for Black women.

The Crooked Room

Harris-Perry (2011) discussed the impact of politics and identity for Black women and introduced the space that she calls the crooked room. According to Parks (n.d.), Harris-Perry coined the term "crooked rooms" to describe "them [Black women] as attempting to stand up in a room constructed to keep them off balance" (p. 29). In this context, political does not refer to an elected office or the political campaign process; instead, this refers to the everyday decisions that influence Black women's lives from their roles at home, work external to home, and relationships with other Black women. To position her argument, Harris-Perry (2011) situates the experiences of Black women as political, by stating, "…the internal, psychological, emotional, and personal experiences of Black women are inherently political" (p. 5). The politics of Black women's experiences in the United States has created a culture wherein Black women find it challenging to

be our true authentic selves and are constantly warring against the stereotypical attitudes that have been forced upon them (Harris-Perry, 2011).

Just as race and gender are socially constructed, Black women's lives are constructed and weaponized against us. Hannah-Jones' experience of being denied tenure at UNC-Chapel Hill in a very public space where her credentials were invalidated is an example of crooked room. The pain of not ever being considered as good enough is debilitating particularly the notion of regardless of your credentials, the room will most often than not be slanted in a direction that is not in your favor and discredited to your race and gender. The dominant narratives that are described in Black Feminist Thought scholarship guide the perceptions of Black women and the inequitable, unfair treatment we often receive. These hypersexualized, commodified, labor-driven beliefs contribute to Black women's expectation to be strong under the weight of our families and in the work environment. Parks (n.d.) described this "universal requirement" as "Black women are supposed to be strong, stoic, and selfless, a message that comes at them from all directions: Black culture, the larger American culture, White women, other Black women, men, the Black church, the workplace, and their families" (p. 29).

On the contrary, Black women's strength is seen as a problem when we speak up for ourselves and against those who are in power. Additionally, this burden to always be strong can be a difficult feat for Black women who are often not allowed to feel, live, or thrive. As Black women are not monoliths, what happens to the sister who is not perceived as strong? This image of being a strong Black woman is to be celebrated, criticized, and condemned as it contributes to the challenges of the intersectionality of race, gender, and class. Parks (n.d.) said, "The Strong Black Woman is at once an opportunity and a cage, fraught with the historical contradictions that come from sitting at the cultural nexus: she is masculine yet female; powerful among the

powerless; Black, but intimate with Whites" (p. 29). This lack of mattering and constant state of being devalued is evident in learning spaces that create spaces and places with no concern for Black women's voices or needs.

The crooked room phenomenon highlights the impossible expectations of Black women to be all things to all people, while simultaneously being nothing for ourselves. When attempting to have something for ourselves or to use our voices, Black women are knocked down in ways such as our knowledge and expertise being scrutinized, lived experiences being denied or questioned for its validity, and ultimately our needs being ignored as secondary to everyone else in the room. Ultimately, the crooked room does not create welcoming, supportive environments for Black women. Instead, it is a place where our lives are scrutinized, sexualized, and commodified in ways that strip our existences down to our physical and financial assets. In the crooked room, success for Black women is defined by supporting everyone else's realities while neglecting our own needs. In the crooked room, Black women's lives and vitality are secondary to the Black men for whom we march and advocate for in life and death. Black girls' lives are ignored in schools where hypersexualized dress codes shame us for our bodies and our confidence and mannerisms are misrecognized as disrespectful and problematic. To become more palatable to other groups, Black women are coached to scale back on our perceived strengths to allow Black men to seem more powerful and to be less threatening to other groups (Harris-Perry, 2011). This shrinkage is merely Black women conforming to the crooked room.

While crooked rooms are certainly not spaces that were created for Black women in mind, we need to create new spaces for ourselves. Often these spaces must be created in response to or amid environments that are oppressive. As such, social groups such as sororities, social clubs, and civic organizations that center the voices and needs of Black women were integral in helping Black

women find space and voice for ourselves, which justifies and necessitates the creation of inclusive spaces for Black women. Collins (2009) argued, "Extended families, churches, and African American community organizations are important locations where safe discourse potentially can occur" (p. 111). These spaces, though some are impacted by oppressive forces provide natural opportunities for Black women to come to a space that does not dismiss our needs and concerns. It is important to note that Collins did not mention schools in this list as schools are often crooked rooms with limited options to support Black women and girls because of their promotion of colorblindness and culturally neutral policies that ignore the essence of Black women's experiences. What spaces are safe for Black women and girls?

Safe Spaces

Collins described spaces that are situated within the Black community and family as the foundations of safe spaces because they help women be more centered as the subject rather than the object or a commodification; these are spaces where Black women can reject the controlling images of mammy, matriarchs, welfare queens and jezebels (Collins, 2009). However, these institutions are often impacted by sexism and violence from men. Much like schools, familial spaces, and predominantly Black spaces have harmful ambient contributions to the environment for Black women. As such, self-definition is the conduit for Black women to create safe spaces for ourselves (Collins, 2009). Black women have been able to form relationships with each other that foster spaces for us to form our identities, resist and reject controlling images, and articulate our voices. The relationships "have nurtured powerful Black women's communities" (Collins, 2009, p. 112). These spaces center the voices and experiences of Black women as we share our everyday lived experiences without having to provide context to the nuisances of what it means to be Black and woman while experiencing multiple forms of oppression. There is freedom when one is in a

space where she can share her lived experiences without context or someone scrutinizing the details. The understanding of the shared experiences of Black womanhood creates the foundation of trust that enhances the relationship. Collins (2009) stated:

> African American women the listener most able to pierce the invisibility created by Black women's objectification is another Black woman. This process of trusting one another can seem dangerous because only Black women know what it means to be Black women. But if we will not listen to each other, then who will? (p. 114)

Black women must rely on each other to help make sense of our experiences, as a solace, and as a learning space to teach lessons of how to survive. These relationships, peer-to-peer, mother-to-daughter, are essential to Black women understanding the value and power in our identities. This recognition of power fuels self-identity and the will to resist oppressive climates to ultimately create ways out of no ways and make impossible situations more palatable.

Other spaces wherein Black women find solace is in the arts, specifically musical stylings of the Blues, jazz, and spirituals. For Black women, music is more than entertainment. It is spiritual. It is emotional. It is the space where our lives coupled with cadences, beats, and rhymes reflect reality. It is sometimes an escape from reality in a world with our race and gender are not highlighted and celebrated. Collins (2000) argued:

> Blues has occupied a special place in Black women's music as a site of the expression of Black women's self-definitions. The blues singer strives to create an atmosphere in which analysis can take place, and yet this atmosphere is intensely personal and individualistic. When Black women sing the blues, we sing our own personalized, individualistic blues while simultaneously expressing the collective blues of African-American women. (p. 116)

Music centers Black women's voices and experiences and is a place where we can reclaim and control our sexuality and expression in ways that reject controlling narratives. Music is a form of storytelling that helps to share our experiences in hopes that other groups will understand.

Safe spaces for Black women involve providing points of connection for Black women to share our experiences without question and to use art and literature as expressions and directions for the future. However, the challenge with the safe space is that it is created within the confines of oppressive environments that Black women eventually must go back into. These safe spaces and communities are ephemeral, often just spaces for meetings or girls' time. Collins (2000) said, "Black women's safe spaces were never meant to be a way of life. Instead, they constitute one mechanism among many designed to foster Black women's empowerment and enhance our ability to participate in social justice projects" (p. 121). Essentially, these safe spaces are akin to filling stations or retreats wherein one can recharge to fight against controlling images, white supremacy, and patriarchy. Despite the benefits of the safe space, this place may not truly be safe due to the overwhelming, overarching presence of oppression.

Homeplace

While home is considered a solace, a place wherein Black families draw strength and enhance self-efficacy, for Black women, it can be a place of resistance despite oppression. The homeplace is sacred. It is a space created and maintained by Black women as a space where Black families can gather under the leadership of women and face oppressive structures unfettered from the gaze of whiteness. To support this concept, hooks (1990) said:

Black women resisted by making homes where all Black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship,

and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside

in the public world. (p. 42)

The homeplace is a place of hope and collective support that is constructed by Black women. The

homeplace is both space and place, physical and aesthetic that fosters a sense of connection. In a

reflection of her grandmother's home, hooks (1990) stated

…in our young minds houses belonged to women, were their special domain, not as

property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and

comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls. (p. 41)

As such, the homeplace represents a place of ownership, connection, and control for Black women,

wherein we could make meaning around our identities despite the oppressive, controlling images

from the dominant narratives. Similarly, to safe spaces, there is a level of privacy that is important

to the homeplace, as if it is the in-crowd room for Black girls in women, wherein we can be

ourselves without explanation of mannerisms, tones, and in group banter.

Crooked rooms and homeplaces as described by Perry and hooks respectively are often

spaces that are created amid oppressive environments and once Black women leave these

sanctuaries, they are still subjected to the harmful spaces. Jackson and Winfield (2014) argued that

through high-impact practices, faculty and alumni mentorship, and curricula that prepare students

for a global society, the institution is providing a new room particularly for Black women, to

realign the crooked room described by Perry.

Jackson and Winfield (2014) said their mentoring program is vital because it "mitigates

invisibility of women of color, particularly those of African descent, in the sciences and empowers

them to persist" (p. 7). Just as Black Feminist Thought scholars referenced in their scholarship,

connection with other Black women, both peer and intergenerationally is an integral component

of the experiences of Black women and their identity development. What happens when we leave these new rooms or empowerment sanctuaries? Furthermore, what does it mean that we often prepare Black women to navigate white, male-dominated spaces, though white individuals and Black men are not prepared to acknowledge Black women's existences, needs, and spaces? This lack of understanding as well as Black women's spaces and places existing amid these environments makes it necessary for Black women to find and articulate new ways and spaces for ourselves.

Ultimately, it is important to remember the field of Curriculum Studies' significance to this work and that the connection to critical geography, which is concerned with space, place, power, and identity. Additionally, given that learning occurs in formal and informal spaces and the connection to space and place for Black women, it is necessary to examine all these layers in helping Black women reimagine learning spaces. There is a lack of critical geography and Curriculum Studies scholars who are examining spatial and educational experiences through racialized and gendered experiences. The intersectionality of these categories is vital to understanding Black women's needs.

Conclusion

Ultimately, a variety of scholarship in many disciplines lacks significant contributions from Black women as scholars, participants, and subjects in their works. This absence contributes to the lack of visibility for Black women, which can often feel like silence or erasure. The interlocking oppression of race and gender as Black women creates a unique experience for us that must be explored and articulated in ways that uplift our lived experiences in scholarship and our everyday lives. It is important to articulate how violence is used as a tool to control and maintain oppressive climates for Black women. Violence has also been used historically and contemporary to police

and sexualize Black women's bodies in ways that restrict our abilities to protect ourselves. As a result of white supremacy and patriarchy, Black women are often not safe even in our own skin and the vessels that occupy our souls. The lack of agency to control one's body, space, and place contributes to Black women's experiences in learning environments. Spaces and places that claim to be neutral or colorblind, such as schools and the courts of law, create more harm due to denial. Neutrality does not mean inclusive. Until Black women have the agency to create and control spaces for ourselves at the inception and not as an afterthought, our experiences will always be a byproduct of whiteness and a secondary to white women. As such, using this conceptual framework of Black Feminist Thought, critical geography, and Afrofuturism, I sought to add to the voices of Black women's scholarship and to create spaces for Black women to reimagine spaces for ourselves to tell our stories.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

"Memory (the deliberate act of remembering) is a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it really was--that is research. The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared in that particular way." -The Site of Memory by Toni Morrison

This work is centered on understanding the experiences of Black women in predominantly white spaces and exploring their ideas for learning spaces with Black women's needs in mind. The conceptual framework through, which I examine these experiences is comprised of three scholarly areas: Black Feminist Thought, critical geography, and Afrofuturism. Through my work, the goal was to center the experiences and voices of Black women and to dismantle the controlling images that have been created and presented about and for Black women because of white supremacy and patriarchy. To develop a deeper understanding of our experiences and to accurately reflect the conceptual framework, I used a qualitative methodology that centers our needs and uplift our experiences known as the sister circle. This methodology was used to explore the research questions for this study, which were:

1. How do Black women define our identities?

2. How do Black women describe our current learning spaces?

3. What type of learning spaces do Black women identify as beneficial for our needs?

The purpose of this study was to explore the ideas that Black women have for learning spaces created with our needs in mind. This chapter will discuss the methodology, research design, and data analysis for the proposed study.

Researcher's Positionality: At the Crossroads of Race, Gender, and Location, You'll Find Me

I am a Black woman who is a product of the Southern region of the United States. Except for brief summer vacations along the East Coast, and a semester of college in Washington, DC, who I am and how I have come to know myself has been largely shaped by growing up in South Carolina and being educated in spaces where I was either one of few or the only Black student in my honors courses. I remember the piercing gazes that were shot my way as we talked about slavery and all the white students looked at me. I remember the shame felt that they only talked about the history of Blacks being enslaved in the United States and being taught that our only hero as Black women was Rosa Parks. I remember being angry that we did not have a lot of exposure to Black authors or that my classmates were more interested in reading Shakespeare than Zora Neale Hurston because they could not understand the dialect.

In the formal schooling curricula, there were few authors who reflected my identities and lived experiences. Though I was outspoken, I was misunderstood as being angry and disrespectful. I was once told by a teacher that folding my arms as a Black girl meant that I had an attitude problem. Despite this, I was held in high esteem by most teachers because I was a smart Black girl. At an early age, I knew that there were different rules for me as a Black girl than Black boys as my brothers and cousins were allowed to run and play shirtless during hot summer days while I was told to sit on the porch because that is not what little girls did.

Religion is a significant part of my experience in shaping my identity and a place where a lot of my moral development was formed. I grew up in a church where women were not allowed to be licensed or recognized as ministers or preach from the sacred pulpit. In fact, women leaders could only speak from the floor. As a child, I questioned this heavily as I needed to know what

this meant for me as a Black woman and how I showed up in the world. Though I was outspoken, I was a smart Black girl, so it was okay.

I came into adulthood when there were a variety of national issues impacting Black youth, particularly young Black men. I was in college during Jena 6 when Black, teenage men were falsely accused of rape in Louisiana. I held spaces for advocacy and education for them and for Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, and every tragic situation impacting young Black men in the United States. I started my doctoral journey wanting to write about police brutality and the impact on first-year Black male college students.

In Summer 2020 when COVID-19 shut the world down, my research interest changed also. There were two simultaneous pandemics in the United States - COVID-19 and the impacts of racial violence peaking at high levels. That summer, the world learned about George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery. There was a young Black woman, Breonna Taylor, who was a first responder working through the COVID-19 pandemic and murdered by the police. I noticed how the world showed up for Floyd and Arbery and forgot about Breonna Taylor. This devastated me as it reminded me of the ways in which Black women consistently show up for everyone and it feels that no one shows up for us. Breonna Taylor's death and the failure of the legal system to hold police officers accountable for her murder shattered my spirit and encouraged me to shift my scholarship to focus on Black women and to create spaces for our voices to be shared and our needs to be met.

This research reflects my need for spaces dedicated to Black women and girls in a world that often makes us choose between race and gender. A personal goal of this research is to provide a space for Black women to feel valued, uplifted, and celebrated. After the death of Breonna Taylor, negative commentary about Meg the Stallion and Lizzo, and other violent acts against Black women by state actors or others, my desire to create spaces as such in formal research has

been burning. I want my work to bring awareness and to create space for healing and joy. I want my work to be a space where Black womanhood is celebrated and elevated without validation or justification. I just want something for Black women and by Black women.

Where My Girls At? Sister Circles as Methodology

For this study, it is important to use a methodology that centers the intersectionality of Black women's lives rather than a critical lens that examines race and gender separately. A methodology was chosen that centers intersectionality, creates a safe space for Black women to reject the dominant narratives set, and allows us to dream. Johnson (2015) described the sister circle methodology as "a qualitative research methodology and support group for examining the lived experiences of Black women" (p. 43). Adding to this definition, Neal-Barnett et al. (2011) said, "Sister circles are support groups that build upon existing friendships, fictive kin networks, and the sense of community found among African Americans females" (p. 268). The community aspect is essential to Black women's identity development, and survival, and is often a space for empowerment and learning.

The spelling – sister or sista – is used interchangeably at the discretion of the writer and ultimately references the use of language by Black women who often refer to other Black women as her sister or sista. There are three central themes that guide sister circles as methodology, which are communication dynamics, centrality of empowerment, and the researcher as participant (Johnson, 2015). Communication dynamics refer to the ways in which Black women converse and connect in verbal and non-verbal ways. Dorsey (2000) said "communicating with African-American women in small groups provides a unique support; one that is unwavering sources of strength for them" (p. 71). As such this methodology supports this study in digging deeper to

further understand Black women's experiences in learning spaces and ways to reimagine learning spaces with our needs in mind.

The ways in which Black women communicate among each other through verbal and non-verbal ways is a significant portion of our shared lived experiences and the communities created with each other. Phrases such as "Yaass, sis," "You go girl," "Bad bih," "Period Pooh," and a variety of others along with non-verbal interactions such as an exchange of looks, high fives, and random, unspoken bursts of laughter or even tears are few examples of communication exchanges among Black women that may not be accurately understood but are integral pieces of our interactions.

As a methodology, sister circles are vital as they give space to these communication patterns and highlight them as a part of the transcript coding and analysis processes (Collier, 2017). To demonstrate this further, Johnson (2015) said, "Because sista circles stimulate natural social interactions among Black women, dynamics such as participants' finishing one another's thoughts or being outspoken and direct is common" (p. 47). While communication modality is an important aspect of other qualitative research methods, the emphasis in sister circles highlights Black women's need for community and the importance of our shared identity researchers who can accurately analyze these interactions without additional explanations needed. Researchers also noted the importance of sister circles occurring in a comfortable space such as someone's home and is associated with food (Collier, 2017; Johnson, 2015). It is important to note that this study was conducted through a virtual platform to allow participants from different geographic locations to participate and to infuse elements of technology, which are vital components of the conceptual framework.

In addition to having spaces where Black women's communication patterns are understood without explanation, it is important for this methodology and this study to have opportunities for Black women to be empowered. For methodology purposes, sister circles are designed to be supportive research spaces where Black women are not only participants, but we are also empowered through community support. Johnson (2015) described empowerment as "the process of stimulating Black women to access their personal or collective power to strengthen one another. Sista circle methodology regards Black women's experiences and wealth of knowledge as power" (p. 48). Empowerment, particularly through recognizing and sharing our own wisdom, is helpful in reimagining new ways for power distribution as well as new learning spaces (Collins, 2009). Through our engagement in sister circles, it is my hope that Black women begin to acknowledge our collective and individual power and influence as this will be vital in sharing our stories and establishing rapport.

The role of the researcher is critical in sister circle methodology as the researcher must also be participant. Sister circle is a methodology that encourages the researcher to be included as a participant. For the integrity of the process, the researcher should also identify as a Black woman to shift the power dynamic of research process or co-opt an experience meant to be shared among Black women (Collier, 2017). Unlike a focus group experience where the researcher may be an observer in study and is there to merely connect data, sister circles encourage the researcher to be a part of the process of the data collection to mitigate power dynamics and foster connections. Johnson (2015) argued:

> With focus groups, the researcher's role is to simply facilitate the group discussion and listen to the participants' stories (Hennink, 2014; Puchta & Potter, 2004). With sista circles, the researcher's role extends beyond facilitating the discussion. The researcher participates

in the group dialogue. Building upon Black feminist epistemology, the researcher shares

her personal experience when necessary as a source of empowerment (Collins, 2009).

Methodology of this sort values reciprocity. The researcher both obtains knowledge from

the participants and contributes knowledge when appropriate. Sista circles are a way to

give back to participants and not just take from them. (p. 49)

Essentially, as a participant rather than the facilitator of the conversation, the researcher can be a

part of the community instead of an observant, which creates a safer, more comfortable

environment for the participants. Johnson (2015) said, "The major goal of sista circles is to gain

an understanding of a specific issue, topic, or phenomena impacting Black women from the

perspective of Black women themselves" (p. 46). Very similar to the foundations Black Feminist

Thought scholars, sister circle methodologists support the notion that Black women know who we

are and the essence of our experiences and would further support spaces like sister circles as helpful

in challenging the dominant narrative and creating spaces for our voices.

Exemplars in Research

Sister circles have existed outside of the academy since the 1800s and have taken a variety

of forms over the years (Giddings, 1984). Sister circles have always been a safe place or even

shared homeplaces where Black women were able to revel and refuel among each other with

shared lived experiences. Neal-Barnett et al. (2011) stated:

Over the course of time, the term sister circle has come to mean different things to different

people. For some, a sister circle is a group of women within an organization (i.e., church,

service club, workplace) who are brought together by a common theme, such as healthy

eating, greater spirituality, love of books, etc. For others, a sister circle is a group of women

experiencing the same health concern who come together for education and support. (p. 268)

These gathering spaces are essential to Black women's identities and are vital for researchers to understand the essence of these experiences. There is a perception of safety and community in sister circles that organically happens in ways that are not accurately understood and explained in research methods that do not understand Black women's needs.

Sister circles did not begin as spaces for research but became a space of community and other clubs for Black women such as churches, sororities, and other civic organizations (McDonald, 2007). Essentially, sister circles have been a vital component of community and advocacy for Black women in social and academic ways. As sister circles become more prevalent in the academy, there are two studies that have been used in the higher education research area that use sister circles as methodology that influence my research design and use of sister circle as methodology.

In her study, Johnson (2015) explored the relationships of mentorship for Black teachers using sister circle as methodology to further understand school support and culture and credited with naming sister or sista circles as a methodology in academic research. Johnson emphasized the importance for her to use a methodology that was culturally relevant and reflective of her participants. Johnson described sister circles as "simultaneously a qualitative research methodology and support group for examining the lived experiences of Black women [that] moves beyond traditional methodology to include research practices that draw on the wisdom and social relations of Black women transnationally" (p. 43). Essentially, Johnson felt that traditional methodologies were reflective of western, white, patriarchal research that ignored racialized and gendered experiences such as those of Black women.

In her research and introduction of sister circles, Johnson (2015) centered concepts that are essential to understanding Black women's essence and communication patterns to emphasize that sister circles are not merely a Black women's version of focus groups though sister circles may have similar components of other qualitative research methods. Uplifting spaces for Black women to share our stories add to the literature and create more opportunities for our voices to be shared as participants may be more inclined to open in environments that feel natural to our identities. Based on feedback from participants, Johnson stated:

> I recommend that these studies be conducted using culturally relevant methodologies. Culturally relevant methodologies incorporate the culture of the participants in the research design. The researcher integrates methods that honor the participants' social and cultural ways of being and doing. For qualitative researchers examining the lived experiences of Black women, I recommend *sista circle* methodology as a way to both study and support Black women. (p. 91)

These spaces are vital so that Black women do not feel used or tokenized in the research process. Similarly, Collier (2017) who also used to examine the experiences of Black women in doctoral programs at predominantly white institutions found value in using this methodology. Collier said:

> Participants in this study experienced sista circles as "organic" spaces where they could connect with other similarly situated Black women…, be affirmed in their experiences…, be vulnerable in their discussions related to their experiences in doctoral study and learn more about how other similarly situated Black women experience doctoral programs… (p. 68)

Colliers' findings were consistent with Jackson's work as well as reflective of the work of Black women telling their own narratives (Collins, 2000). Collier (2017) supported the need for spaces

for Black women as articulated their "need space, in community, away from the White and male gaze" (p. 72). Collier's findings further support the use of sister circles as the methodology for this study as culturally relevant, necessary, and an opportunity to contribute to the field of Curriculum Studies.

Research Design

The goal of this research was for participants to articulate our experiences in learning spaces and to reimagine learning spaces with their needs in mind. As aforementioned, the three research questions to guide this inquiry were:

1. How do Black women define their identities?

2. How do Black women describe their current learning spaces?

3. What type of learning spaces do Black women identify as beneficial for their needs?

Participant Recruitment and Selection

The criteria for participation are as follows:

1. Participants must self-identify as a Black woman.

2. Participants must be between the ages of 29 - 42 years old.

3. Participants must have some experience in historically white learning spaces in the United States at least 3 years.

These criteria are necessary to ensure that the target demographics of the study are met. The age range was an important aspect of the study to eliminate the potential for power dynamics and misunderstandings between different generations of Black women. This study geographically highlighted the Southern region of the United States due to more prevalent struggles with race and gender in this area. Participants were recruited through emails to my own personal network as well

as social media posts. From the recruitment process, five to seven participants were chosen to participate in two sister circles.

The first sister circle focused on rapport building and discussing their experiences in learning spaces. The second sister circle focused on reimagined learning spaces for women. It was important to create opportunities for the participants to establish rapport and trust with one another and with me as the researcher. To do so, I created a GroupMe chat group that was be used to communicate information about the sister circles and for participants to communicate with each other. Using GroupMe allowed the participants to use pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes.

Once the participants were identified, they were contacted via email to confirm their participation and share the details of the study. Participants were asked to view the recording of the Verzuz musical battle between Erykah Badu and Jill Scott that initially aired on Instagram in May 2020 during the COVID-19 shutdowns. Verzuz musical battles were created as virtual spaces where artists and fans could still connect and celebrate music. Erykah Badu and Jill Scott were the first Black woman pair to be showcased at the time, and their segment yielded the highest ratings. Both Badu and Scott are well-known for songs that uplift and embody the experiences of Black women as well as elements of Afrofuturism. According to an Essence magazine article, the battle, which was really a celebration of Black women, had a significant impact on Black women and allowed Black women to have a space to connect with each other in a variety of virtual platforms (McKenzie, 2020). The ability to create community using technology was vital for so many people, me included, particularly during the COVID-19 lockdown. As such including this as a precursor to the sister circle research process was imperative to capturing the elements of community espoused in the conceptual framework as well as it was an opportunity to consider the ways in

which technology impacts learning environments for Black women. Additionally, as Afrofuturism is still a new concept, this is an opportunity to introduce the participants to this concept.

Facilitating the Sister Circles

During the sister circles, participants were assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality and anonymity purposes. The sister circles were facilitated via Zoom to allow participants across the United States to be participants and to aid in recording the sessions. Prior to the initial session, participants received informed consent waivers to sign, which gave permission for the sessions to be recorded. As aforementioned, the first sister circle focused on rapport building and discussing our experiences in learning spaces. The second sister circle focused on reimagined learning spaces for women.

As a reflection of the methodology, I participated in the sister circles as a researcher and participant as a means of building trust and community with each participant. As such, it was important for me as a researcher to be mindful of my dual role, to avoid dominating the conversation, and have appropriate moments of self-disclosure. At the conclusion of the sister circles, the transcription process for data analysis began.

Data Analysis

The process of collecting and analyzing data is integral to contributing to field of Curriculum Studies and to contributing additional research that centers the experiences of Black women. As such, it is important to use methods that promote understanding the meaning of these experiences in ways that can be shared by the researcher and understood by other scholars and practitioners. Saldaña (2011) stated, "Unlike quantitative research, with its statistical formulas and established hypothesis-testing protocols, qualitative research has no standardized methods of data

analysis" (p. 93). As such, it is important to highlight the methods used to collect and analysis data to ensure research validity.

In qualitative research, it is necessary to focus on all aspects of interactions and engagement to understand phenomena such as how language is used, non-verbal communication, body language, and the environment at large (Saldaña, 2011). In sum, it is not enough to only listen to the words the participants are saying; instead, the experience must be used in the analysis. With this in mind, in vivo coding was used to analyze the sister circle transcripts and identify themes from the sister circles. Rather than creating codes before reviewing the transcriptions, codes were created as I reviewed the transcripts to help understand the sister circles (see Saldaña, 2011). Once the codes were assigned, I reviewed and categorized the themes to help identify patterns and connections reflected in the research question and in line with the conceptual framework. At the conclusion of the analysis process, I shared the findings with the participants to ensure the information that was captured accurately as a means of ensuring creditability and trustworthiness. Additionally, checking in and following up with the participants, the data were compiled and written to discuss and summarize the themes, findings, and implications for the field of Curriculum Studies. Ultimately, as the researcher, I constantly ensured that the quality and credibility of the qualitative study was met through making sure the methods are connected to the conceptual framework and that all ethical guidelines are followed to protect the participants.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

As a methodology, sister circles are new to the field of Curriculum Studies, yet it can be instrumental in adding to the scholarship about Black women's experiences in learning spaces. It is important to understand that while similar to focus groups, sister circles are different particularly

as it relates to the role of the researcher in the data collection process. Given the nature of the study and my positionality, with both centering Black women, sister circle is the appropriate methodology for this study. Ultimately, this study adds to the field of Curriculum Studies through exploring curriculum as a racialized and gendered text and using the critical geography of space and place that provides a reflection of Black women's intersectionality. It is necessary to continue to add the voices and perspectives of Black women to Curriculum Studies as a means of creating spaces for ourselves.

CHAPTER 4

DATA REPRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

"I mean, yeah, it's heavy. It's a heavy burden to carry, but they are doing it, ladies."

-Patricia, Research Participant

This chapter is a presentation of the data collected in this study and of the codes that emerged from the data collection and analysis process. As aforementioned, despite our academic achievements, Black women often struggle to have spaces that reflect our needs in learning spaces. Using a conceptual framework of Black Feminist Thought, critical geography, and Afrofuturism, the goal of this study was to understand Black women's experiences in predominantly white learning spaces and our needs in re-imagined learning spaces. The three research questions that guided this qualitative inquiry were:

1. How do Black women define our identities?

2. How do Black women describe our current learning spaces in predominantly white, patriarchal environments?

3. What do Black women describe as aspects of reimagined learning spaces?

In this chapter, there will be a discussion of the participants in the study, the data collection and analysis processes and the emergent themes from the research study.

Participants

Sixteen individuals completed the initial screening questionnaire and were contacted for one-on-one interviews. Eight participants replied to the email invitation to the one-on-one interviews. Seven individuals completed the one-on-one interviews. All seven participants agreed to participate in the sister circles, making a total of eight participants including the researcher as a participant (Collier, 2017). The graphic below depicts the data collection and analysis process.

Figure 2

Data Collection and Analysis Process

Data analyzed from 1:1 interviews for sister circle protocol	→	Send Sister circle protocol to IRB for approval	→	Schedule sister circles one and two	→	Data analysis from sister circles	→	Share findings with participants
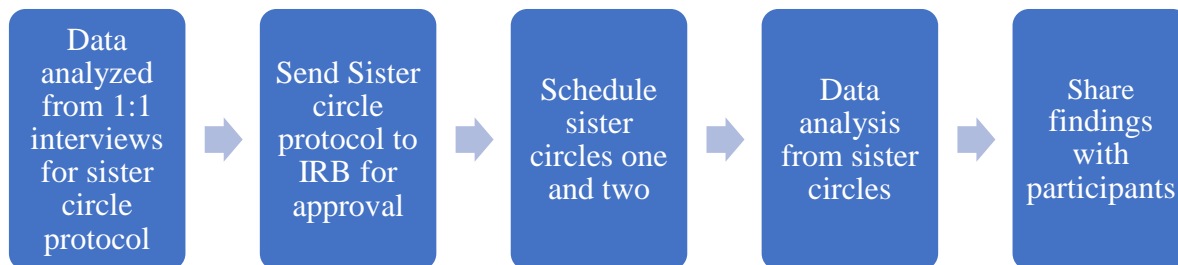
Takeshia (no pseudonym used) is 35-year-old diversity, equity, and inclusion practitioner and the researcher in this study.

Sydney (pseudonym) is a 29-year-old queer woman higher education professional who enjoys anime, cooking, and has recently started writing again to practice better self-care.

Ty (pseudonym) is a 29-year-old queer woman who is currently pursuing a master's degree in clinical mental health. Ty has a twin sister.

Janelle (pseudonym) is a 39-year-old self-described Southern belle who is an accountant in corporate America.

Patricia (pseudonym) is a 37-year-old physician who also hold a Doctor of Philosophy in nephrology and is completing a fellowship at an elite teaching hospital in the New England region of the United States. She is from a small town in the South. Patricia is married to a white man and enjoys anime.

Sandra (pseudonym) is 31-year-old higher education professional who is also doctoral student. Sandra has a partner who is a white male.

Mack (pseudonym) is a 31-year-old mental health counselor who attended private, predominantly white schools. In this phase of life, she is intentionally seeking out relationships with other Black women as a source of community.

Melissa (pseudonym) is a 35-year-old newlywed, Peace Corps alum, and doctoral student in public health exploring sexuality and pleasure in cisgender Black women.

Both Mack and Sandra chose their pseudonyms. Sandra chose her pseudonym in honor of a family member. The other participants were assigned pseudonyms by me that referenced Black women scholars and performing artists whose work holds relevance for this study. Table 1 summarizes demographic information about the participants.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Age	Geographical location	Educational background
Takeshia	35	U.S. – South	Mostly PWI
Sydney	29	U.S. – South	Mostly PWI
Ty	29	U.S. – South	predominantly African American
Janelle	39	US – South and Midwest	Mostly PWI
Patricia	37	U.S. – South and Northeast	Mixed
Sandra	31	U.S. – South	Mostly PWI
Mack	29	U.S. – South	All PWI
Melissa	35	U.S. – South	Mostly PWI

One-on-One Interviews

The purpose of the one-on-one interviews was to collect biographical data from the participants, ensure the participants met the qualifications of the study, and to identify themes for the two sister circles. Participants for the interviews were selected based upon the responses to the screening questionnaire. Participants were asked 12 questions to help me understand the

following: (a) how Black women see ourselves in historically white learning spaces, (b) how

Black women have made meaning in learning spaces and what meaning has been created, and (c)

to explore Black women's thoughts about their needs in re-imagined learning spaces. Each

interview was scheduled for 1 hour. Table 2 displays the 12 questions along with their

connections to the conceptual framework and rationale for relevance to the study.

Table 2

Connections to the Conceptual Framework and Relevance

Conceptual framing	Question	Rationale
Identity as Black woman – Black Feminist Thought	1. Tell me about yourself. As a Black woman, how do you describe yourself? 2. Describe your formal and informal learning spaces? What did you learn there and how did they make you feel physically and psychologically? 3. What impacts did your learning environment have on your identity development and how you see yourself?	How Black women see ourselves in PW learning spaces
Spatial meaning-making – critical geography	4. How did you make meaning in your learning spaces? 5. How many PW spaces did you experience? 6. What positive experiences did you have in PW learning spaces? 7. What negative experiences did you have in PW learning spaces?	How Black women have made meaning in learning spaces and what meaning has been created. What meaning/experiences are important for Black women
Creating new spaces with technology – Afrofuturism	8. What do you think Black women need in our learning spaces to feel supported academically as well as physically and psychologically safe?	Exploring Black women's thoughts about our needs in re-imaging spaces

9. Can you think of any existing spaces that have been created by Black women for Black women?

10. How do you think spaces created for Black women will impact how they see themselves?

11. What positive influences do you think technology has on learning spaces for Black women?

12.What negative influences do you think technology has on learning spaces for Black women?

Responses to One-on-One Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself. As a Black woman, how do you describe yourself?

The purpose of this question was to learn more about the participants and to begin to understand how they saw themselves in the world. Most of the participants described themselves by identifying their career fields and titles and educational background. A few participants described themselves by discussing their hobbies and interests outside of work and how they care for themselves. Sydney shared:

Well, I am 29 professional working in higher education. I actually work at…I actually work at the school that I received both my undergrad and my masters in.. But I love, you know, Disney, I'm I like to become with a big little kid. I love all things, Disney, I love all things, marvel and Star Wars all, all of that. That's my thing. But I love poetry so rest in peace to the late and great, Toni Morrison and Maya Angelo, you know, just and..and recently bell hooks. Just like yeah, that's me right. Oh! But with all of that, I… you know, love binge watching shows. Lately I'm actually ironically, this is actually good space and time for me,

because I've actually, I've been in this what I guess you call a… a journey, a really, really big journey of like rediscovering like who I am and what's you know, in my truth, and everything so #therapy is important and what not. But with all that, yeah, except that I work in an institution of higher learning. I…I'm in charge of their peer education program. So I actually supervise student leaders. I've actually in April we'll make a year since I've been in that role. But prior to that I worked in academic advising. So I've been in the higher education world, including undergraduate from undergrad to now for basically 10 years in some shape, form, or fashion. (one-on-one interview)

Based upon their responses, it was assumed that these Black women were proud of their achievements and struggled to find hobbies and interests outside of education and work. Geographically, all the participants experienced most of their P – 12 formal learning spaces in the Southeastern United States. Connected to the relationships between geography and identity, Sandra said:

Okay, so telling about myself, I was born in upstate New York, but I grew up in Georgia, so I identify a lot of my personality with features of being, I think Black in the South, but like a lot of people who live in the South all of my family went to the North at a certain point in American history, and that's where I was born, and we're actually all of my family is except my. my sister and myself and my mother. As a Black woman I'm trying to think of how I specifically identify myself. I thought, there's been a lot of growth, and how I see myself in my Blackness since kind of like college till now, maybe even before college. But I see it most specifically. I'm in college, but I think I'm very proud of my Blackness. I try to forefront my Blackness in all of my, my work and my interactions. (one-on-one interview)

This comment highlights the connection of geographic and identity in the ways in which this participant understands her identity.

2. Describe your formal and informal learning spaces? What did you learn there and how did they make you feel physically and psychologically?

In response to this question, participants shared how their identity as Black women were impacted by their learning spaces. Most of the participants discussed experiencing challenges or microaggressions in learning environments and being oblivious to those experiences because of support they had in other spaces and places such as home, church, or an extracurricular activity. The participants shared that they became aware of the microaggressions and their environments later in their formal educational journey particularly in college and graduate programs. Sandra shared,

> *I knew it, but it's very strange. I didn't have any of the discomfort, or I think, awareness around what race meant in my everyday life, until, honestly, the end of college going into grad school. Before that I knew I was Black, but like if you had said hmmm Sandra, have you ever experienced, any racism I'd be like No, not really. And then I look back now, and I'm like, Yeah, all the time, like all these microaggressions were happening, and I never, I wouldn't [have] taken it that way. So obviously, I think a little bit of that is like that period of transition that was like 2014, 2015, 2016, when I was leaving undergrad. Hmm. So the world was different, or more apparently different to me, but I think there was also, like I studied sociology and undergrad. So I think there became this academic understanding of racism that helped me like understand it in my everyday life, and for me and my brain things when they're presented academically, it makes sense, in like every portion of my life or things when they're not presenting academically I feel like I get like stuck in them like.*

But if I'm taught something, in a lecture, and then have a book to read, or something I'm like, Oh, I get this, and this is how it appears everywhere. Yeah…But when it just kind of is passive, I don't it doesn't make the same sense to me. (one-on-one interview)

Related to this, Patricia said,

Oh, yeah, definitely, subtle racism, microaggressions. It's, it's never really out there. Maybe up here, too. It's never macro presence is always micro. Yeah. And I don't know if it's because it could be being Black could be being one a woman. Could it be like looking younger? But you know it's always something like you don't expect you to know the answer, and or they don't expect you to know how to take care of a patient, and then you'll sit there and like run circles around them, and the patient comes out looking great and you're Like this. This is, I do this all day, and so things like that I love it. You know you know not, not talking to you, but talking to your male, counterpart type of thing, you know. That's like the medic student. He has no clue. What's going on and you're sitting there getting all the orders through, Hm, m…A, B, C, D…. and get back to me. So things like that so…Hmm. So kinda just like dismissing your credentials. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah… it's probably been more so, like, coursework, Medical, Medical School Residency where I experience microaggressions. Okay. Yeah, even in fellowship. In high school and undergraduate, I know, like I mean, I felt like everybody was pretty equal, especially in the Science Department. (one-on-on interview)

Perhaps microaggressions were a normalized part of the participants' learning experiences that they did not acknowledge until they were older and more aware of language to describe it. Participants shared a variety of coping skills to these microaggressive environments from ignoring and avoidance, to silence and withdrawal, and some resistance in the form of speaking out or

refusing to participant in assignment. One participant shared a time when a history instructor facilitated a debate and asked the participant to defend enslavement. The participant shared that as the only Black student in the class and one of few in the entire school with the other Black students being her siblings that she did not participate in the assignment. Some participants shared that a mentor in the form of a teacher who poured into them or pulled them aside to give extra words of support and encouragement. Some participants shared that their home environment had a strong influence on their learning experiences. One participant, Sandra, shared that her parents' expectations for her to succeed and not fulfill negative stereotypical behavior typically associated with Black women was both a driving force and a burden. Based upon these comments, it was evident that support from family members and professionals in learning spaces was important in the ways in which the participants experienced learning.

Participants also articulated the complexities of navigating informal and formal spaces. Formal spaces often require Black women to wear masks and shift their behaviors to fit in predominantly white spaces whereas informal space require little to no shape shifting. Patricia stated,

> *Probably just 2…2 different worlds, 2 different worlds. I think that's the best way to put it. Yeah, you…you I don't know. I guess it's almost like you're…you're, you're an actor. In in the formal spaces. You're not really…You can't really say, do all the things that a White person could say to do so. I think that's when it kind of taught me. You either, either have to be the best. If you are the best, they're not gonna like you, and you must be able to handle that appropriately. And you also have to know when to pretend not to be the best if it's gonna get you ahead in the long run.* (one-on-one interview)

Participants agreed and shared that this shifting, which was comparable to DuBois' notion of double consciousness was exhausting and tiring, yet a necessary part of the game if they wanted to be successful.

All participants expressed that the pressure to be twice as good and to work harder was heavy and impacted their mental health through anxiety and depression. Additionally, the support to navigate challenges were different depending upon family background, socioeconomic status, religion, and community support. One participant talked about how dealing with anxiety and depression was not supported by her family when she was younger as they believed she should just pray it away and develop skills to navigate challenging environments.

Patricia shared,

> *Oh, I have bad anxiety and depression, I see a counselor as well, it's better now, but I've had, had it since I was a child. And my parents didn't really believe I had it, which is some other stuff. But you know they were like, you know, religion with cure everything. But you know it's, it's better now. But I definitely have a counselor. I am on [redacted]. I have to do mindfulness, and I have to kind of like, be able to tell myself this isn't me, and this is like the part I need to play to get to where I want to go*. (one-on-one interview)

As an adult, she sought help through medication and a therapist to help develop better coping skills and practicing intentional self-care. Other participants shared that church was a source of support and encouragement for her. Attending an African Methodist Episcopalian (AME) church, which has deep historical of support and education for Black people, church was a source of support, education about Blackness, and affirming her Black identity.

Melissa stated,

> *...my church is kind of different. Why, speaking to other people, it could be the same. But the people I've spoken with, we did like our Sunday school included writing essays that were like graded on the Sunday School lesson, and that was to like make sure that education and what we're doing we weren't like left behind in some kind of way. So it was very education, based, like really promoting doing well in school like public speaking, and all of that was like, okay, because you're Black. You need to excel at this. So it was done in the church setting to help you in the academic setting, so I never really felt I have, so I didn't really feel out of place in the formal settings. There have been instances where, like they've tried to play me in the formal setting, but I was able to like pick up on it, so it didn't really impact me that much*. (one-on-one interview)

Essentially, the church was a coaching ground to help her perform with less anxiety in predominantly white spaces.

The role of family was highlighted as well. For some participants, success and achievements were driven by family expectations. Patricia shared that she quit medical school because she did not like it and then went on to complete a Ph.D. in nephrology; however, because her parents expected her to become a medical doctor, she went back to medical school and completed the residency process to satisfy them. In contrast, another participant did not have parental support, but found support and inspiration from her twin sister and grandmother. While these family members did not pressure her, they provided solace and encouragement to pursue education.

3. What impacts did your learning environment have on your identity development and how you see yourself?

In response to this question, participants shared what elements of their learning experience were important to them as they learn and make sense of their learning environments. While all the participants shared elements from primary and secondary formal learning spaces, there was consensus amongst their stories that learning experiences after high school years were more meaningful to them as they felt that is when they had more control over the direction of their learning, particularly with selecting a major and choosing courses. Additionally, it appears that the older the participants became, the more conscious and aware they became of their identities as Black women or, for some of the participants, as queer Black women. This awareness has inspired social advocacy and activism as a part of their academic journeys and work lives.

A few participants mentioned the importance of having a support group or friend circle that consists of Black women as a source of inspiration, support, and community. Participants felt that these groups were inspirational in times when formal learning spaces were not supportive of their identities and experiences. These groups were created by those who sought out connection and were not provided or supported by their universities or workspaces. Patricia said, "*I have my husband. I have my [friend] groups, I have my undergrad circles and residency circles, so I have what I need*" (one-on-one interview). These self-selected spaces were impactful to her success.

4. How did you make meaning in your learning spaces?

For this question, I wanted to understand how Black women made meaning in learning spaces and how meaning impacted their experiences. Most of the respondents shared that meaning-making was tied to their ability to choose, as most experienced in their collegiate learning spaced where they had more ability to choose majors and courses. While there were connections among

the responses, I felt it was important to share each participant's response to this question as it is a significant reflection of their individual lived experiences.

Sandra shared,

> *I feel like I'm hot harping on my college experience, but I feel like that's very much when you take control of your own learning in a real way, because you're making like you know, and high school. You get a little bit of choice about what you may be, maybe an elective, but not really. And so I think, being able to study things that are personalized like, like even when I said, I want to be history major, and then I was like, Oh, I don't think I want the history teacher anymore. And I kind of just took a ton of classes to find something that peaked my interest, and that was sociology. Yeah. And so, like personalizing and relating things, and then I feel the thing that motivated me through sociology, public admin. And then my education degree I've been doing it was like activism, like, I link those back to activism in my head like what it? How is that gonna actively help me like knocked down [and] deal with systems that I don't think are fair? And like, so I feel like being able to do something, learn something even if it's in theory but then be able to use that to do work that I think is important. That feels personal to me, because I feel like, even in admissions which can get Black and White…That work felt feels still actually very important to me. So yeah, and I mean, it's about access. And I, I was like, and to me it was all about creating access, through whatever means I could for whoever I can. So, yeah, yeah, yeah, so that meaning came from this notion of how is this important to me? And then how does it impact me? Shifting structures to be more accessible.* (one-on-one interview)

In addition to choice, motivation through personal goals and achievement contributes to meaning-making as well. Janelle stated,

It goes back to just having a goal. I knew when I went to get my Bachelor's, I needed to graduate. I had four years to do it. My parents were only going to pay for four years, so it's like if you don't finish then you're on your own. So just I had that goal in mind and I didn't want to be left behind, especially with my friends. I didn't want to be that friend that everyone else graduating and I'm there with the underclassmen so. And then you look at your circle as well, the young ladies I met my freshman year of college, that friendship carried on and we encouraged each other along the way. That was my sister circle. I would say my first, no, middle school, high school, I had a sister circle, but I would say when you actually live on campus and have roommates that bond grows a whole lot deeper than someone you may have grown up with. (one-on-one interview)

There was also motivation from a group of friends along with achieving a goal that is important. Related to the notion of goal attainment, Ty said,

How do I make meaning in my learning spaces…really applying myself and using my resources and not being hard on myself running the appointment of giving myself grace, and like the best, I not put any stress on myself and do not procrastinate. More than anything and when I say applying myself, I know people be like I get things done early, like in the month, advance, or whatever cause. That's just that's just my work at this, regardless like I try to get things done make sure I'm on top of things and stuff like that. But also, like people don't also see the fact that, like I have to go to the writing center like 2, 3, times before I can't turn in the paper. And that's another reason why, like I have to get things done early, so I could get it check[ed] over enough before I, I could turn it in. So just doing like certain things like that. So, to make sure I am getting good grades to make sure I am like getting A's, like when I say I work my ass off for every grade. Everything that I've done,

especially when it comes to college. I work my ass off. It's not like I can procrastinate like that's not even an option in my world. Yeah. I really have to do what I have to do to times 10, just to get. That's just who I am. (one-on-one interview)

Support this, Melissa shared,

I guess I, I can answer that from graduate point of view, like. I just focus on what I'm inspired by, and what I'm motivated with, with my research and that's how I just make meaning of what I'm doing. I do it in that way. I got always just like I know what I want to research. I know what I want to do. I guess [I am inspired by] just seeing other people who are, who have gone before me, who have gone through white spaces and made it out, and then reaching back it's like, okay. You can do it. So just the motivation from others, just seeing other people who have done the work. And on the side. I do a little bit of substituting at the elementary school. and so that kind of motivates me too, because sometimes I will see the students, and I was like, okay, like they're at the beginning stages of where I was one day. These are like the foundation to what they need to get to where they're going. So, it kind of motivates me to like, Go back and reach back as well and just be an example for them. So yeah. (one-on-one interview)

From here it was seen that meaning-making was also inspired through seeing others role model success, particularly in white spaces and being a giving and potentially inspiring others. Supporting the notion of meaning-making from goals and role modeling, Sydney shared,

I would say in, when I was in high school there were relationships I had with a few of my teachers, and their involvement. And, and like their support in college, specifically. Once I got into my major level classes, my professors definitely made it more meaningful because I got to learn. I was able to, I learned about my professors, and who they were as people,

and that made it more…that kind of help remind me that the only difference between my professor and myself was they got years of experience on me. So, they got a family. They have, they have a family, they have like goals, disappointments, failures, all of those bits and pieces, all of those things. (one-on-one interview)

As such, meaning-making through understanding one's lived experiences was important to understanding her own goals and experiences. Another participant shared that her experiences particularly in white spaces impacted the meaning she made the messages she told herself as a result of those experiences. Patricia shared,

In, in the formal spaces, you're not really, you can't really say, do all the things that a White person could say to do so. I think that's when it kind of taught me you either, either have to be the best. You are the best, they're not gonna like you, and you have to be able to handle that appropriately. And you also have to know when to pretend not to be the best if it's gonna get you ahead in the long run. And I guess I always try to say this is, I could be myself here, and I have. I give myself permission to be myself here. That I could be as goofy and as funny, and I can say anything off the wall. And it's, it's okay. It's okay. I can take the mask off for an hour or 2 and have some time to breathe. (one-on-one interview)

From this experience, Patricia shared that the places wherein she could be herself were created outside of formal spaces and were necessary to allow her to navigate white spaces. Learning how they play the game was an important meaning-making experience. For one participant, being reflective on her all of her learning experiences and acknowledging her growth was important to her meaning-making process.

Mack expressed,

> *I think a lot of it is just looking back and, excuse me, appreciating the growth that I did. It would be really easy for me to look back at my college experience, grad school grade school experience, and just pick out all of the ways that I felt let down and felt, I don't know unheard, and all of those things right? But, when I look back at that, look back at it and this is really a conversation that I had with my mom. I think she felt really not great about hearing me, and my siblings talk about like yeah, these are all the terrible things that we experienced, you know, in grade school, right? And like we had a terrible time, which was not the truth, right? Like, we had a wonderful time, right? I made connections with people that I still, I'm really close with. And, and so like speaking with my mom about that right just to give her a little bit more, I guess, understanding. And for her to help us see like, yes, these times are really hard for you. Yes, there were times that really sucked, and like you grew, and you were challenged. And you, you know, made these connections, and so I guess, kind of like shifting my mindset from focusing on all the things that I was lacking. Like, I can acknowledge that right, and I can also appreciate. The good things right that came from those experiences as well.* (one-on-one interview)

Despite the challenging times in difficult environments, it was important for this participant to focus on the positive connections and experiences rather than the negative incidents, which reflects that despite hard times, Black women choose to make best of hard times.

5. How many PWI spaces did you experience?

Nearly all participants except one person said their formal experiences in P-12 occurred in predominantly white spaces. Two participants described learning in private schools and seeing very limited to no Black people or seeing themselves in their curricula.

Mack shared,

> *I think the biggest thing is representation. I didn't realize how important it was until I worked in an elementary school, and well, my hair is natural. I just have it blown out right now. But that part specifically right, like I would have parents who would say to me, like, I love that you wear your hair out in your fro like it makes it so much easier for me like I have a reference point now right? Like when I'm getting my kid ready for school. I can say, like Miss [redacted], like she wears her throw out, you know. Don't you wanna wear your fro like Miss [redacted]? Like it's so big and beautiful, and blah blah blah right? And I didn't even realize because I was just over here doing me. You know, but that goes such a long way, and from an advocacy perspective being in an being an educator, and I feel like this goes, no matter what. Looking back, I wish I had this in my private school too.* (one-on-one interview)

One participant described how her mother sought out the best public schools in the area, which happened to be in more wealthy areas with small numbers of Black students and no Black teachers. Three participants described their learning spaces as mixed environments but expressed limited representation of Black Americans in their curricula. One participant described having a variety of experiences mostly in spaces that centered the Black identity in curricula and community engagement. This participant said these spaces made her feel a sense of community and connection in ways that she did not experience in predominantly white spaces.

A few participants expressed a desire to have an experience that was more reflective of Black culture, particularly at the collegiate level. Melissa said, *"I'm kinda jealous of those who had that HBCU experience. I feel that I missed out on something special."* On the other hand, Patricia mentioned that while these spaces may have been nice for social interaction, the academic

reputation of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) still lags behind that of Ivy league institutions, particularly in medical and science fields. Patricia said, "*While it may have been nice, when it came time for job placement and fellowships that are often composed of white individuals mainly, PWIs schools like Harvard and Duke are perceived to be more rigorous than Spelman and Howard.*" Essentially, there was still a perception about institution type that unfavorably impacts HBCUs.

6. What positive experiences did you have in PWI learning spaces?

In response to this question, participants shared positive experiences they had in PWI learning spaces. The responses to this question were very similar and related to finding community with other Black students amid the PWI spaces as well as mentorship from teachers. Ty credited the relationships she created particularly as a student employee in offices tied to advocacy work as spaces that helped her find community.

Ty shared,

> *I found my home in the offices where I worked, like WGSS (Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies), SSS (TRiO Student Support Services), and OMA (Office of Multicultural Affairs), was really a safe space for me. I was able to help spearhead the work for the Campus Pride Index so that other queer students could have a connection and know the resources the University provided and mentor other first gen [generation] students and Black students like me. That meant a lot especially when a lot of the other spaces on campus treated Black students like shit.* (one-on-one interview)

Additionally, a few participants felt they were not treated differently or even treated more favorably than other students because of their academic ability or even family background. One participant

specifically stated that when her classmates and teachers at her PWI private school learned about her mom's occupation, they were impressed and treated her favorably.

Sydney shared,

> *But like I can distinctly like remember that. And so, with that…keeping that in mind, I learnings learning for in like, when I was in elementary school, you know, my teachers did not treat me differently. But honestly, in reflecting back, I realize that I wasn't treated differently, because I excelled in the classroom. If you talk to any of my elementary school teachers, they will tell you I was a star student. I was kind. I was sweet. I was real, real, real smart, but then, and then combine it with my mother is a pharmacist, and so everybody knew that my mother was a pharmacist. I made that clear. (one-on-one interview)*

Similarly, Mack shared experiences with both of her parents being physicians and more specifically, her mother being the first Black woman physician in their hometown. Because of her parents' achievements, she and her siblings who were the only Black students in their private school were well-known by all the school personnel. Mack stated,

> *Me and my sister and brother's faces were everywhere. Every advertisement, every billboard, and every brochure. And they knew their parents, especially my mama had no issues coming up to the school if they ever had any concerns. She wasn't playing that at all.* (one-on-one interview)

These experiences were positive due to their families' successes.

7. What negative experiences did you have in PWI learning spaces?

In these responses, participants shared their negative experiences in learning spaces. The participants' responses varied from negative to neutral to oblivious to the negative experiences. One participant mostly described her experiences as negative. Ty, who had the least experience in

PWI spaces felt that these spaces lacked the family or community connection in comparison to the spaces she was accustomed to. Additionally, she felt particularly in the collegiate spaces, that PWI spaces were not created to support the success of Black students and students from underrepresented backgrounds at large.

Ty said,

> *These schools really don't give a fuck about us. Like they really don't. They cut funding for offices that support these students. They underfund SSS and they make OMA be the catch all for all the minorities. I've seen book burnings, professors calling people n words, and other students just being problematic all on social media and they, the administration tells us there's nothing they can do. I really don't like how they use in the marketing, but really don't get a shit to listen our complaints. And that's why I just stay to myself and my lil circle.* (one-on-one interview)

Similarly, Janelle shared an interaction with a white peer that she felt was handled improperly. Janelle offered,

> *I did everyone right, by the book. Followed all the steps they told me and had a confirmation for my group's and everything, and because this White group needed space at the last minute after not having followed the protocol and they wanted me to make room him. And I said no*. (one-on-one interview)

Janelle felt that exceptions were being made for the students that would not have been made for her group.

Despite mostly describing her experiences as positive, Sydney recalled having a not so pleasant experience with a fellow student also calling her the N word. Sydney said, *"In elementary school, this kid told me that grandma said he couldn't play with me because I'm Black. I was*

baffled. I was also young and didn't know what to say. That really stuck with me." (one-on-one interview). Sydney ultimately said this experience was impactful yet left her feeling numb. Sandra described a similar experience as neutral and a lack of awareness in her younger years, but because her self-awareness as a Black woman had evolved over time, she understood it more as an adult. Sandra shared, "*As a younger person, I didn't know these negative experiences were microaggressions. Then I when I came to college through my courses and joining a historically white sorority, my eyes became to open to the subtle*" (one-on-one interview). Youth, age, and experiences seem to be common factors in how the participants perceived their environments and their responses to microaggressive behaviors.

8. What do you think Black women need in our learning spaces to feel supported academically as well as physically and psychologically safe?

In response to this question, there was congruency among the participants that representation, specifically seeing Black women in leadership roles and as our peers in learning spaces is helpful for us to feel supported. Sydney shared,

> *I think just being able to have to see what people that look like me in the classroom would have made a difference, because I just feel like they're just certain things that we just do. And we just know, between ourselves, that's just like we got, explained. We're gonna have to explain nothing right? Right from a staff perspective, you know I would*. (one-on-one interview)

The participants felt that though Black women are not monoliths, we have commonalities in our experiences that make our connections feel more natural and require less explanation than when spaces do not have a large amount of Black women. As an extension of representation,

participants shared that they hoped that the Black women would be supportive of each other, show empathy, and assist with networking.

Additionally, participants expressed a need to be in spaces to just be without any expectations of having to outperform others. Patricia said,

> *I think, yeah, I really like the, the spaces for us spaces where we can be ourselves and not have this expectation of being. I think a lot of times like, especially with the Black girl, Magic, and things like that we're expected to be perfect and be stronger and be smarter, and especially if we're in those type of formal spaces you're supposed to be at the top of your game. All the time. That's why you're here. And I think, just being a space where we could just be human. It's okay to be sad. It's okay to fail.* (one-on-one interview)

Essentially, the participants felt that the Black Girl Magic moniker was nice, celebratory, and added more pressure to be superhuman. They really just want to have moments of normalcy.

9. Can you think of any existing spaces that have been created by Black women for Black women?

In response to this question, participants shared spaces that exist for and by Black women. Most of the spaces that were shared were group chats and communities on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Some of these communities are convened around specific topics such as natural hair care, career and professional development, mental health, and gaming.

10. How do you think spaces created for Black women will impact how they see themselves?

In response, to this question, participants shared their perspectives on how technology may impact how Black women see themselves. Overwhelming, the participants mostly saw technology's impact on Black women as positive. There was consensus that technology would

expand the representation of Black women in successful roles and that the message would reach farther spaces.

Ty stated,

> *[Technology can be] Inspiration, encouraging…Giving people the mindset that they can do it too like, regardless of where you, from how many oppressions you have, or like how many obstacles you have to go through, that it is possible, also like how Zoom maneuver and navigate things cause most people don't know they're getting their cell phone so especially when they go to college and not understand, like, it's different past it gets to where you want.* (one-on-one interview)

Essentially, the common themes among the participants were that technology could be helpful in undoing the negative stereotypes of Black women that are often portrayed by the media as well as be a gathering place for community for Black women.

11. What positive influences do you think technology has on learning spaces for Black women?

In response to this question, participants shared their perceptions of the positive impacts of technology for Black women. Like the responses from question 10, there was consensus that technology would be a place of connection and community as well as a tool to combat negative stereotypes.

Mack shared,

> *I think that the to…to do for Black women connect us for sure, also bringing a voice to the mainstream as well, and having certain con, not like these podcast conversations, but like actually having like real deep conversations and addressing things in like letting people know that they're not alone, any such in these situations. And also speaking of about certain things that goes on with in our communities as well, that's usually swept under the rug, or*

kept in the house like, if one person speak up, it it's like has a domino effects of like allowing

other people to speak up and talk about their experience, and how they impacted that I feel

like that kinda also goes into like my generation. (one-on-one interview)

Specifically, as millennials, the participants felt that technology was a connector to family and friends who do not live in the same location. One participant shared that with more people being able to have access to create their own content that technology provides more opportunities for people to be educated and should be less racist, sexist, problematic overall. Sandra said, *"With all these content creators, video makers, our voices are more amplified and people who are not Black women should take it as an opportunity to learn so we they don't have to teach them everything."* (one-on-one interview). More access to create content helps to eliminate gatekeepers and amplify our voices.

12. What negative influences do you think technology has on learning spaces for Black women?

In response to this question, participants shared their perceptions about the negative influences of technology. Most of the participants agreed that users on social media particularly feel that the portrayal of the "highlight reel" could create a lot of comparison challenges among Black women that could lead to competition and perhaps some Black women feeling inadequate as they look at their followers only sharing the happy moments in their lives. Janelle shared,

Particularly with younger people because they have way more social media sites than I did

at their ages, I think technology has made their reality limited because if it isn't on the

Internet it didn't happen. I couldn't imagine the pressure of having my entire life played out

online. I hope they find some boundaries. (one-on-one interview)

Related to this, other participants shared that technology could create more opportunities wherein people isolate themselves. Patricia shared, "*Sometimes, you don't even have to leave your house or place of comfort to interact, which could be good, but I've seen a lack of social skills with people over the years because they are consumed with technology.*" (one-on-one interview). While Sandra was excited about the ability for individuals to create content, she and Melissa were also concerned that the message could be compromised by detractors of individuals who would just continue to misinterpret Black women's experiences.

Meaning-making from One-on-One Interviews

The one-on-one interviews were analyzed, and themes were identified to create prompts to guide the conversations during the sister circles. In looking at the data, it was evident that additional conversations regarding Black women's identity and meaning-making in place and space to think about reimagined learning spaces using technology was a next step in discussing the research questions. Based upon the participants responses, there were elements of Black women's identities as reflective of controlling images and caricatures of Black women that was consistent with the research as well as managing behavior and performance of Black girl magic. Patricia said,

> *I think a lot of times like, especially with the Black girl, Magic, and things like that we're expected to be perfect and be stronger and be smarter, and especially if we're in those type of formal spaces you're supposed to be at the top of your game all the time. That's why you're here. And I think, just being a space where we could just be human. It's okay to be sad. It's okay to fail. I mean, we are magical. Yes, it's okay. You know this is the come down and be human for a couple of minutes, and then go back up*. (One-on-one interview)

This sentiment reflects the weight and responsibility that the participants feel as Black women. Though we are not monoliths, I felt that the similarities in the responses required further exploration to understand how Black women see ourselves. Additionally, their responses reflected the importance of community support through role modeling, mentorship, kinship, friendships, and allyship, particularly in navigating negative experiences in predominantly white spaces. Sandra shared,

> *I didn't feel that I never felt in those moments that, like people like my teachers weren't rooting for me and that they didn't want the best for me, especially like K through 12, yeah, even, even in calls. But in those formal places like, I always felt like professors wanted me to do my best like I even had this memory of like in high school. I had this AP US History teacher. I love history, I loved it, and even more, I was going to be a history major and remember we got to like the AP US Exam. And I remember just being like, I'm not studying for this I don't wanna do it like I'll take it in college. Who cares? I like that class, anyway, to my teacher is still Facebook friends with him, and very interesting political opinions that he has, in my opinion now, but he like pulled me aside and was like sharing, and I haven't even said that to him. I was just thinking it, and he was like, I just want you to know, I really believe in you. And I know you're gonna like, kill this exam like you're so smart blah blah blah and like was really like in like you could have done that to every single student. I wouldn't have known. But I was like, Oh, he really wants me to do well, I'm better. I'm about to go do well, let me not let him down, you know, so I never felt like teachers didn't want the best for me, in those formal spaces.* (one-on-one interview)

This statement is one example of the impact of meaning-making in relationships on Black women's experiences. As such it was determined that the first sister circle should expand on identity

exploration and community and relations needs and support. For the second sister circle, the theme of meaning-making in places and spaces and further understanding of Black women's needs in reimagined learning spaces was necessary. Participants began to articulate their experiences and needs in informal spaces, but there appeared to be some ambiguity about the spaces and places. For example, some saw place as a physical location and for others, spaces for Black women exist among individuals who make us feel comfortable. There was agreement that spaces for Black women's needs is necessary. Mack stated,

> *After moving to this new city cause I left once [redacted] because there wasn't enough [Black] people there, and I wanted to be around more like Black professionals so I've kind of been going out of my way to make connections with people whether they're private practice people or just like Black people that I met on bumble bff! Right, like, I'm trying really hard to establish connections with people who look like me. So, I guess I'm kind of like creating that community for myself on my own. But yeah, there's also the I think it's called the Love Land Foundation, or the Love. I think it's lovely, and but it's in New York, but they post a lot of really amazing resources for Black people. I think it's Black women specifically, yes, yeah. So those are some things that I use, and I'm trying really hard to also increase my like Black authors, and not just like here's the Black struggle, but like Black authors who talk about falling in love, and who tell stories about medieval times, and all, all of that just trying to really like lean into that and kind of put my money where my mouth is*. (one-on-one interview)

This response reflected the need to further allow time to unpack and explore what Black women need in reimagined spaces. Connected to this thought, the second sister circle would also think

about technology use as convening spaces for Black women the ways that they are currently using technology.

Ty stated,

> *Well, positive things. I think that the to, to do for Black women connect us for sure, also bringing a voice to the mainstream as well, and having certain convos, not like these podcast conversations, but like actually having like real deep conversations and addressing things in like letting people know that they're not alone any such in these situations. And also speaking of about certain things that goes on with in our communities as well, that's usually swept under the rug, or kept in the house like, if one person speaks up, it, it's like has a domino effect of like allowing other people to speak up and talk about their experiences, and how they impacted that. I feel like that kinda also goes into like my generation, Millennials. How also, how like we're all speaking up and talking about our experience of growing up a certain household, and how we prioritize our mental health as well I don't know. Like mental health is like a trend right now, but like it's really like, we're not tolerating certain things like it's not no old family is family, for majority of us. I'm calling out on it, or I'm gonna remove myself. I'm gonna set boundaries. I'm not gonna not say certain things because you are a family member, or because I know you for so many years and stuff like that. So like, I feel like technology when it comes to like apps or a support group, or certain things like that is giving people safe spaces, a connection and a voice, and also an opportunity to be heard, and also to relate and also normalize things for Black people, especially Black women in these spaces, as well.* (one-on-one interview)

This response is an example of how Black women are currently using technology and the need to further understand technology's role in helping Black women reimagine spaces with our needs in

mind. Table 3 depicts the ways in which I began making meaning and understanding the ideas from the one-on-one interviews to create prompts for the two sister circles.

Table 3

Sister Circles' Ideas

Black women's identity	Experiences learning spaces	Potential needs in new spaces
Strong	Positive	Support for mental health
Hard working	Some mentorship and support	Spaces to be authentically ourselves –
Smart	Outperforming people	and not always have to wear the
Academic achievement – the picture of	Given opportunities, particularly in	mask
success	White spaces where there are few	Support – mentorship, allyship,
Beautiful	Black women	friendship
We are trendsetters	Treated well when they are the "right	Representation and role modeling from
Doesn't always fit in spaces –	type of Black – wealth and good	other Black women
shapeshifters	behavior	Ability to make decisions about what is
Always making it happen	More choice in collegiate spaces than in	learned
	P-12	
	Negative	
	Lack of representation from other Black	
	women	
	Microaggressions	
	Lack of family support	
	Harmful mental health experiences	
	resulting in anxiety and depression	
	Feeling like you always have to be on	
	Lack of or limited resources	

Sister Circle Protocols

Concepts identified from the individual interviews were used to create prompts for the sister circles and included in an amended institutional review board (IRB) application for approval. Once IRB approval was obtained, the participants were contacted regarding the logistics for the two sister circles. For the first sister circle the participants were Sydney, Sandra, Patricia, Mack, Ty, and me. Janelle and Melissa were unable to attend due to prior engagements. For the second sister circle, the participants were Sydney, Sandra, Patricia, Mack, Ty, Janelle, Melissa, and me. Additionally, once participants agreed to continue in the study, they were invited to join a GroupMe as a means of facilitating connection and rapport building prior to and throughout the remainder of the research experience and to share information relating to the sister circles. Each sister circle

was scheduled for 2 hours, and additional time was added as at the conclusion of the sessions the participants were still conversing with each other and asking questions.

Sister Circle One: Black Women's Identity: Controlling Images and Black Girl Magic

In this sister circle on March 11, 2023, the goal was for participants to delve further into how Black women see ourselves and the ways in which we make meaning about our identities. Three prompts and questions were used to guide sister circle one, and they were:

1. Being a Black woman means_____.

2. Being a Black woman feels _____.

3. What Black women inspire you and why?

Prior to the prompts, the informed consent document was reviewed, and participants were given opportunities to share any community rules for the sister circle. The participants decided on respecting each other's voices and to not interrupt or speak over one another when sharing responses. Participants were then asked to introduce ourselves.

The first prompt was "Being a Black woman means…" as an open-ended prompt for participants to share our ideas on what it means to be a Black woman. The responses were melancholy, with an acknowledgement of being overworked while also often experiencing happiness and sadness simultaneously. The participants shared:

Ty stated, "*What automatically means in my head was being strong for everybody else, and also have to take care of yourself.*" (sister circle 1)

Sydney shared,

> *Yeah, piggybacking from Ty, I would add that I feel like being a Black woman right now means you can do. You can put in the work. You can have the ideas, you can have, the innovation and everything. And but because you are a Black woman you won't. Get the*

credit. You won't, get the acknowledgment. You won't get the, the flowers. You won't get the praise. That's kind of what comes to mind right now. (sister circle 1)

Sandra stated,

I was going back and forth in my head of what I think it means, but what I want it to mean, and what I think it means is not like. I wish you meant something else, especially when I think about like professional and in life. But the word that came ahead is also like having to be a shapeshifter and having to fill the void in the gap constantly, and like not really having the time to just be, but having to like step into rules that maybe you didn't need to. (sister circle 1)

Takeshia disclosed,

It's interesting that you said that about this, what you want it to be what it is. Because, as I was talking, I was like, I want this to be positive, and I don't want to be the negative one. But sometimes, being a Black woman, is happy like right. Now you have all this micro magic, and I think of what's sis' name from how to how to get away with murder. I, no, not her. Oh, Lord! She's winning and Beyonce, and all of these people, and even like regular Black women just being celebrated more. But then you think of like real, regular folks like kind of like, what? What is it? She said, Like you doing all the work and you meeting all the requirements and checking the boxes. And people are like, okay. So, it's like there are high moments of celebration. But then there are moments where it's just like you're outperforming. We're outperforming everybody else, and everybody just acts like it's a, a regular task. (sister circle 1)

Patricia stated,

I was gonna say, at least for me. You said it perfectly. But being a Black woman is like being in this constant dual state of being joyful and sadness. Because they have all these opportunities in front of us. We're doing well. It's Black women. But then, like Sandra says it feels like you have to be a shape shifter like Sydney said. You're doing all the work, and then we're getting all the credit. and it's like you feel happy and glad that you're pushing on for the movement and the ancestors. But then a part of you just feel sad and tired looking at the reality in front of you all the time. (sister circle 1)

Mack stated,

I was the word that came to mind for me was like everything right. I'm like we are everything and but I, I during Black History month I, I've made a point with my like Black clients to talk about like being Black, and what your favorite part of being Black is, and all this stuff. And I was talking with the client that's in high school, a girl. And she said, I, I, what I love most about being a Black woman is that like we're better than everybody else, and that's like elaborate. But basically what she meant is which is, which was kind of sad thinking about it. She was like, you know. The bar is so low for us, so that everything that we do is like a big deal to certain people right like certain people right She was like I, if I, you know I don't know, shoot a ball and basketball. Everybody is like. you know, like I walk into the room, and people are like actually just existing right because they have these like tropes and stereotypes of like what we're like. We're supposed to walk into the room and be like, hey, everybody like I'm here and blah blah blah right, and when we don't meet that expectation that they have. It's kind of like a let down right, or I don't. I don't really know if I'm explaining it Well, but it. It's interesting in that way of people want Black women to

exist in a certain way, and when we don't exist in that way, like, if we do the things that

they want us to do, and we shut and jive, and we're like fabulous, and they can take our

language and do all these things right then we're great. But if we do anything other than

that. then it's just like oh, you know, slipped under the rug like I were saying, we'll take

that idea. But, like you didn't really, you know, we don't really want you to do it. So, we,

you know sweep that away because you didn't do it in the way that we needed you to do. If

that makes sense. (sister circle 1)

Ultimately, the participants' responses showed Black women's experiences are steeped in this notion that there is one set of expectations for others and a different set for Black women; yet, Black women are held accountable for both sets of expectations, which ultimately creates unfair environments where we are underpraised and unrecognized. Our experiences could also be seen through lenses of opportunities, success, and burnout, as reflected in the simultaneous expression of elation and exhaustion. There was a collective, non-verbal reaction in this space with head nods appearing to support this notion of being all the things for everyone along with a sense of exhaustion. The head nods appeared to be slow and affirmative, showing that the participants agreed with the emotions being shared. Additionally, these comments support those of the other participants particularly highlighting the lack of recognition Black women experience for their contributions.

Mack shared an example related to who Black women are expected to be verses who we really are and the expectations to shapeshift. Mack stated,

It's interesting in that way of people want black women to exist in a certain way, and when

we don't exist in that way, like, if we do the things that they want us to do, and we shuck

and jive, and we're like fabulous, and they can take our language and do all these things

right then we're great. But if we do anything other than that. then it's just like oh. you know,

slipped under the rug like I were saying, we'll take that idea. But, like you didn't really, you

know, we don't really want you to do it. So, we, you know. (sister circle 1)

In some ways, the participants acknowledged that for Black women to be everything we want to

be for ourselves, embracing all the tropes and stereotypes and owning them is necessary. There

was consensus among the group that Black women should embrace all our stereotypes from the

City Girls to the smart, educated girls.

The second prompt was "Being a Black women feels…" as a means of furthering our

understanding of our identities through an emotional or psychological perspective. Participants

shared feelings using words and phrases such as draining, a conscious state of excitement and

anger at the same time, privileged. The responses followed a similar cadence from prompt one,

whereas participants acknowledged a sense of pride, but also a sense of heaviness and sadness

related to their identities and experiences as Black women.

Mack shared,

The first word that came to mind for me was draining. But then I feel very privileged to be

a Black woman in a lot of ways. but it is very draining it doesn't Take lot, and it sometimes

it's a really intense drain, and sometimes it's just like you know. I was in the staff meeting

on Monday, and we primarily meet virtually. But it was the first time that in a while that

we all met in person, and I was like looking around the room. It was like I'm the only [n

word] in this room like, you know, and I just was like. You know, and I know that we're in

the process of hiring another person, and she, my boss, is like going through, you know,

like these are the people that I've interviewed and like. This is what I thought about them,

and blah blah, blah! And in my head. I'm like, I wanted to be like. Are you gonna hire

anybody that's like not like, you know. I just like wanted to ask that. But then I felt like

annoyed that I had to be the one to ask that. (sister circle 1)

While participants were excited to be invited into rooms and spaces to share our experiences particularly because we worked hard to be there, there is often pressure in being there, making these experiences unpleasant and stressful. Supporting this, I shared,

I hear you, Mack. I think sometimes it's like, yeah, these accomplishments are wonderful.

It's great to be at the table, and then it's exhausting, because you're only one at the table,

right? And you don't know if you're going to be ignored. Sometimes you're tired of being

the one that always has to speak up. Sometimes you're tired of being the one that's the one

in all the spaces. (sister circle 1)

Essentially, despite being invited to or earning an invitation to the room, it is not always clear how supportive those environments will be for Black women. There was excitement shared in spaces wherein success and achievement were recognized and celebrated particularly by other Black people.

Patricia said,

I would say powerful when you can get past, like all the icky stuff and bad stuff if you're in

a room, and you're the single Black woman, and everybody's listening to you, and you're

like. Got their attention and you're like I know what I'm talking about. This is what we're

going to do. This is what's going to happen. I think I get that a lot. Dialysis is one of my

favorite rotations. You're managing all these complicated patients, and the nurses is like

well, Patricia's here. She's got it. This patient is going to be okay. They'll page me. Say,

can you come and talk to his patients family. The patient family usually is person of color,

and they'll see me, and I'll be like this is what we're gonna do. This is gonna happen. I'll

call the primary team as they come down and fix your patient. It's handled. and you just

know you got it. (sister circle 1)

From this experience, the display of one's knowledge and achievements, particularly in a profession and role that is not occupied by Black women made this participant feel seen and as if all the struggles were worth it for moments like this. As this was shared during the sister circle, her story was celebrated with affirming words and non-verbal responses such as head nods and finger snaps to support Patricia's feeling powerful in this moment.

The third prompt asked the participants to share Black women who inspire us and why as a means of understanding how Black women see ourselves and the women who influence these images and perspectives. Before this question was asked, participants discussed individuals such as Jill Scott and Dana Owens, also known as Queen Latifah. I shared,

So, I told you all last week in the chat that I went to see Jill Scott [in concert]. It was a

great time like Jill talked about love. She talked about sex, and I just felt liberated like sure

there are other people in the room, but I went with other Black women, and it just felt like

damn this is good. (sister circle 1)

Seeing Black women be our authentic selves in public spaces without shame is a very positive experience that Jill Scott exudes through her work, hence the inspiration. Connected to this, Sydney exclaimed,

Can we talk about [it]? Can we talk about Dana Owens Aka Queen Latifah? That woman

has been in the scene for decades, and not once will you catch a strand of hair out of place,

even with her hair even when even when her hair is supposed to be in a messy bun. But she

still does not miss… queen, and She was like my favorite actress all times and like, but also

queen, let's see, but also help me realize my queer identity in the process. Right? there's a

swagger about them. There is this aura, this sensuality that is about them that is just like Yes, yes, I'm glad to be a Black woman, because you know what I share the same identities as Queen Latifah like. Can we talk about her hair secrets, and how again she her hair, does not miss? (sister circle 1)

This celebration of Queen Latifah's hair reflects the beauty standards and beliefs that the participants held about ourselves. To support this, Mack said, "*I just have never in my life seen a not beautiful Black woman like, and it is flabbergasting.*" (sister circle 1).

Sandra also shared,

> *But there's one of the characters in Orange Is the New Black, who's talking about how Black women are beautiful in so many different ways, whereas, like her argument is that White women have one standard of beauty and like obviously, we could fall victim to that standard of beauty because we're how we grew up and where we live, but like that Black women, there's just like a 1 million ways to be beautiful when you're a Black woman, and that our community recognizes all those different ways to beautiful, which I think it's very important. It makes me feel very proud.* (sister circle 1)

There was additional consensus about former First Lady Michelle Obama as a source of inspiration, particularly in the ways in which she represented Black women on a global stage while navigating challenging spaces and harsh criticisms. Patricia said,

> *Yeah, it's [when she] navigated the White world versus the Black world, and tried to keep her identity, especially when, like those nasty conservatives were like labeling her a man, and just like things like that, and she just kept it classy.* (sister circle 1)

The participants felt that Obama's example was relatable and a roadmap for us in dealing with microaggressions despite being the most educated and qualified. Other examples include Black

women who have endured institutional racism and still show up as their authentic selves. Sandra shared,

> *The woman who was the Dean of Students for me when I was in college, who I like to call Dean still…I don't think I've never expressed this to her, but, like she was the first person who ever kind of like alluded to like the idea of institutional racism to me. I never heard about it. She didn't say it, but she alluded to it in like an orientation chat. We had bold, especially at that school at that time, and that kind of got me on the spiral of like changing my major and doing what I do now. But then also, I think she shows up as herself authentically, and like It's something that I'm still working on. And then also stand up for myself and like, leave a situation when it's not right anymore. All those things like that really means a lot to me.* (sister circle 1)

The ability to show up authentically, particularly in white spaces and deal with microaggressions in successful ways was important to the participants in role models.

Other role models included Black women who had more familial ties with participants such as mothers, grandmothers, and sisters. I shared,

> *And so, this whole like dissertation process is really just made me think about the women in my family, because it's easy to get to the big names like Obamas and all that stuff, and I love them, and I think they've been good things for us in the… the, the broader scale. But my grandmother's didn't have any degrees, either and it just makes me like wonder, like I feel like going through this dissertation process. In some ways I feel more spiritually connected to them, because I'm like I'm literally the manifestations of the things that they may have wanted for themselves.* (sister circle 1)

Similarly, Ty shared her connection with her grandmother by saying,

Yeah, to go off of that, my grandma. That's my baby. I love her that I just saw her yesterday. She taught me a lot about like how to take care of myself. Mentally growing up. She taught me like how not to care about what people think. People like live off that that energy, if you give into it with them back and forth. So just let people think whatever they want to think, and just truly be yourself. She also taught me how to be proud of who I am…She's my role model, she's my baby. (sister circle 1)

Connected to this, there is support and reaffirmations that come from the family connections that have been important to how Black women see ourselves. Mack stated,

So, I've always like been a thicker girl, right like my entire life, and because I grew up in predominantly White spaces, I, I was always like the thickest one, you know, I'm saying, and like, obviously as puberty comes along. You know you grow boobs. You grew up like that gets sexualized and like a lot of really weird ways, because my boys are really weird, and that was literally all I was around. But my mom from jump like has always been like You're the baddest. You're beautiful, you know, like since I can I, since I can remember, like she has always been like such a champion for me and my sister, and like our bodies, and she's super insecure, and it's so ironic that she gases us up the way that she does, and we direct that energy to her. (sister circle 1)

Inspirationally, kinship can inspire the resistance we may be afraid to live. Patricia shared:

I actually find myself idolizing my little sister who has kind of subtly been pushing back against my parents, and I love my parents that they they're kind of planned for her. She is now like. She has rejected Christianity. She no longer goes to church. She keeps crystals all throughout her house. I come in, and she's like has incense going and saying that she's leaving water out for the ancestors. She just lives this good Bohemian lifestyle, and just

kind of let things come in as they go and you know, sometimes it's just reminders from her like saying, you're working too hard and I'll sit back and I'll be like, yeah, I know. So for me it's just been really just interesting to see how like would like to be in the coming months coming years. and I really like and it brings a nice balance to, I think, because he's actually been kind of pushing me to do more gaming, doing more cos play things like that. So I really like. Now I think I look towards her now, kind of like my… my semi idol, because I don't feel like I can ever truly live that lifestyle she's living. I'm never going to and I think that's a part of me. I still have to live up to my parents. (sister circle 1)

Resistance and pushback were common themes, particularly in relation to the participants being able to be our authentic selves and Black women who showed us the possibility of doing so.

This session ended with the participants thanking me for creating this space and their appreciation for being among other Black women. Ty said,

I'm just glad to be around Black people. I'm tired of the white people that I don't understand, like going to class barely be like being a Black person in the internship. They all White and that, like the first day of class I was just like, not in a good mood, and my sister is like, hey, TY, just not yourself. What's wrong? I was like, I realized, I'm back here [at school]. Yeah, not only do I appreciate you for creating this space and just actually just being able to be ourselves and have these type of conversations where it actually matters, and people are actually listening and care. (sister circle 1)

This sentiment was reaffirmed by the other participants wanting to meet in person for brunch. Participants were encouraged to use GroupMe for continued conversations before the next sister circle.

Meaning-making from Sister Circle One

In reviewing the conversation from sister circle one, I began seeing connections between the themes acknowledged in the one-on-one interviews and this first sister circle that was focused on Black women's identity and our role models. The sister circle was able to reveal a deeper understanding of how Black women see ourselves. For example, the participants were able to share more stories connected to how we see ourselves and the importance of the role models for Black women who encourage authenticity, the ability to deal with challenging environments without allowing it to break you, overcoming challenges, and maintaining good hair presence. Table 4 depicts the ideas that emerged during sister circle one. These ideas related to three areas: Black women's identities, Black women's feelings about ourselves, and Black women's thoughts about the role models who influenced how the participants understood our identities as Black women.

Table 4

Ideas From Sister Circle One

Black women are	Black women feel	Role models
Strong for self and others, having to take care of everyone	Dual state of joy and sadness	Supportive family members who teach us to be strong and defend us when needed
Putting in the work, not getting credit	Pressure to perform and to be perfect	Hardworking women in families who set the example of hard work
Shapeshifter	Exhausted	Black women who work hard while looking good, like Queen Latifah
Filling in the gaps when others come up short	Pride	Remaining classy under pressure like Michelle Obama
Outperforming everyone is the norm		Outspoken and authentic, pushing back against status quo like Lizzo and younger siblings
Everything – because we do everything that is expected		

Sister Circle Two: Place, Space, and Meaning-making in Reimagined Learning Spaces

In the second sister on Saturday March 18, 2023, the theme was centered around meaning-making in places and spaces as a means of considering the ways in which Black women experience our learning spaces and reimaging new spaces with our needs in mind, particularly with the influences of Afrofuturism and technology. Prior to this sister circle, participants were asked to

watch or rewatch the Verzuz musical battle that featured Erykah Badu and Jill Scott as a point of reference for the discussion. Verzuz music battle was created during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown as a digital space for music, mainly hip hop and R&B artists to still share music with the world in virtual platform as these events were live streamed through social media platforms such as Instagram, Triller, and YouTube. The Erykah Badu and Jill Scott Verzuz was the first event with two Black women artists and both Badu and Scott and well known and lauded for their musical content that centers Black women voices, experiences, and the liberation of Blacks across the diaspora. As such, given the conceptual framework of this study, I felt this was an appropriate activity for participants to engage in.

The four questions used to guide the second sister circle:

1. What did you think about the Jill Scott and Erykah Badu Verzuz Battle?

2. What role do you see technology playing in creating spaces for us?

3. Describe a learning space or place that has meaning for you. How does that place make you feel?

4. What would your ideal place and space be for learning and why?

Prior to starting the questions, one of the participants, Mack had an experience at work with a microaggression that was shared in the GroupMe. She asked to have some time to share in the sister circle before we began with our prepared questions. Mack shared that though she already processed the situation with her co-workers, she also wanted to bring it to the sister circle because she felt she needed the opinions from the perspective of other Black women and felt that the sister circle had become a safe space in which to do so.

She shared this story wherein she felt a white male client who was going through a deposition for a divorce shared a story about his in-laws wherein he felt they were racist, and the

client used racial slurs several times in conveying this story. Mack shared that they had been working with this client for some time and this story did not ever come up. She felt he specifically told her this story to get a rise out of her because he knew she was the only Black woman at her clinic. She talked about how emotionally taxing it was for her because it was microaggressive, and the client was experiencing a life-changing moment, and she felt like he was trying to use her racial identity to get ahead. She did not know if her co-workers and supervisor would take her complaint seriously. Mack said,

> *You know, I was like, this is just my life right? Like as a Black person like I have these interactions all the time, and like, you know, because she really wanted to like Well, I'm going to say something to him, and I'm going to do this, and like, how can we, as clinicians address this in the moment? And I'm like I'm not going to address it, because that's weird and like part of me is just like there it goes again, moving on, you know. I'm like if I paid attention to every single thing that happened in my life that was a microaggression. I would be angry all the time. And so I, I felt like I really struggled to explain that to her.* (sister circle 2)

Sandra validated Mack's feelings by saying:

> *Yeah. One thing that I've read a lot about because of research, but is like, it's the microaggression or the race racist event. But then, how much energy and like stress! We go through it by people after processing it, and then doing what you did like, having your emotions and being like. Am I overreacting? Did they even mean it like that? Back and forth? And it's like the, the loss of the things you lose out on because you have to do that.* (Sandra, sister circle 2)

The guilt and burden of speaking out was a place where the participants agreed and affirmed having this experience in other spaces. This also led to a conversation about performative allyship and the trauma of having to find solutions to our trauma while navigating the trauma. Patricia shared,

> *For me, it's almost like you're always trying to make themselves feel better that they're like an ally, and like. I remember I was in the hospital, and this is when, like Black lives, matter was big, and I had this Whiteness pulled me aside, and she had this huge Black lives matter shirt, and I was like what you what you want me to say. Yeah. So I don't know she might need to give her a cookie or a pat on the back, or a hug, or whatever…. And I it just like and like you said it just kind of falls on us to fix it…and it get, gets it gets really tiring and soul crushing, and I had to step away from it. I just. I just couldn't do it anymore. I just it's just I felt like it wasn't my responsibility like you have more power than me. You should be the one sitting down and figuring it out, not me. And having means that we live this trauma trying to explain to you how to fix it.* (sister circle 2)

The consensus among the participants is that allyship without action and that is consistently seeking praise from Black women is not helpful. Mack expressed thankfulness for the space and they decided to move on to the prepared questions.

For the first question, we shared our reflections from the Verzuz Battle. Sydney shared,

> *And to me there was a level of like, I say liberation, but like one of the things that I love about, like Jill Scott and Erica Badu is like when they sing and just their songs in general there is a level of like, I feel like they, their vibe, and how they sing takes back like the femininity of Black women, and what that entails… because going back, and you know rehearing, you know Jill Scott's songs and all those other things. It's just like Home Girl was out here like and yes, like Yes, and for me for me that spoke a lot to me because of the*

fact that growing up, you know, being in spaces of like damn, Can I just not? Can I just be? Can I just exist like? Can I exist and not be over sexualized? Can I actually embrace, you know my sexuality and all those other things that kind of thing? (Sydney, sister circle 2).

Supporting this statement, Janelle shared,

For me, what I love about the both of them is, they are their true authentic selves. And as a culture we're not monolithic. You have them and you have the city girls, and I'm not knocking the city girls. But what I love about them is, you can be natural. You can wear your head wrap. You can be plus size and be sexy, you know, Erykah, she has this mystique about her, so I love the fact that they embrace that. And as Black women we can be all those things and be unapologetic about it, and it's still sexy. I mean Erykah. She's had some of the best [men] in the world…she's intriguing. She has a thing that draws you in, and I think that's all of us as Black women we have, that when we're in certain circles it crosses in, and it just it's kind of off subject, but it goes back to us always being the medias and the big mommas, and everybody coming to for advice, not just within our culture, but outside our culture, because I work in a majority white space as well. (sister circle 2)

These comments reflected what was shared in the first sister circle about role models and the support Black women give to everyone. Additionally, the space event itself was appreciated for the sense of community it brought out. I shared:

I really just loved that whole thing. I mean, it was COVID, and we was at the house, and I'm sorry I'm missing people, but that was like one of the first times in a long time, like I felt genuinely connected to other Black women that I didn't know because of that like space. (sister circle 2)

Similarly, other participants appreciated the Verzuz because of the positive relationships it displayed between Black women. Patricia shared,

> *I was gonna say that this really just loved how they uplifted each other and the* *camaraderie.* and I sometimes I feel like [we] don't do that enough for other Black women sometimes, especially when you get the higher up levels you'll have, like some Black women who could be your worst enemies and trying to do your their best to tear you down, which is just mystifying to me. So, it was just beautiful to see two Black women just be there for each other. They're not going. It is technically a versus. But they were just uplifting each other and I think that's something we really need, especially in these times. (sister circle 2)

This is reflective of the sentiments about representation for Black women, in that not all Black women are always supportive just because they share racial and gender identities. There was consensus among participants that the Verzuz Battle was a positive reflection of Black women being in community, without competition, being their authentic selves without being threatened by the other women's identity. based in Black joy, and meaningful sisterhood.

In the second question, we discussed reimagined learning spaces for Black women. Representation was a resounding consensus among the group. Janelle shared,

> *For me, representation matters. I think representation matters so. I think that also helps* *with the learning space. If you go into the classroom, and somebody looks like you because* *there's, there's a sense of relatability that's already there, even though we don't know each* *other. I just know you look like my mom. You look like my aunt, my cousin. So, for me I* *think that would have been totally, because even my advisor was a White male, and he was* *different. I'll say that I can't say he was racist. but I do feel like he didn't take the time to*

truly be a mentor adviser and help me with getting through, you know higher education.

I'm a first-generation college student, so I'm just learning everything on my own, and I'm

person to this school, and then I have this White male advisor, and our sessions would be

like 5 minutes. (sister circle 2)

Supporting this, Sandra said,

The formal of collegiate space, and so I think the representation, your staff and faculty,

representation, and curriculum. And then I think also representation in your student

leaders. So I find that a lot of times, even on, like a PWIs campuses, you find that you have

lots of student leaders of color, and I think it's because student leader, Black people

specifically want to show up in that way…I think that's empowering, because as a new

student, you're walking and seeing all this space is a place where I could prosper and like

every version of me, could prosper right? (sister circle 2)

Connected to this, we discussed representation in curricula, seeing ourselves in classroom material,

and how valuable an experience that was. I shared,

So I, I started college at Howard, and I remember just the feel. I felt like I found my identity

as a Black person as a Black woman on that campus. I do remember being thrown.

Because, my English professor, I walked in with this White man, and I was like why you

here like this, the HBCU. You said like, Why are you teaching English? He turned out to

be the most phenomenal of the most phenomenal professors I've ever had, and it was the

first time that I ever read Toni Morrison. We read The Bluest Eye, and I just remember

being like it was a range of emotions. It was anger, it was frustration, it was grief. It was

appreciation, but the anger and frustration and grief was, Why didn't we read Toni

Morrison in high school, or in any of these other classes like when I grew up like that

wasn't a part of the literary canon, and I was in AP Honors classes, and we read, we read

Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God for a week and spent a whole month

on Chaucer and I was like, Why, this doesn't make any sense like the [lack of]

representation is frustrating, and I just if I felt like if I had exposure to that in the formal

curriculum in like primary school and secondary school, maybe that would have shifted

how I felt about school because I feel like a lot of times, I, I was hostile in combative

because I didn't see myself in the curriculum, and I felt like when I spoke up about it was

just like, oh, you just looking for a reason to be Black again...And so when I transfer it to

college, and I feel like I lost that for a second like it was difficult because I'm like. Now

I'm back in the sea of Whiteness, and my identity as a Black person is no longer the

centrifuge of this campus experience, so I have to find it. I was fortunate. I had two Black

women professors who literally had to get me together. (sister circle 2)

Along with the representation of Black women in spaces, it also was evident that mentorship and

coaching along with true, culturally appropriate support from non-Black individuals was

supportive in re-imagined spaces. Patricia shared, *"Representation without support is just nice*

window dressing. If Black women aren't supportive of one another, like not speaking, not reaching

out, then the representation is pointless," (sister circle 2). Along with representation appropriate

training for educators when discussing issues with race was important. Mack shared,

I think that teachers/professors, White teachers, so many professors like they don't

necessarily know how to have conversations about race without making it like, feel like,

okay. Everybody we're about to talk about racism. Get ready, you know, like that's how it

feels, and they feel super nervous and uncomfortable, which then makes me as a Black

person I'm like. Well, I'm not going to ask a single question, because they look like they're

about to explode. They're just like I need to get through this curriculum, so I can move on

because it's in my standard. So I have to talk about it. But like we're going to do this in the

shortest way possible. Right? Which just makes it makes it feel makes my makes me feel

like my history is not as important, right? (sister circle 2)

Perhaps when educators feel more comfortable discussing racism, students can be more comfortable being ourselves in learning spaces.

One participant highlighted that sometime the spaces, particularly informal spaces that are often considered to be healing spaces for Black women are often places that facilitate harm. Sydney said,

Home is where you know kids learn. You know how it is like where, where kids learn. One

of my mentors made a remark a few years back of that, and it always stuck with me was

that sometimes a kid's first bully is their parent… I think I remember hearing somebody say

this sometimes, how somebody asks a while back when we talk about how many times that

we feel, you know, unwanted by you know people that don't look like us. What about how

many times do we not feel wanted by people that look like us and I think that makes a

difference as well, because if I'm supposed to be in this in this space that's supposed to be

surrounded by that, You know it's for us. But every time I turn around you have something

to say about me that's really rooted in insert Ism, phobia, insert…Yeah, insert Phobia is on

here like, what are we doing? And I think that also needs to be taken [in]to consideration

as well. I feel like they'll space the informal spaces would be the hair salon, or under those

other places, or even just home, right just home. They have a lot of merits, but if the ones

that are in the home aren't in the space of promoting that level of camaraderie and

everything else on top of the former learners learning spaces that aren't there for us. We

just out here just in purgatory. (sister circle 2)

This commentary is a reminder that Black women are often not in support of each other and that spaces that are often supposed to be for us may be harmful to us.

For the third question, we talked about using technology in reimagined learning spaces for Black women. One participant saw technology as an opportunity to create connections beyond the physical limitations and ultimately create new connections. Sandra stated,

Well, I think if you're looking at just like the, the networking side of technology, so social

media, but also like things like LinkedIn and stuff. I think that in post COVID, especially

like people at varying levels, have been able to create learning opportunities in like virtual

counter spaces for us to reaffirm ourselves. That like, if the Internet is, this is the way to

know. When I was in high school I would have had opportunities to make connections, even

if they weren't physically in front of me. (sister circle 2)

Additionally, participants recognized spaces such as Black Twitter and created them for sharing information that is helpful for Black people globally. Mack shared,

I think that it has been helpful from a like mental health perspective of starting

conversations around Black people and within the Black community, about the importance

of like caring for ourselves, and like prioritizing our own mental health as much as should

show that 2020 was that was one of my highlights at least, was seeing so much more

conversation, open, vulnerable conversation within the Black community on specifically

Instagram. But Facebook, and, like the various Facebook groups that I'm in that have

Black women or Black people in them and just like naming the thing, because we all

experience similar things to different degrees, right? And it kind of help like you were

saying Sandra like with. Okay, I'm not the only person in the world that is dealing with this, and particularly being someone that is in a lot of White spaces. It does feel very isolating, and so it's helpful. I mean kind of like what you guys did for me at the beginning of this right to have someone else say like, actually, no, you're not crazy. And here's an example of something that I experience that's literally the exact same thing, you know, like it just feels more like, okay, cool, like. (sister circle 2)

Essentially, the participants recognized the sister circles as a place of connection and community that could be helpful for Black women in learning spaces.

The conversation shifted to representation of Black women in media and the ways in that representation has empowered Black women and created more opportunities for community and connection on social media, podcast, and other forms of media. Sandra shared,

When I was growing up there was less like representation in media of Black people, because there was only so much media right? And I didn't have cable. So it was only as much media. And now, because of TV plus streaming, plus YouTube plus TikTok, there's like more media representation of Black women in in every form, and I was just listening to like a podcast. I listen. I don't know. Keep it. It's like a quick, immediate podcast. I love it...and they do like the intersection of pop culture, but also like politics, which is like perfect for sure.. But they interviewed Kerry Washington, and they were talking about the start of scandal, and how nervous everyone was about what scandal gonna be successful because it was like, and I obviously don't I watch Scandal after like 2 seasons in, but they were like we were mid-season replacement with a Black lead on a network that hadn't done that, and like they were like we were doing all this stuff, and they were like we start the whole tweeting thing. Just so people would watch. We were scared. No one was gonna watch.

Why would they? And I was like, oh, that is like not my recollection of scandals like being in college, browsing Now I wear White blazers. People need to call me Olivia. This this is who I am, but like that wouldn't have been a character for me when I was like a kid that wouldn't have existed on TV, and like the amount of fear and anxiety around, would that be successful? To me also sounds crazy because it's like when I look at TV now, I'm like all this, Black women are leading programs and shows, and not to say it's where it should be. But like, my perception of TV is like, I can. I watch Bel Air every week? That's literally an all-Black cast. I don't think I've seen a White person on there, right? And it's to date, for I don't know. I just think that that is really powerful to be able to turn on your TV at any age and have representation right like I had Raven. I think my eighth in that time, and that was it. (sister circle 2)

Participants agreed that representation in media, particularly of Black women living everyday lives in shows like Insecure, A Different World, Living Single and Bel Air were important and affirming examples for us. Affirming this idea, Ty stated,

I feel like it's power and feeling like you relate whether it is a character on TV, or if it's like using social media, because I feel like people use social media to show like their life is good and stuff like that. But when you see like somebody is going through it or experiencing something it's like you can relate to them, and you feel like a bond, or you feel like you're not the only one that's going to that experience. (sister circle 2)

Due to timing, question four was not asked. As the sister circle wrapped up, participants shared their gratitude for being in sister circles and expressed a desire to continue these sister circle sessions as well as details for how they may recreate their own for other women.

Meaning-making from Sister Circle Two

In reviewing the ideas from sister circle two, I noticed continued threads of connection from the one-on-one interviews and sister circle one, specifically understanding our experiences in predominantly white places and spaces and the impacts on our identities. Additionally, Mack wanting to share her story with the sister circle validated the value of the sister circle as a place where Black women can receive support and have community. Furthermore, sister circle two highlighted the emotions connected with Black women's experiences, places, and spaces, and how technology can be the vehicle for creating more spaces for Black women to amplify their voices. Table 5 depicts the themes noticed in sister circle two.

Table 5

Sister Circle Two Themes

What did you think about the Jill Scott and Erykah Badu Verzuz Battle?	What role do you see technology playing in creating spaces for us?	Describe a learning space or place that has meaning for you. What do you need in reimagined spaces	Mack's Story
Liberating Loved seeing two Black women compliment and not compete Loved how they showed up as their true authentic selves Love how they own their sexuality and gave them permission to do so Shows Black women's versatility	Connector, especially after covid A great place to role model success for Black women Easy to for creators to navigate gatekeepers and share stories. We can connect from where we are Representation in the media has increased Black Twitter and virtual spaces that center Black spaces allows us to be who they are without explaining context More conversations about mental health in virtual spaces	Representation in the curriculum Places to be their authentic selves Role models and representatives that speak up Credit for our work Masks off No pressure – space to just be	Black women need places to process our trauma without having to solve it Allyship is not wanted if it is not authentic We do not always want to provide solutions to issues related to racism Microaggressions are traumatic

GroupMe

GroupMe was created to help build and maintain rapport between the sister circles. Initially, activity in the GroupMe was limited to introduction from the participants. After the first sister circle, the GroupMe became more active as participants shared memes and anecdotes that reminded them of something that was discussed during the sister circles. It also became a space to vent and for encouragement as participants reached out sharing moments such as dealing with microaggressions or even congratulatory moments for career and educational achievements. There was a plethora of conversations about natural haircare tips and product sharing. Ultimately, GroupMe provided further insights to Black women's needs in their learning spaces through further demonstrating the use of technology for creating spaces for Black women to connect and build community for each other.

Creating Codes

Upon reviewing the data from the one-on-one interviews and the sister circles, I noticed common ideas that emerged from the one-on-one interviews and the sister circles. These ideas were coded through in vivo coding derived from words and phrases explicitly stated by the participants. The most prominent codes were care, exhaustion, shapeshifters, microaggressions, strength, and allyship. As aforementioned, there were common threads and patterns noticed through each session, and further meaning was created to analyze the data for more understanding. Figure 3 depicts the process I engaged in as I made meaning of the data at throughout the interactions of this study, wherein the responses from the one-on-one interviews created the prompts for the two sister circles. From these three touch points with the participants, codes were identified based upon the patterns observed in the conversations that helped better understand the participants' experiences.

Figure 3

Meaning of Data Throughout Interactions
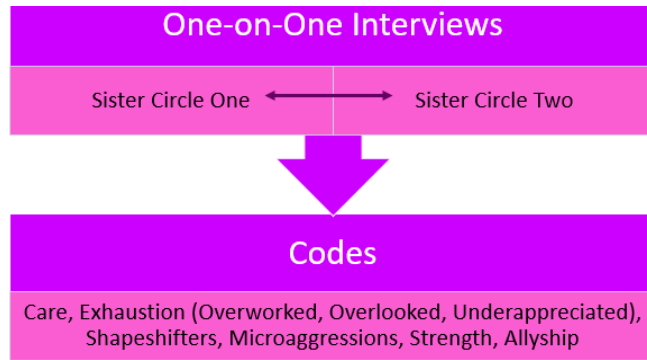
Care

  The code of care was used to reflect the ways in which the participants experience care. The first way the care was expressed was through the ways Black women provide care for everyone at the expense of ourselves, often leaving ourselves feeling a sense of exhaustion or emptiness. Janelle referenced this point in both her one-on-one interview and in the second sister circle. Janelle said,

> *You know Black women, we have to carry everybody if you want to take it back to slavery. I was saying this before with Keshia. You know we were raped by the White man. Then we had to go and cook for the White man. We had to birth to his babies with his White wife. We had to feed the babies, the White, wise babies with our breast milk we had to clean. Everything comes back to us. We always have to do. We also take care of it, and then fast forward and progression to taking care of the Black man and uplifting him and making sure he's good. So we're always making sure everybody is good. But who's looking out for us to make sure that we're good, that we're taking care of?* (sister circle 2)

There was consensus among participants that as Black women, we are taught to take care of everyone else before taking care of ourselves while still thriving and achieving. Essentially, our labor and contributions are more valuable than who we are. Additionally, the care for others often limits Black women's ability to care for ourselves and our children. This lack of self-care is the second way that care was discussed in this research.

The participants discussed the need for self-care through identifying or creating time to reconnect with hobbies that bring us joy as well as through seeking help from mental health providers. Two participants, Sydney and Patricia connected over their love for anime as a hobby and a form of self-care. Patricia shared, *"I cosplay at conventions occasionally. I have to kind of slow down trying to get more into a self-care journey as I creep up on the Big 40, so that's been, that's a big 2023 goal"* (sister circle 1). Every participant shared that seeing a therapist, particularly one who is a Black woman has been helpful to us in identifying strategies to practice better self-care. Patricia also shared,

> *And that's why it's been it's been great to see like Black women go into mental health, because now, like I'm working, do these issues with a Black woman therapist, and you know, she and I. We had a conversation Wednesday, and I had, like I was back and forth I'm in the lab, and I'm in the hospital and I was telling her, like you like I have to do very intensive days in the hospital Wednesday and Thursday, and I was like I probably need to go to the lab Friday and she was like you're, You're gonna work like a 14 hour day. and then get up 5 0'clock in the morning and go to the lab. If she was looking at me like, are you crazy like, and I felt like I told her like there's a part of me. If I don't keep going, I feel like I'm disappointing myself, and I'm not living up to that bar and of course to me that translate well. That means my boss is going to see that and say, like I'm not doing what I*

need to do, so I guess that's why it's been so important for me, at least, to work with the

therapist to see how unhealthy this is. (sister circle 2)

Participants acknowledged that our therapy sessions have been helpful in working to develop better coping skills and navigating difficult situations.

Exhaustion – Overworked, Overlooked, and Unappreciated

Connected to the notion of care, participants shared feelings of frustration and exhaustion, connected to doing too much or doing the most work and not being credited for their contributions. Phrases like, "I just cannot," "It's just so much," and "I'm just tired," were prevalent throughout the data and expressed by all the participants. Ty exclaimed,

Oh, like you have to put up with everybody else shit and be strong, especially when it comes

to the family in the household as well. I just feel like in general women we like do so much

like the world wouldn't exist or function without women. We take care of the children, also

have to go to work and stuff like that. I feel like women play a huge role and don't get the

credit. But on top of that, like you said, like Black women don't get the credit as well, even

when they do so much work, and they're overlooked and, like you said, like they have to

act a certain way, or be a certain way to be accepted. So, it's like You're constantly have

to play different roles and be strong and put on this mask just to survive and get through

like life. And this base, and just have to learn how to navigate and also coming home, and

not having the space where you feel comfortable, or have like your knees met. So, you just

constantly just have to be strong in different ways in a life as a Black woman. (sister circle

1)

Participants shared that the exhaustion is not easily explainable or understood outside of Black women spaces. Patricia shared,

Because I feel like you're so hypervigilant all the time. It's why you're so tired and like my White husband like I'll come in and I can't explain to him like why I'm just I wake up and I'm tired. It's a constant struggle. (sister circle, 2)

Strength has been used to combat exhaustion, making Black women more tired and frustrated. The exhaustion is also from navigating microaggressive environments and shapeshifting, which is also a form of racial battle fatigue. Essentially, participants felt tired from always having to "be on" to deal with whatever may come their way.

Shapeshifters

The participants emphasized that Black women are not monolithic and exist in many ways from schoolgirls to church girls, and city girls. However, participants shared the need to constantly change who they are to fit different rooms or even this notion of wearing masks so as not to show their authentic selves in certain spaces. Essentially, there is pressure to show up as the version of yourself that makes other people more comfortable. While this can be seen as a strength in that Black women can be adaptable to a variety of spaces, it is also a source of stress and exhaustion. Sandra described this by sharing:

When I think about like [as a] professional and in life. But the word that came ahead is also like having to be a shapeshifter and having to fill the void in the gap constantly, and like not really having the time to just be but having to like step into roles that maybe you didn't need to. (sister circle 1)

Shapeshifting limits our ability to exist without worry and contributes to anxiety and depression that many participants expressed trying to manage and navigate. In the first sister circle, I shared:

I told my boss, I come to work, and I give my best performance an Oscar-winning performance every day because I have to be strong for my staff. I have to be strong for my

students, and I have to do what the hell I have to do on this job and not get fired to do with your BS. And so you don't really want to know my true feelings. So, I'm going to tell you respectfully. I'm going to keep this mask on till I get out of this building and go to my car and sit down where I can drive to my Black ass house and be myself, because y'all can't accept this truth here. This place showed me time after the time that you don't want my true authentic self. You want the mask version of [me]. (sister circle 1)

The performance of shapeshifting contributes to the participants' exhaustion and is buoyed by the expectation to care for everyone.

Strength

Participants discussed and defined strength as an important aspect of our identities consistently throughout the interviews and sister circles as both a positive attribute and a burden. Ty's quote about Black women's role in the family and outside of the home is a reflection of the burden of strength that we often experience and learn from other mothers and other role models. Connected to that, Mack shared,

I grew up watching my mama be strong at work since she was the first Black woman to be a medical doctor in our hometown and at home. Even though my dad was very present and active, it was clear in our family that my mama was in charge. I saw her be stressed out and worried a lot, but she kept going. She never gave up, especially when it came to my siblings and me. (one-on-one interview)

While Mack's admiration for her mom is evident, the burden and worry from her strength is evident as well. Essentially, Black women must be strong enough to navigate our routine responsibilities of caring for others and ourselves while navigating different spaces that may or may not be suited to our needs. Strength for Black women is needed for our survival, particularly

when we feel we must shapeshift and wear masks in formal and informal spaces. In this reference, strength is an expectation that is to Black women's detriment as because of the perception of our strength, others fail to realize when we need help or support. This ultimately contributes to Black women experiencing exhaustion.

Other descriptions of strength were described in how Black women see our roles models, particularly Black women in our families who display strength that we wanted to emulate, or we felt like contributed to our successes. I shared,

> *The women in my family endured a lot of things that made them not societally successful where they're literally the backbones of our family like I don't know where my brothers and I would be without my mom's strength.* (sister circle 1)

Essentially, there was consensus amongst the participants that strength was learned from other Black women in our families through our roles and support in our lives. Connected to this, Janelle expressed, "*We saw our mamas, big mamas, and aunties be strong in the face of hard times. What else are we expected to do, but to be strong?*" (one-on-one interview). As such, we expect ourselves to be strong because of our matriarchs' examples and the expectation to continue the tradition of strength as Black women.

Microaggressions

Participants shared a variety of narratives wherein we had to navigate microaggressions that created harmful environments. These experiences were reminders that our identities do not fit the dominant narrative of the spaces and places that we often occupy, particularly in learning environments. Navigating harmful environments was an assumed part of our experiences as Black women that some participants from support and training from family members or spaces like churches to better manage these situations. Melissa shared,

My church is kind of different. Why, speaking to other people, it could be the same. But the people I've spoken with, we did like our Sunday school included writing essays that were like graded on the Sunday School lesson, and that was to like make sure that education and what we're doing we weren't like left behind in some kind of way. So, it was very educational, like really promoting doing well in school like public speaking, and all of that was like, okay, because you're black. You need to excel at this. So, it was done in the church setting to help you in the academic setting, so I never really felt I have, so I didn't really feel out of place in the formal settings. There have been instances where, like they've tried to play me in the formal setting, but I was able to like pick up on it, so it didn't really impact me that much. (Melissa, one-on-one interview).

Essentially, the church was a coaching ground to help her acknowledge microaggressions and how to deal with them.

Additionally, participants felt it was unfair and an extra burden to have to tell people how to address the microaggressive, harmful environments while trying to unpack and heal from them. Mack exclaimed,

How can I tell you how to fix other people when it comes to like racism and all of these microaggressions, while I'm actively trying to process how I feel without flipping out, because I, I need my coins to pay my bills, so I can't act the fool on these people job? (sister circle 2)

The participants acknowledged that we cannot respond to every negative, traumatic interaction because we would constantly be fighting to prove our worth. The cycle of validating our existence in spaces that are not made with our needs in mind is our reality. Also, the burden of having to fix these environments felt like a lack of care.

Allyship

Participants identified the support in the form of allies as an important part of our experiences as Black women and identified allies in the form of other Black women and individuals who are not Black women. The participants articulated a need for active allyship wherein allies want to be more direct support for Black women rather than passive representation or a bystander. Instead, participants expressed that we needed allies who want to actively mentor other Black women to help us learn the ropes of learning spaces. Essentially, Black women need to seek out other Black women as a form of support to help navigate formal learning spaces. Patricia said,

> *Yeah, I guess that's why I said like the representation without when I outreach, because I strongly believe that all skin folk aren't kin folk, and I mean that's the only way I can kind of survive in this environment. You have to like, do something. You have to prove it to me.* (sister circle 1)

Essentially, allyship in name and title alone is not enough. Additionally, participants agreed that one should not assume that all Black women are in support of each other just because we share racial and gender identities.

For individuals who are not Black women in learning spaces such as teachers, administrators, supervisors, and even peers, participants expressed proactive, non-performative allyship and action is necessary. The participants shared that it is the duty of allies to hold their peers and other students accountable and to educate them on ways to help Black women have safer, less microaggressive learning environments. When sharing her story about work during the second sister circle, Mack shared,

I appreciated that my White lady boss took the lead in addressing how microaggressive and rude the client was to me once I explained the situation. As the only person of color on the team, it meant a lot and gave me a chance to sit in my feelings and decide what I needed in that moment. (sister circle 2)

Black women do not and should not have to endure harmful events, speak up for ourselves, and fix the environment. Instead, the participants expressed that our allies should take the lead in addressing and solving the challenges while Black women focus on navigating the trauma and healing ourselves.

<p style="text-align:center">Summary</p>

The data show there was consensus among the participants that our current learning spaces are harmful environments wherein we often experience microaggressions and some participants expressed feelings of anxiety and depression in navigating those environments. There was also a pressure to succeed, often from external factors such as family that drove Black women to try to persist in these environments. Additionally, family was also a contributor to Black women being able to excel in these spaces as they often had to intervene with the teachers or administrators in the learning spaces to ensure their needs were met. Also, family and extended networks such as churches, hair salons, or extracurricular activities served as grooming places for us that boosted our identities and self-efficacies to navigate these difficult environments.

Despite the negative experiences in predominantly white learning spaces, the participants have excelled in these environments often at the expense of our psychological safety through developing coping skills and community support. Additionally, the participants were proud to be Black women and to identify ourselves as such, as if it is a special club and lived experiences only understood by other Black women. The participants were emphatic that Black women are not the

same, but there are commonalities in our lived experiences that make our connections relevant. Ultimately, participants described needing more Black women in these spaces where our voices and experiences are celebrated and valued, and we prioritize our needs before taking care of others.

Chapter 5 further expanded upon the codes to explore the emergent themes and findings as connected to research questions. Figure 4 shows a summary of the codes, common words, and phrases used throughout the study in the silhouette of a Black woman with natural hair. This image is befitting as our conversation in the GroupMe and during the sister circles elements of a hair discussion from compliments about hairstyles to sharing product information, to discussing how their hairstyles are perceived in white spaces.

Figure 4

Summary of Codes

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

"I think a lot of times like, especially with the Black Girl Magic, and things like that we're
expected to be perfect and be stronger and be smarter, and especially if we're in those type of
formal spaces you're supposed to be at the top of your game. All the time. That's why you're here.
And I think, just being a space where we could just be human."

- Patricia, Research participant, one-on-one interview

As Black women, the intersectionality of our lived experiences means that we simultaneously experience oppression because of our gender and race. This intersectionality is not understood by individuals who do not share our identities. To address these challenges, this dissertation sought to examine what can be learned from the experiences of Black women operating within predominantly white spaces. The goal of this dissertation was to explore Black women's experiences of gender and racial oppression within predominantly white spaces and to use collective knowledge gained from those experiences to reimagine learning spaces created for Black women by Black women and to articulate their needs in those spaces.

In Chapter 1, I introduced the elements of the conceptual framework for this study as Black Feminist Thought, critical geography, and Afrofuturism. These bodies of scholarship guided the argument that Black women are not looking for others to define us; however, we need spaces, places, and people who will allow us the agency to share our own stories in spaces and places that center our experiences (Collins, 2009; McKay, 1997; Patton & Ward, 2016). The research reviewed helped to bolster the importance of this work and justify the necessity of this study.

In Chapter 2, I discussed controlling images such as mammy, matriarch, and Jezebel that were created as inaccurate stereotypes of Black women that often exploited our labor and ignored

our voices (Collins, 2009). Additionally, Crenshaw's work regarding intersectionality was introduced as a key concept in understanding Black women's simultaneous experiences as racialized and gendered and our challenges with seeing ourselves as just Black or woman (Crenshaw, 1989). To challenge how we have been conditioned to see ourselves in learning spaces, Afrofuturism was introduced to examine how technology could be instrumental in helping Black women reimagine spaces for ourselves in connecting the past to the future to better inform the present (Imarisha, 2015).

In Chapter 3, I introduced the sister circle methodology and discussed the relevance of this research method for uplifting the stories of the participants in this study. Sister circle methodology is designed to create spaces for Black women as a methodology that is centered on our perspectives and understanding our communication patterns (Collier, 2017; Johnson, 2015; Neal Burnette et al., 2011).

Chapter 4 presented information about the participants of this study and discussed the data that were collected and analyzed to formulate codes relevant to the research questions for this study. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings in terms of emergent themes and use these themes to address the research questions for this study. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of research implications and directions for future research.

Emergent Themes

Using the Emergent Themes to Address the Research Questions for this Study

This section will discuss the themes and findings connected to the research questions to ultimately understand how the participants understood Black women's identities, experiences in predominantly white learning spaces, and their needs in reimaged spaces. Themes were derived from the in vivo codes that were discussed in chapter 4.

A review of transcripts occurred after every step of data collection from every one-on-one interview, the first sister circle, and the second sister circle to begin to track patterns for code creation. After the second sister circle, all the transcripts were reviewed together to identify the pattern from the participants. After the first reading of transcriptions, I conducted a second review of the codes and began to further analyze the codes to narrow down the list of codes to be able to better identify patterns and to understand how the participants used the words throughout the interviews and sister circles. A third review of the lists of codes was conducted to identify themes as connected to the codes.
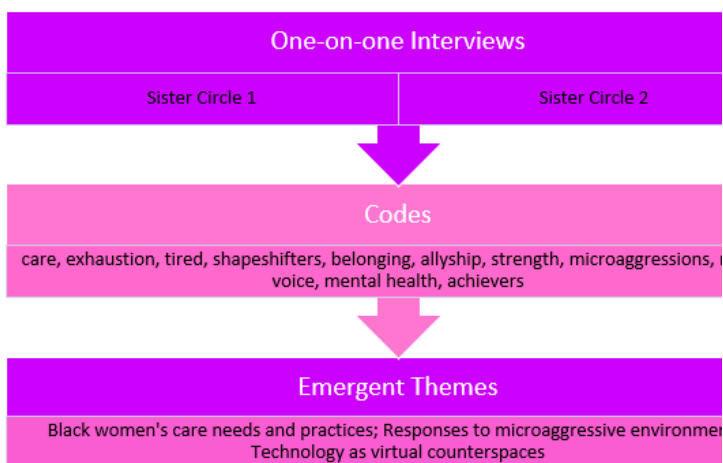
The following overarching themes emerged from my analysis:

- Black women's care needs and practices

- Responses to microaggressive environments

- Technology as virtual counterspace

Figure 5 depicts the process of analyzing the data to identify codes and emergent themes.

Figure 5

Process of Analyzing the Data

The discussion is organized by the research questions this study sought to address. The research questions were:

1. How do Black women define our identities?

2. How do Black women describe our current learning spaces?

3. What type of learning spaces do Black women identify as beneficial for our needs?

RQ1 Theme: Black Women's Care Needs and Practices: Prioritizing Care for Others Over Self

Most of the participants described ourselves by identifying our career fields, titles, and educational backgrounds, which is consistent with the research that Black women's achievements are integral to how we see ourselves. A few participants described themselves by discussing hobbies, interests outside of work, and attempts to engage in self-care. Geographically, all the participants experienced most of our P-12 formal learning spaces in the Southeastern United States. Additionally, it appears that the older the participants became, the more conscious and aware we became of our identities as Black women and, for some of the participants, as queer Black women. This increase in self-awareness influenced the participants to be more vocal about our needs and to seek out resources and spaces that centered our voices and experiences. Additionally, this awareness inspired social advocacy and activism as a part of our academic journeys and work lives. It also inspired the participants to offer mentorship and guidance to other Black women as a means of building community and helping one another navigate the microaggressions and trauma we have experienced.

As a part of speaking out more about our needs, the participants pushed back and spoke against the notion of "Black Girl Magic." While there appeared to be an appreciation of the phrase when used to celebrate Black women's accomplishments, there was also concern that the use of the term magic increases the expectation for us to have to do more work for less recognition or

trivializes our achievements as normal and perpetuates the notion of Black women always having to be strong (Ricks, 2014). Essentially, the descriptor magic contributes to the pressures to achieve and the lack of sincere acknowledgment of their accomplishments.

Lack of sense of belonging in predominantly white spaces was a common experience expressed by the participants. The participants shared that we often felt like we had to prove that we belonged in formal learning spaces, whereas other demographics appeared to just show up and not do any extra work to fit into these spaces (see Morton, 2021). As a result, often our credentials or reasons for being in these spaces were questioned and our capabilities were doubted despite the hard work we performed to be in these spaces. Essentially, these spaces homeplaces, safe places, and crooked rooms co-construct our identities by becoming the background of places that are not inclusive of our needs.

The participants described strength in ways that made us proud and tired. Strength was a characteristic that Black women are expected to exude as often learned from matriarchs and other Black women who are role models and mentors. Additionally, strength is also necessary to navigate microaggressive spaces. This strength also causes others to not recognize when Black women help, with a false assumption that we can handle everything or take on additional responsibilities without assistance. This was a more profound experience as we navigated COVID-19, the public outcry of George Floyd's murder, while Breonna Taylor's death was ignored. The participants shared throughout this experience that our strength is the preferred response rather than the trauma of our lived experiences. As such, we portray strengths as our kinfolk instructed us to do while trying to figure out how to determine the best ways to help ourselves.

RQ2 Theme: Responses to Microaggressive Environments: Shapeshifting and Wearing Masks

Participants also articulated the complexities of navigating informal and formal spaces, by sharing that these spaces are often two different spaces wherein formal spaces required us to wear masks and shift our behaviors to fit the predominantly white spaces. There is a face that is only accepted in formal, predominantly white spaces that is often not required in informal spaces. Participants agreed and shared that this shifting, which was comparable to DuBois' notion of double consciousness was exhausting and tiring, yet a necessary part of the game if we wanted to be successful. Given the geographical connection with the identities of the participants, it is important to consider the triple consciousness theory, which is inspired by DuBois and emphasizes that Black women being American along with race and gender impact our experiences as Black women (Wehlang, 2018). Essentially, DuBois' theory examines race and nationality, ultimately describing the Black community's tussle with race and nationality, Triple conscious theory argues that for Black women, our gender must be a part of understanding our experiences as Black men have access to male privilege to which we are denied and oppressed by (DuBois, 1996). Through our stories, the participants clearly expressed the need to understand our experiences through multiple, intersectional lenses, rather than one singular identifier. Ultimately, having to consistently change shape or form to fit new rooms upholds Perry's description of crooked rooms wherein Black women cannot ever stand up due to shifting circumstances that we do not control (Harris-Perry, 2011). To address, and challenge crooked rooms, all facets of our identities must be acknowledged to allow us to stand in our full truths without having to contort to fit every space we enter.

Additionally, receiving credit for one's work was also important for Black women in our learning spaces as the participants mentioned often not receiving recognition for our work or as

our contributions being downgraded as insignificant, which ultimately downplays our achievements. There was consensus among the participants that Black women often complete tasks without acknowledgments and when others do the same task they are praised. Patricia explained,

> *Because we have all these opportunities in front of us. We're doing well. It's Black women. But then, like Sandra says it feels like you have to be a shapeshifter like Sydney said. You're doing all the work, and then they're getting all the credit. and it's like you feel happy and glad that you're pushing on for the movement and the ancestors. But then a part of you just feel sad and tired looking at the reality in front.* (sister circle 1)

While the participants were proud to praise our own achievements, being recognized for our work is important to who we are. Also, having your peers applaud our work contributes to a sense of belonging that is important to feel safe in places and spaces. Ultimately, receiving credit for our work contributes to feeling valued and appreciated for our contributions, which the participants shared as something that is currently missing from our current learning spaces.

Theme: Responses to Microaggressive Environments: Seeking Psychological Safety

Regarding the influence predominantly white learning spaces have had on the participants' identity development as Black women, most of the participants discussed experiencing challenges or microaggressions in learning environments and being oblivious to those experiences because of support we had in other spaces and places such as home, church, or an extracurricular activity. The participants shared that we became aware of the microaggressions and our environments later in our formal educational journey particularly in college and graduate programs as we learned language to describe these experiences and were often validated by sharing our stories with other Black women and in the curricula.

Additionally, participants shared a variety of coping skills to these microaggressive environments from ignoring and avoidance, to silence and withdrawal, and some resistance in the form of speaking out or refusing to participate in assignments. The more we accomplished our goals in educational and career settings, the more comfortable we became in speaking up against microaggressions and serving as a mentor to other Black women. Based on the data, it was evident that support from family members and professionals in learning spaces was important in how the participants experienced learning. The participants described family and community support as the safety net in helping to develop coping skills to address and navigate microaggressive environments. While these coping skills have helped Black women achieve despite the harm, it has led the academy to believe that Black women do not experience trauma in learning spaces (Roseboro & Ross, 2009). As such, educators should be aware that acts of resistance or even defiance are Black women's ways of navigating trauma and educators should be responsible for fixing these environments. Mischaracterizing Black women as defiant, attitudinal, bossy, or problematic for speaking up for ourselves is a misinterpretation of who we are.

On the path to achieving our goals, all participants expressed that the pressure to be twice as good and to work harder was heavy and impacted our mental health through the manifestation of anxiety and depression to develop coping skills to navigate microaggressive environments and traumatic situations. Most of the participants mentioned dealing with anxiety and depression, a few had diagnoses and medication to address our mental health needs, and every participant discussed having regular engagement with a mental health provider. This burden of outperforming and overworking led to feelings of exhaustion among the participants and a consensus for a need to prioritize self-care and leisure activities. As such, when creating spaces with Black women's needs in mind, it is imperative to consider labor and performance along with the need for

psychological safety. Additionally, the support to navigate challenges was different depending on family background, socioeconomic status, religion, and community support. The participants who described having more social capital through their families' wealth and occupation had more support in formal learning spaces, whereas participants from poor backgrounds did not have the same level of familial support. Essentially, the participants described our learning spaces as microaggressive environments that have had grave impacts on our psychological safety. Though family and community support helped navigate these environments, they also contributed to the pressure that Black women felt to excel in these environments despite the harmful experiences.

RQ3 Theme: Black Women Care Needs and Practices: Allyship, Representation, and Support

We specifically discussed role models and mentors who encourage Black women to excel and be ourselves, which emerged as a finding for what Black women need in new learning spaces. Overwhelmingly, role models who were identified from Michelle Obama to mother and grandmother family figures were lauded for their ability to navigate microaggressive environments without losing themselves or stepping out of themselves. For professional staff in the learning environments, participants expressed that representation of other Black women was paramount in creating new learning spaces. Active representation, meaning Black women who purposely seek out other Black women to offer support and guidance is necessary. For individuals who are not Black women in learning spaces such as teachers, administrators, supervisors, and even peers, the participants expressed proactive, non-performative allyship and action is important. The participants shared that allies must hold their peers and other students accountable and educate them on ways to help Black women have safer, less microaggressive learning environments.

Creating space for Black women to articulate our needs in reimagined learning spaces was one of the desired outcomes of this study. It was important to have a space where Black women

could be amongst each other to discuss our needs given the trauma often experienced in spaces that are not created with our needs in mind. In the second sister circle, the participants were able to focus on our needs in reimagined spaces and to consider how technology could be influential in facilitating these spaces and describing our needs in learning spaces.

Representation was an important finding as well and the participants expressed a need to have other Black women in their learning spaces as sources of support and guidance and examples of success. Janelle shared,

I think representation matters so. I think that also helps with the learning space. If you go into the classroom, and somebody looks like you because there's, there's a sense of relatability that's already there, even though we don't know each other. I just know you look like my mom. You look like my aunt, my cousin. So, for me, I think that would have been totally, because even my advisor was a White male, and he was different. I'll say that I can't say he was racist. but I do feel like he didn't take the time to truly be a mentor adviser and help me with getting through. (sister circle 2)

Essentially, representation in learning spaces is helpful for Black women to feel a sense of belonging and to identify someone who may be of assistance to us. It was also important to the participants that these Black women are individuals who are willing to reach out to help other Black women rather than those who are more focused on competition or gatekeeping, which ultimately contributes to negative learning environments. Related to this, Patricia shared,

Yeah, I guess that's why I said like the representation with outreach is important, because I strongly believe that all skin folk aren't kin folk, and I mean that's the only way I can kind of survive in this environment. You have to like something you have to prove to me I can

trust you and that you want to help me. It's just not enough to be a Black face in a space,

like are you willing to help because otherwise you are causing harm. (sister circle 2)

The participants expressed a need to be surrounded by Black women who value community and uplifting Black women from all points of view and backgrounds as integral to our learning spaces. This is consistent with the research that expresses how Black women find value in mentorship and role modeling from Black women (Jackson & Winfield, 2014). Additionally, the participants in some way identified Black women as role models and mentors, with one participant particularly acknowledging that a mentor saved her from a mental health crisis. Sydney stated,

I struggled in graduate school because I didn't think graduate school was for me. Yeah, I

had the academic achievements. Yeah, I did. Well, I did not think grad school was for me,

but she [my mentor] still stuck it out with me. I actually got to a very, very low point, the

semester I was supposed to graduate from my, my master's program. I got really, really,

really…I was in a dark, dark depression to the point where I was struggling with suicidal

ideation, ironically and, ironically…And I'm actually coming up on that anniversary in a

couple of weeks. Now actually March 24th. There was a time that particular day again in

2018, I was in a really, really, really, really dark place, and it was because of two of those

women that I kind of remembered. You know what I kind of had my aha moment like these

two women have poured into you over and over again, like you know for certain that they

got you in some shape or. or fashion. And I don't think I, I don't think I would be here

without either of those two, one of them being my supervisor at the time, and my other

mentor, I would not be where I am without them, and they are phenomenal, and I look up

to us so much because I'm like I can do this. They are achieving so much like I could do

this, and just being able to help me find my way, being a Black woman, being again also

taking a so for being a dark, skinned Black woman who is passionate, who is who asks

these hard questions. (sister circle 1)

This participant's story supports the necessity of active mentorship for Black women with other Black women as vital to mental health and survival. Essentially, representation is helpful for Black women to have a guide in navigating harmful environments and seeing examples of ourselves as success stories. Much like allyship, it is not enough to just be a Black woman; instead, participants expressed a need for active representation to help one another.

Theme: Technology as Virtual Counterspace

Participants expressed a need for space with other Black women where we did not have to explain the context and did not have to be something other than ourselves. Participants expressed the consistent need to be on and having to care for others, which is often exhausting. However, if we had spaces where we could be ourselves without pressure that would allow us to experience joy and recharge. Sydney shared,

Like this has been awesome like. Really, it's been awesome because I kind of feel that same

notion of connecting with you know, other Black women and sharing with other Black

women. I think, especially where the space and headspace are where I am. And now, like

I truly feel like I'm able to really connect with Black women, and be me right, not saying

that other, other connections that I have with my friends that are not Black women, aren't

genuine right. But I had to get to a space too where I could take the mask off a little bit,

and no longer be the person who I thought they wanted me to be rather than who I actually

you know who I actually am. (sister circle 1)

Participants saw the sister circles as a potential place where this could happen with the help of technology. Additionally, participants expressed that these spaces would be like refilling stations.

We did not see a space where Black women could always separate ourselves from others. Nonetheless, having a place of refuge and retreat for Black women would be helpful. When it is not possible to retreat with other Black women, it is necessary to have allies to speak up and out for us to mitigate the trauma that we consistently navigate. Table 6 displays the themes in connection to the research questions as denoted by an x.

Table 6

Themes Correlated to Research Questions

Theme	RQ1 How do Black women define their identities?	RQ2 How do Black women describe their current learning spaces?	RQ3 What type of learning spaces do Black women identify as beneficial for their needs?
Black women's care needs and practices			
allyship, support, and representation	X		X
Prioritize care for self over care for others	X		
Responses to microaggressive environments			
Shapeshifting and mask wearing		x	
Psychological Safety		x	X
Technology as virtual counterspace			X

Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study as a means of understanding Black women's experiences in predominantly white spaces and our needs in reimagined learning spaces from the perspective of the participants in this study. Though the data collected and analyzed cannot be generalized to describe the experiences of all Black women, the findings in this study contribute to the field of study as additional considerations to ensure the needs of Black women

are considered in learning spaces, particularly the simultaneous realities of our racialized and gendered experiences. As such, three findings will be discussed in this section, which are:

1. Black women's experiences in learning spaces continue to be defined by controlling images.

2. Community support is critical in helping Black women navigate the challenges of predominantly white learning spaces.

3. Technology through virtual sister circles are spaces for Black women with our needs in mind and not limited by geography.

Finding 1: Black Women's Experiences in Learning Spaces Continue to be Defined by Controlling Images

Based on the participants' narratives, it is evident that Black women's experiences in learning spaces are still limited to the narrowly defined controlling images that were created for us and are based upon our labor (Patton & Haynes, 2018). Essentially, the more we exude strength particularly in the face of adversity and in spaces that are not psychologically safe, the more we are expected to succeed without help. This unappreciated and often under-compensated labor and expectation to be strong makes contributions to this unrealistic expectation to work without reward to the point of exhaustion (Collins, 2009; Parks, n.d.). The care we give to others is not always returned to us. As a result, we often achieve our goals as shells of ourselves as we have sacrificed our mental and physical health to prove that we belong in these spaces despite statistics showing that Black women are outperforming nearly every other identity group in education. Connected to this, Sandra explained,

> *I think, because cause kind of how I said I am the picture of someone who gets a Master's Degree sometimes they get left out of the conversation, because, like statistically, we're it.*

It looks fine. But it's like I could be like, academically killing it, but not holistically, you know, feeling it, and then graduate half a person. And it doesn't matter anymore. I think that's just huge because I feel like we, they don't, don't get the same allowance as your community building opportunities or methods for community building that are set up for us. That Black men do and that's not to say they let's switch it off like we , we need to have it too, but like, it doesn't matter. Like, yeah, it doesn't matter how many degrees I get if I'm like not emotionally on well afterward. Or I leave this historically and predominantly White space and go to my next one let's assume the next place, you're going. Your workplace will likely be like that. But I didn't even get the coping skills to be able to do that so I'm just like, you know, on, on E, running for the rest of my life because I didn't get that [help]. (one-on-one interview)

As a reflection of the controlling images and the dominant narratives created for Black women, our production is more than our humanity, and essentially creates spaces for our narratives to be controlled by individuals who are not Black women in ways that distort our realities (Collins, 2000). Additionally, this further maintains the notion of crooked rooms that have continued to shift in ways that attempt to stymie Black women's successes (Harris-Perry, 2001). As such, it is of vital importance that Black women have the power to tell our as a means of dismantling the controlling images that have been created and to create the support systems to need to thrive holistically in learning spaces. This is not something that Black women can achieve without community support.

Finding 2: Community Support is Critical in Helping Black Women Navigate the Challenges of Predominantly White Learning Spaces

Community support in the form of mentorship from other Black women, family, and community support, and allyship from individuals who are not Black women is vital to the success of Black women in their reimagined learning spaces. The participants shared consistently throughout the study that various forms of community support such as family members and church were instrumental in helping us develop the support to navigate microaggressive, harmful learning spaces and work towards our goals. Spaces and networks such as sister circles are vital for Black women to have the collectivist, community support to navigate these spaces to learn from each other's lived experiences (Collins, 2009; Neale Barnette et al., 2011). One of the participants was insistent about the support that her church community, which is the AME Christian denomination, provided for her as preparation for navigating predominantly white spaces and helping her to create a strong sense of self as a Black woman. Collins (2011) said that these community spaces are necessary to support Black women. Additionally, mentorship from Black women was expressed as important by the participants and is consistent with the literature (Jackson & Winfield, 2014). These relationships reflect the desire for active representation and the need for more access to Black women as role models and leaders in learning spaces, which addresses the hidden curriculum experienced by Black women. Essentially, these relationships help Black women develop the coping skills needed to navigate these spaces.

Allyship and upstander actions from individuals who are not Black women is of vital importance for Black women in their reimagined spaces. The participants expressed this as a necessity for Black women particularly because allies should be educating their peers and giving Black women the space needed to recover from traumatic experiences. The best way for our

narratives to be challenged is for our allies to educate their peers and to hold them accountable for microaggressive, inequitable experiences. Essentially, we do not want allyship as a descriptor; instead, we need allies who are willing to speak up, push back, and help Black women continue to carve out space for ourselves.

Finding 3: Technology Through Virtual Sister Circles are Spaces for Black Women with Our Needs in Mind and not Limited by Geography

There was consensus among the participants that technology was a great opportunity to connect with other Black women, particularly during and after the COVID-19 global pandemic. As millennials, technology, more specifically social media usage was a regular tool for connection, information sharing, and gathering, and we considered this a positive experience for Black women. Additionally, we view technology as an opportunity for Black women to see ourselves and share the successes of other Black women. Being that there are more opportunities to create media with fewer gatekeepers, Black women can share our stories more quickly and with a wider audience, which ultimately increases our representation (Womack, 2013). Participants also noted the ability to connect from our homes or respective locations is a benefit of technology. For many participants who are juggling multiple responsibilities and who may have relatives and friends across the globe, we find technology beneficial in maintaining those connections and establishing new ones. Participants referenced virtual spaces like Black Twitter and other social media communities as a highlight of technology in connecting with other Black women and appreciate that in these spaces that center our experiences, we do not have to explain the context of commentary because of the commonality of their experiences, they just get it, which is something that is often not experienced in predominantly white spaces.

While participants were mostly positive about the use of technology, we were also concerned that technology has its limitations, particularly when there are spaces that are created within larger, dominant groups. For example, Black Twitter is not a private community for users who identify as Black; as such, there is no screening or approval process, which means messages can be distorted or misinterpreted without understanding the context. According to a study conducted by Amnesty International in 2018, Black women reportedly experience more violence interactions on the Internet and even after reporting incidences, there is often little to no recourse or remedy (Blackett, 2022). With very few methods for intervention, violence can be experienced through online trolling, Zoom bombing, and other forms of online harassment (Richard & Gray, 2018). Essentially, we must proceed with much caution in creating these spaces. As a result of the online violence, Akiwowo (2022), a Black woman, authored a book to offer Black women tips on navigating violence virtual spaces and encourages allies to be actively engaged in pushing back and speaking up for us. Ultimately, violence in virtual spaces is an extension of violence Black women have experienced in other spaces and is direct reflection of Black women not mattering and being rendered voiceless (Lindsey, 2022). While technology is a tool to share our voices and experiences, white supremacy, patriarchy, and misogynoir must be named and addressed as forms of violence towards Black women's liberation.

Participants were also concerned that without context to individuals' lived experiences, social media could create spaces wherein Black women become envious of other Black women's achievements. While representation is necessary for Black women, relationships are integral as well in helping to truly understand someone else's lived experiences beyond social media posts. This is reflective of the finding that representation beyond symbolic representation was important to the participants. Afrofuturism scholars argue than technology and the arts create endless

possibilities for collaboration and community for Black women rather that the notion of competition as the representation can provide inspiration and insight to the future possibilities for us (Womack, 2013). Technology such as the Verzuz battle with Erykah Badu and Jill Scott creates opportunities for us to have representation of other Black women in uplifting ways that celebrate who we are as well as to share resources and knowledge on topics such as our hair and mental health. Essentially, technology is beneficial in creating spaces with Black women's needs at the center, particularly when those spaces have safeguards to protect our voices and interests.

Significance of the Study

One major aspect of the significance of this study is understanding curriculum through a racialized and gendered text and understanding curriculum as geographic (Pinar et al, 1995). More specifically, articulating how Black making meaning in places and spaces to ultimately understand our needs in reimagined learning spaces for ourselves is important to help support Black women. This section will further explore the significance of the study by discussing implications for this research study in the future as well as the impact on Curriculum Studies.

Curriculum as Racialized, Gendered, and Intersectional

As aforementioned, Black women know who we are, and we are not looking for additional research to define our identities. Instead, we need people, places, and spaces that will allow us to share our stories and understand how these stories impact our realities. Rather than being solely defined by race or gender, the crux of Black women's experiences is at the intersections of race and gender and the other identity markers we identify with. Research that presents our existence from a singular lens is limiting to who we are because it essentializes our experiences. When discussing and studying Black women's experiences in the field of Curriculum Studies, scholars must use theoretical frameworks that highlight the intersectionality of who we are to ensure that

our essence is represented accurately (Crenshaw, 1989). Attempting to speak for Black women without consulting us is a form of oppression. Ultimately, scholars, particularly Black women and other women of color should continue research about our lived experiences to challenge the dominant narratives about who we are and our needs.

Curriculum as Geography and Black Women as Geographic

It is important to acknowledge spaces and places for Black women along with the trauma that occurs for Black women in our historic and present spaces and places (McKittrick, 2006). Scholars must name and call out environments and trends that have created harm for Black women despite our successes and achievements. Additionally, it must be acknowledged the psychological impacts these places and spaces have had on Black women and the coping mechanisms that have been adopted and passed along for us to attempt to survive in these environments. Until we do so, Black women will continue to be successful shells of ourselves who despite our achievements feel worn out and muzzled. As such, it is necessary to understand and give space to the patterns and connections of our lived experiences and include us in the discussion of special needs for Black women (Stovall, 2019).

Black women's aesthetics in poetry, arts, and music should also be considered in how we create spaces for ourselves and contribute to the spatial meaning overall. Afrofuturism is a conduit for connecting our past to the future to answer the challenges of the present. More research in Curriculum Studies is needed in this area to help understand Black women's experience beyond space and time. Technology needs to be more actively used in learning spaces to create opportunities for Black women to connect and straighten crooked rooms. When using technology, safeguards should be implemented to mitigate the potential for virtual violence and cyberbullying. Ultimately, there are not many schools, workplaces, and homes that are safe places for Black

women. To address violence and trauma, we must be able to speak up and be taken seriously when doing so. Black women must have access to roles where we have access and agency to impact these learning spaces and are acknowledged for our expertise.

Representation in Curricula

Representation in the curricula was important for participants because of the lack of representation experienced in P-12 formal learning spaces. Participants expressed frustration, sadness, and even anger about representation being non-existent or limited to slavery or not having exposure to Black women until our collegiate years or upon discovery outside of formal spaces. As a result, we often must challenge our perspectives of only seeing white males as experts and relying on Black men to represent our lived experiences. Sandra shared,

I think, like the representation curriculum. It's obviously the authors, but also highlighting Black achievement alongside all other achievements when it's topically relevant. Not just that one month where we decide like look by people existed like no all the time, and I've always been so aware, like I feel like in college, always like so where that I wasn't being included like, Why, people weren't being included, and I was like, oh, yeah, I'm aware that I know... But then it hit me how brainwashed I was by it when I was doing my beginning dissertation research because I was just looking up all the foundational research on microaggressions... I'm like this so crazy White guy did that because in my head he was White without ever doing any extra research, I decided he was a White man, because I've only been presented with White men when I've been doing any of my research...And then finally I saw the picture, and I was like, yeah Sharon, he's Black. But you assume he is right, because you've only seen White men doing stuff, and especially around that research

around.... I don't know I just think there's like long-term effects of like us not showing up

in curriculum in formal learning spaces. (sister circle 2)

Having Black women represented in the curricula is not only uplifting for Black women but also educational for our peers as it helps to understand our lived experience.

Sister Circles as Methodology and Place

The participants valued the sister circles as a gathering place for Black women to rest, recharge, and to have community with other Black women. Before the second sister circle, one of the participants, Mack asked to share a work experience with the group as a place to process and receive feedback. After sharing her story, Mack expressed feelings of relief, joy, and validation in having a space with other Black women who understood her lived experience without context or explanations. Supporting this, after both sister circles, the participants thanked me for doing this study and for creating a virtual space that prioritized Black women's voices and experiences and was looking for opportunities to continue to be engaged after the study and how to potentially replicate this experience for other Black women. Sydney said, "*Yeah, this is a very like healing space, and I appreciate I felt very like a light after our last session, and I feel that way today. So, I appreciate it and you, Takeshia,*" (sister circle 2). The participants felt that the sister circles were a healing space where we did not have to wear masks to pretend to be something other than ourselves and a place where we could be encouraged and celebrated by other Black women.

Throughout the sister circles, there was a myriad of non-verbal and verbal communication expressed that validated what was being shared or showed concern for something that someone expressed such as snapping, clapping, affirmative hand waving, phrases like "Yaaassss," "Go off, then sis," "Yes, curls" (sister circles 1 and 2). There were even looks exchanged among participants that helped to communicate expressions in non-verbal ways, such as leaning into the camera or

falling away from the camera, turning one's camera on and off quickly for dramatic effect. These communication patterns reflect Black women's communication style as affirming and validating, which is consistent with the rationale for using this methodology when studying Black women (Dorsey, 2000). These forms of validations were affirming for the participants and helped us to establish a rapport with each other. The participants highly valued my participation in the sister circles as the researcher and participant in the sister circle by sharing that my participation felt organic, natural, and not as an outsider looking in, which validates the need for sister circles as a methodology to support Black women being included in research studies (Collier, 2017; Johnson, 2015).

Virtual Sister Circles: The Wave of the Future

The participants also appreciated the virtual format of the sister circle as it was convenient and allowed for connections to occur from their respective locale rather than having to travel to a physical location. This is a deviation from the roots of sister circles; however, technology is a conduit of connection and place that must be explored for Black women, particularly post-COVID-19 global shutdown. Essentially, virtual spaces have become a part of our routines. Additionally, the methodology calls for the Black women to experience a specific phenomenon together such as members of the same sorority, profession, or attending the same educational institution; however, this was not the case for this study (Collier, 2017; Johnson, 2015). While some of the participants had commonalities in hometowns, college attendance, and careers, I was the only individual that everyone knew in the sister circle. Other than being Black women who met the other criteria for the study, the participants did not have any connections to one another. Despite this fact, the participants felt a connection with one another and built a sisterly, support rapport. Before the first sister circle, GroupMe was not very active beyond introductions and sharing updates about the

study. However, after the second sister circle, GroupMe grew in activity as participants requested and shared links about haircare products and regimens, shared memes, and inspirational quotes, and congratulated each other on their achievements. Ultimately, the sister circle felt like a group of friends conversing about our lived experiences, encouraging, and uplifting one another as Black women. As a result of our experiences, the participants requested additional research and resources for how to create sister circles on our own. Essentially, the participants found the sister circles as a place of safety, healing, and community that should be shared and experienced with other Black women.

Implications for Future Research

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore Black women's experiences in learning spaces and reimagine spaces with their needs in mind. In carrying out this research, the following findings emerged:

1. Black women's experiences in learning spaces continue to be defined by controlling images.

2. Community support is critical in helping Black women navigate the challenges of predominantly white learning spaces.

3. Technology through virtual sister circles are spaces for Black women with their needs in mind and not limited by geography.

Based on the findings of this study, teachers and scholars should consider how Black women's experiences can contribute to the knowledge being shared by seeking Black women scholars and encouraging Black women to share more. It should not be the sole responsibility of Black women to ensure we are represented in the learning spaces. Leaders must take responsibility and speak up and for Black women. Essentially, active allyship is necessary to advance our needs in learning spaces because Black women cannot do this alone and our representation benefits everyone.

For future research, it would be beneficial to explore other identities that impact Black women's experiences such as sexual orientation and socioeconomic background. For example, for the two participants who identified as queer Black women, their sexuality added another lens to their lived experiences that impacts their experiences in predominantly white spaces and the support they need in learning spaces as well as their experiences in Black spaces. Additionally, the participants' access to wealth and social capital impacted their support system in navigating traumatic environments and the perception of their families from administrators in learning spaces. For example, for the participants whose parents had more professional careers such as medical doctors and a pharmacist, their families' statuses in their communities impacted the treatment they received from their peers and administrators because of their assumed proximity to resources. While they still experienced trauma and microaggressions due to their race and gender, their perceived wealth as a privilege that is not experienced in their racialized and gendered experiences that challenge the stereotypical narrative of Black womanhood.

Sister circles are needed to help Black women navigate all spaces because we need the support of other Black women. Ultimately, having the ability to tell our stories and organize our spaces helps prepare us to navigate learning spaces from a more psychologically safe and sound position. Black women's successes are pivotal to the fabric of learning and should be valued in all learning environments.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

College of Education

Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading

Informed Consent
For
For Black Girls, By Black Girls: Examining the Experiences of Black Women in Historically White Learning Spaces and Reimaging Spaces With Our Needs in Mind

1. My name is F. Takeshia Brown, and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a qualitative research student about Black women's experiences in historically White learning spaces and reimaging spaces with our needs in mind.

2. The purpose of this research is to explore Black women's experiences in historically White spaces and reimagine spaces with our needs in mind.

3. Participation in this research will include completion of:

   a. Participants will complete a pre-screening questionnaire to ensure they meet the requirements of the study.
   b. After completing the questionnaire, 10 prospective participants will be contacted to conduct pre-screening interviews to confirm qualifications are met. These interviews are one-on-one and for one hour each. The themes from these interviews will be used to create the themes and prompts for the first and second sister circles.
   c. After the participants have been selected, they will be placed into a group chat and encouraged to begin meeting each other as a form of community building.
   d. Participants will attend the first virtual sister circle.
   e. Participants will also be asked to view the 165-minute Jill Scott/Erykah Badu Verzuz musical battle on YouTube prior to the first session. This is instrumental to the participants understanding the conceptual framework, particularly Afrofuturism and the use of technology
   f. Participants will attend the second virtual sister circle. The theme will be solidified after the data analysis from pre-screenings.
   g. After the data has been analyzed, the participants will attend a 90-minute review session to review findings to ensure accuracy.

4. Discomforts and Risks:

Because all information obtained will be confidential and any subsequent documentation of the research will use pseudonyms, there are no foreseeable risks as a result of your participation in this study. Please note that the pre-screening questionnaire will be collected using Google Forms, which collects IP addresses and limits confidentiality. The information from this questionnaire will only be used by me to recruit participants. This information will not be shared with anyone outside of the study. You many choose not to answer any questions asked during the interviews or group talks that you are uncomfortable addressing. Additionally, you may withdraw from the study at any time.

5. Benefits:
   a. The benefits to you as a participant include being a part of network with other Black women.
   b. The benefits to society include understanding more about Black women's experiences in learning spaces, understanding the benefits of using sister circles as a methodology that centers Black women's experiences.

6. Duration/Time required from the participant: The total time of the study is 565 minutes - 9 hours and 25 minutes, including the pre-screening questionnaire for 10 minutes, one-on-one interview for 60 minutes, two sister circles for approximately 120 minutes each, and a data review session for 90 minutes. You will also be asked view the Erykah Badu and Jill Scott Verzuz battle on YouTube, which is 165 minutes.

7. Statement of Confidentiality As the researcher, I will have access to the data on my laptop, which will be deidentified, decoded, and password protected. The data will be stored for a minimum of 3 years as required by IRB and then discarded.

8. Future use of data: Deidentified or coded data from this study may be placed in a publicly available repository for study validation and further research. You will not be identified by name in the data set or any reports using information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

9. Right to Ask Questions: Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board at 912-478-5465 or irb@georgiasouthern.edu.

10. Compensation: By participating in this study, you will receive a $50 gift card at the completion of the second sister circle. The gift card will be sent via mail to the address that you provide.

11. Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may terminate your participation at any time. Should you choose to discontinue participation, please contact F. Takeshia Brown via email at fb03220@georgiasouthern.edu or 843-830-3146.

12. Penalty: There is no penalty for terminating your participation in this study. If you terminate prior to the third sister circle, you will not receive your compensation.

13. Focus Group: Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of sister circles prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researcher would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the sister circles to others.

14. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study.

You will be given a copy via email of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GS Institutional Review Board under tracking number H23197.

Title of Project: **For Black Girls, By Black Girls: Examining the Experiences of Black Women in Historically White Learning Spaces and Reimaging Spaces with Our Needs in Mind**

Principal Investigator: F. Takeshia Brown, fb03220@georgiasouthern.edu
Other Investigator(s): N/A
Research Advisor: Dr. Sabrina Ross, sross@georgiasouthern.edu

This consent is being provided electronically. The researcher(s) will ask you to verbally consent before completing the interview. Participating in the interview indicates your willingness to participate in this research.

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH INTEGRITY

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
PO Box 8005 • STATESBORO, GA 30460
Phone: 912-478-5465
Fax: 912-478-0719
IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu

To:	Brown, Takeshia
From:	Georgia Southern Institutional Review Board
Approval Date:	February 2, 2023
Expiration Date:	January 30, 2024
Subject:	Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research Expedited

After a review of the following proposed research project, it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Protocol #:	H23197
Title:	For Black Girls, By Black Girls: Examining the Experience of Black Women in Historically White Learning Spaces and Reimaging Spaces with Our Needs in Mind
Maximum Number of Subjects:	10
Purpose of Study:	The purpose of this study is to examine Black women's experiences in learning environments in which they are minoritized and to reimagine spaces with our needs in mind.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research **with the understanding that you will abide by the following conditions:**

No COVID Safety Plan	No in person procedures were included in this protocol.	
Incentives	There is a human subjects incentive in this project in the amount of:	**$50 gift cards**
	This project has been approved as the following type of data collection:	**Anonymous**
	If University or sponsored funds are used to pay incentives please refer to the Human Subjects Incentive Policy and Human Subjects Incentive Disbursement and Reconciliation Form.	
Special Conditions:	*None*	

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a Research Study Termination form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

APPENDIX C

PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

First name

Last name

Do you identify as a Black woman?

Have you experience learning in the United States for at least 3 years?

How old are you?

May I contact you in regards to participating in this study?

What is your email address?

APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT FLYER

APPENDIX E

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself. As a Black woman, how do you describe yourself?

2. Describe your formal and informal learning spaces? What did you learn there and how did they make you feel physically and psychologically?

3. What impacts did your learning environment have on your identity development and how you see yourself?

4. How did you make meaning in your learning spaces?

5. How many historically White spaces did you experience?

6. What positive experiences did you have in historically White learning spaces?

7. What negative experiences did you have in historically White learning spaces?

8. What do you think Black women need in our learning spaces to feel supported academically as well as physically and psychologically safe?

9. Can you think of any existing spaces that have been created by Black women for Black women?

10. How do you think spaces created for Black women will impact how we see ourselves?

11. What positive influences do you think technology has on learning spaces for Black women?

12.What negative influences do you think technology has on learning spaces for Black women?

APPENDIX F

IRB AMENDMENT APPROVAL

GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH INTEGRITY

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
PO Box 8005 • STATESBORO, GA 30460
Phone: 912-478-5465
Fax: 912-478-0719
IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu

To:	Brown, Takeshia
From:	Georgia Southern Institutional Review Board
Amendment Approval Date:	February 24, 2023
Current Expiration Date:	January 30, 2024
Original Approval Date:	February 2, 2023
Subject:	Status of **Modification Request** for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research
	Amendment #: **1**
	Originally Approved By: **Expedited**

After a review of your Extension Request for the following research project, it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable

Protocol #:	**H23197**
Title:	**For Black Girls, By Black Girls: Examining the Experience of Black Women in Historically White Learning Spaces and Reimaging Spaces with Our Needs in Mind**
Maximum Number of Subjects:	10

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your extension and modification.

Modification Description: The addition of including questions and themes from the sister circles has been approved.

Special Conditions: None

Please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a Research Study Termination form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

APPENDIX G

SISTER CIRCLE 1 AND 2 QUESTIONS

Sister Circle Protocol #1 – March 11, 2023

Theme: Black women's Identity: Controlling Images and Black Girl Magic

1. Being a Black woman means_____.
2. Being a Black woman feels _____ .
3. What Black women inspire you and why?

Sister Circle Protocol #2 – March 18, 2023

Theme: Place, space, and meaning-making in Reimagined Learning Spaces

1. What did you think about the Jill Scott and Erykah Badu Verzuz Battle?
2. What role do you see technology playing in creating spaces for us?
3. Describe a learning space or place that has meaning for you. How does that place make you feel?
4. What would your ideal place and space be for learning and why?