CHAPTER 9

Ties That Bind

Forging Black Girl Space in the Black (Male) Educational "Crisis"

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As the mother of two Black teenage daughters, I often lamented the lack of Black television options available to them throughout their childhood. The kinds of shows I grew up watching simply didn't exist anymore. As a result, I relied heavily on channels like TV One, which played reruns of old shows such as *A Different World, Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, Family Matters*, and so forth. Hence, while many would argue Black television has recently made a strong comeback, much of the Black television my children watched growing up (when Black TV was at an all-time low) were repeats of these older shows. Watching these shows together served to expose my daughters to television images where we were reflected in positive ways, and also allowed me to reminisce about the "good old days" when nuanced visions of blackness were commonplace in television.

Recently, we all watched an episode of *Moesha* together entitled "The Million Boy March." *Moesha* was a popular 1990s television show starring singer and actress Brandy as a teenage Black girl growing up in the Leimert Park area of Los Angeles. In this particular episode, Moesha begins the show with a voiceover that says, "When it comes to giving women our proper respect, why do some guys still act like they're clueless?" We soon learn that the "guys" Moesha refers to are members of a youth organization for Black boys, the Council for Concerned Youth (CCY). The CCY contacts Moesha's church, where the congregation is primarily Black girls, to inform them of a scholarship competition for Black boys. Moesha, incensed that the scholarship isn't open to Black girls, crashes the group's meeting and demands to be included in the fundraiser planning process and demands that the scholarship be made available to Black girls as well. After much protest from the group, Moesha successfully joins, but doesn't quite receive the warmest welcome. For example, the Black male leader of the group says to Moesha,

"Why can't the Black woman just support the Black man? Instead of always jumping up in his face tryna tear him down?"

As the story unfolds, Moesha clearly outperforms her male counterparts in organizing and even gets the then popular music group Jodeci to perform; Moesha becomes the primary force behind the event's success. Still, when the media comes to take a picture for the newspaper, the male leader of the group asks Moesha to refrain from being in the photo: "I think the world needs to see that this is the work of young Black brothers." Moesha responds, "even if it's not?" In traditional sitcom-ending form, a few moments later all of the boys encourage Moesha to be a part of the photo and they smile happily together for a picture. The show ends with the photo and the newspaper headline: "Million Boys Led by One in a Million Girl."

I begin with this vignette because it's an excellent entry point into an often difficult conversation: Does talking about the needs of Black girls signal a problem with programs designed exclusively for Black boys? Does having programs for Black boys necessarily diminish the very real struggles Black girls face in every facet of the education system? What role might patriarchy play in the focus on Black males that has galvanized media and research attention? Why can't we just have (as Moesha wanted) a program that is open to both Black girls and Black boys? These are profound questions and become particularly significant in the context of a district-sponsored manhood development program for Black boys, and the absence of a similar district initiative available to Black girls.[1]

If we begin to think about these questions through the lens of Moesha, we may understand that her anger with the exclusion of Black girls signals a pushback against the ways Black girls (and their needs) are often left out of the conversation completely. Further, the show is written in a way that demonstrates that Moesha is needed in this boy's group and, in fact, she achieves things for the group they would not have been able to achieve on their own. Hence, the message is not only that Black girls should be allowed in this space, but rather, Black girls (and women) play a critical role in the success of Black boys (and men) and the Black community more broadly. In recognizing that Black women are often positioned as what Zora Neale Hurston (1937/2008) referred to as the "mule of de world," this episode attempts to problematize the heavy focus on the needs of Black boys to the exclusion of Black girls.

While this episode aired in the early 1990s, in our current historical moment when there are exclusive programs the focus of these race-specific projects still tends to be on Black boys. Even on a national level, programs like My Brother's Keeper, an initiative of the Obama administration, aimed to address the opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color.

While this work is a critical component of supporting a broader agenda of educational equity, it can also inadvertently obscure the violence of the racialized experiences Black girls have in school. In fact, in response to the announcement of My Brother's Keeper, Kimberlé Crenshaw spearheaded an open letter, signed by thousands of influential women of color, calling on Obama to "re-align this important initiative to reflect the values of inclusion, equal opportunity and shared fate that have propelled our historic struggle for racial justice forward" (Henderson, 2014). The problem, however, is not that there is something inherently wrong with a focus on programs designed exclusively for Black boys. Rather, it's the absence of a focus and corresponding opportunities available for Black girls. In other words, addressing the specific needs of Black girls shouldn't inherently diminish the important work being done to serve the specific needs of Black boys. So while Moesha offers an important critique about the lack of focus on Black girls, the way the show is written creates an unnecessary dissonance between the championing of Black girls and spaces that are racially and gender exclusive. Perhaps if the resources existed, Moesha would have advocated for a scholarship for Black girls *specifically*—or pushed for the creation of a concerned youth council for Black girls. This would also have prevented the show from having to choose sides. In the end, as opposed to celebrating the success of an organization for Black boys, if we remember the headline of the newspaper coverage ("Million Boys Led by One in a Million Girl"), we leave with the idea that the group wouldn't have accomplished anything without a Black girl (Moesha). I want to offer an alternative ending. What if this Black boys organization successfully organized their fundraiser on their own? What if, also, Moesha articulated the injustice in the lack of opportunities and resources for Black girls and pushed for a similar structure for Black girls? What if the show became a critique of the idea that Black girls should have to fight for the kinds of supports more readily developed for Black boys? What if the show aimed to resist the narrative that Black girls are alright (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015), undeserving, or even invisible, and instead illuminated the notion that while there are certain experiences shared by Black people en masse, regardless of sex, gender, sexual orientation, ability, income level, and so forth, there are also numerous and varying Black intersectional identities and experiences that deserve their own attention to specificity (Dumas & ross, 2016)?

While scholars, public intellectuals, and even musical artists (see, for example, Beyoncé's *Lemonade*) have begun to highlight the obstacles facing Black girls and women more broadly, the experiences of Black girls in schools remain sadly underexplored. Still, in the existing literature, scholars have noted the ways, for example, that Black girls may be perceived as more defiant, loud, and unladylike than their non-Black counterparts (Morris, 2007). Perhaps as a result of these perceptions, and in direct response to the increasing attention on the racialized disciplining of Black boys, scholars have also began to interrogate the disproportionate discipline rates of Black girls in schools, noting the relative risk for disciplinary action is higher for Black girls when compared to their White counterparts than for Black boys when compared to their White counterparts (Crenshaw et al., 2015). Still, the Black educational "crisis" is often understood as a Black *male* crisis, and likewise, critical interventions are often conceptualized with the Black male in mind. Perhaps, as Ayana Brown suggests, for "those 'loud black girls,' we must continue to consider and respond to *why* they speak so loudly. We must question not only the volume of their speech but also the substance of their concerns. How do we regard these girls who have been dismissed or *trained* to be resilient through silence" (Brown, 2011).

In this chapter I want to highlight an exclusively Black-girl space and underscore various issues facing Black girls in schools *specifically*. Pushing back against the "single story" (Adichie, 2009) of the Jezebel, hypermasculine, unsophisticated, angry, defiant, disruptive, loud Black girl, this chapter reflects on an ethnographic case study that explores both the ways Black girls are racialized and hypersexualized in schools. I utilize the concept of *Black Girl Space*, which refers to the space in the margins that Black girls and women produce to enact educational fugitivity. The production of such Black Girl Space facilitates a reimagining of a Black girl identity, and the development of a radical Black subjectivity. At the same time, I also highlight the synergy between the pedagogical philosophies and practices of the MDP instructors and that of the Black woman instructor of this space. In doing so, I draw our attention to the ways these critical educators demonstrate an awareness of the needs of Black students more broadly, and also the ways these instructors leverage a shared racial and gendered identity to facilitate students' awareness of different modes of navigating common struggles. Still, I want to problematize the notion that shared racial and gender characteristics automatically lend themselves to positive teacher-student relationships. Like many of the MDP instructors, this particular teacher's frames, philosophies, and theories, in conjunction with her shared communal history with her students, are what allowed for the kind of liberatory Black educational project explored in this study. Moreover, this instructor's positionality as a Black woman who lived in the same community as her students privileged her within this context.

WOMEN'S STUDIES AT JEFFERSON HIGH

The class referenced in this study was formally called a women's studies course and took place at Jefferson High School,[2] a public high school in a

large city in the San Francisco Bay Area. While the Manhood Development Program was a formal district initiative, this exclusively Black women's studies class at the time was an anomaly. Ms. C, the course instructor, was asked to create a space for Black girls as a result of increasing disciplinary incidents involving Black girls at the high school level. While Ms. C was initially hesitant, fearing she could not count on the administration for the support she needed, in the end she agreed to teach the course every day—one class during fifth period and one during sixth period.

The course was presented to Black girls (grades 9–12) as a women's studies class (for which they would receive elective credit), and girls were encouraged, but not required, to participate. The course's curriculum was designed to address student needs across a variety of domains—physical, emotional, academic, and social. It was aimed at encouraging students to learn more about themselves, their cultural and racial history, and their communities with the goal of helping them think more expansively about Black girlhood. Class activities centered around discussions of contemporary issues; critical analysis of popular media like songs and movies; discussion about race, gender, sex and sexuality, complexion, hair, security guards, police, sexual harassment, love and relationships; and so forth. Finally, many classes centered on the needs of the girls in the class on that particular day, and curriculum was always fluid when and where necessary.

As a result of administrative turnover, the principal who asked Ms. C to develop the course was no longer at the school as the fall approached. Fearing even less structural support, Ms. C limited the course to 10 students per period (or 20 students total). While each class was initially full, by the end of the first semester, there were 12 students remaining. Those 12 students remained in the course for the entirety of the second semester. Importantly, of the 8 girls who dropped the course, 7 did so as a result of no longer being a student in the school. Two of the students moved out of the city altogether, citing safety concerns. The one student who remained in the school but not in the course dropped the course very early on. After stealing from multiple girls in the space, and also sharing confidential information with students outside of the class, she felt unwelcomed (by the other girls) to return. All 12 remaining girls identified as Black or African American, and all identified with the "she" pronoun. The girls ranged in their complexions and sizes, from particularly thin to overweight—from a deep dark chocolate to a lighter caramel.

MS. C

Ms. C was a petite Black woman with a caramel complexion and an infectious smile. She would often dress in clothes that signaled her connection

to youth culture, mixing in her own Afrocentric flair. She had also begun the process of locking her hair (developing dreadlocks), interestingly, as opposed to cutting her hair and beginning with short twists (as many people do); she decided to begin the process with her shoulder length, curly (but not quite kinky) hair. I signal this only because for many months, it was unclear what she was doing with her hair; this became a recurring point of conversation between Ms. C and the girls in the class. The general consensus was that she was "ruining" her hair and should cease with the dreadlocks business immediately! She would sometimes wrap her hair in a headwrap or pull it back into a ponytail. She had a few different pairs of glasses, each one with its own quirky shape or pattern. Her nose was pierced with a small gold hoop and she often wore large, dramatic earrings. Overall, she presented as a healthy mix of Afrocentric, urban, and quirky.

Ms. C was in graduate school at the time, completing her master's in women's spirituality, a program that combined gender/women's studies, ethnic studies, philosophy, social justice, and spirituality. Prior to her role as the instructor for the women's studies course, she was an English teacher at Jefferson High School for one year. Prior to that, she taught English/literature for 7 years at two other public high schools in the Bay Area. Ms. C took extreme pride in being a teacher, and she understood the work she did with students as necessarily always extending beyond the classroom. Still, she was always in her classroom long before I arrived, and she always left hours after the bell rang.

Like many of the MDP instructors, Ms. C understood that the ways Black students experienced anti-Blackness in schools necessitated creating a space that would serve as a refuge from the larger school. This often meant that she positioned herself *with* her students and *against* the administration. In the areas of discipline, conflict resolution, and the power of words, for example, there is a strong parity between the philosophies and pedagogical practices of Ms. C and those of many of the MDP instructors.

ON DISCIPLINE

More than disassociating from the school administration, Ms. C had to wrestle with the collateral damage of the adults in the school creating an unsafe disciplinary environment. Already, the way the space was constructed ensured that student behaviors that would be disciplined in other spaces within the school were either not considered a discipline issue, or rather were praised within this Black girls' space. In the beginning, Ms. C decided to enact discipline outside of the classroom space so as to minimize the chances of triggering students accustomed to unfair and inappropriate interactions with the larger school staff. Still, there were moments

when Ms. C determined it was impossible to avoid direct confrontation within the space. I asked her about her policy on sending students out of the classroom:

> *Ms. C:* To me, that's a last resort, last last last last LAST resort.
> *Interviewer:* Did you ever do it?
> *Ms. C:* Timone.
> *Interviewer:* She got a referral?
> *Ms. C:* No, I didn't write no referral. I never wrote a referral because, again, I felt like, if I'm sending you to someone then that defeats my purpose and this is bad, but I tell other teachers, like, that's just me, but use your mind. Other teachers will be like, "The principal didn't help me; he made it worse!" and I'm like, "Well why did you send them to him? If you see that it doesn't work, why do you keep doing it?" So I'm like, I don't send them to him because I know it's just going to make it worse and counterproductive to my values and rules. So if I felt like the office was a place where discipline and restorative justice happened, I would've sent them, possibly . . .

For Ms. C, sending students to the principal would make the situation "worse" and be "counterproductive to [her] values and rules." This is a critical distinction. In other words, more than the necessity of positioning herself as an ally and advocate of students, in opposition to the administration, Ms. C firmly believed that sending students to the office would actually make whatever situation deemed potentially discipline-worthy, worse. In fact, she does not believe "discipline" happens in the office. When she indicates that if she believed this were the case she would likely send students there, she implies that if she understood the administration as partners in resisting anti-Blackness, she would also partner with them in healthy and effective disciplining of Black girls. Still, when she indicates "possibly" at the end of her sentence, she signals her view of the impossibility of such a partnership.

Beyond her refusal to send students to the formal disciplinary body within the school, as a general rule Ms. C refused to send students out of the classroom. Centering the students' well-being, she questions:

> This is my thing, where am I sending them to? I'm sending them to go hang out on that corner. I'm sending them to go buy chips. I'm sending them in front. That's terrible. What? No! So that's why, again, I was always like, I'll talk to them in class, before class, after, really try to bring the point home, give them opportunities to really show up differently . . . in this climate, keeping them in is more powerful.

Sending students out of this space is also counterproductive to Ms. C's values and rules, and ultimately, her philosophy. As she imagines what she may be sending students to if she asks them to leave, she recognizes the senselessness of sending students to the very things she aims to protect them from. Further, given the various forms of #BlackGirlMagic happening within the classroom,[3] keeping students inside is always "more powerful."

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Ms. C's discipline practices were another way she enacted conflict resolution as a pedagogical tool within the classroom. When asked about the ways Ms. C disciplined them, all students indicated that Ms. C was committed to working through problems in a way that was different from other teachers' approaches. In comparing other teachers to Ms. C, one student commented, "they be so quick to just you know kick you outta class and don't really care about you know you stayin or tryin to make it—like, try to fix it and stuff like that. So yeah." Another student noted, "She discipline us by gettin on our level you know and tryin to make stuff work and tryin to fix it rather to other teachers they don't care they just write a referral and just send us to the principal or somewhere else so they could fix it when that's really not the problem you know." Hence, Ms. C's mode of disciplining was inseparable from her commitment to resolve any and all conflicts in the space, whether they were between students or between a student and herself. In contrast to the ways students experienced other teachers as uncaring or unwilling to care enough to resolve an issue, they appreciated Ms. C's dedication to reinforcing Black girl humanity, and maintaining a healthy space.

WORDS MATTER

As noted earlier, Ms. C was keenly aware of the ways society produces and reproduces harmful racialized notions of Black girl identity. Hence, Ms. C was very deliberate: She consistently provided the girls with positive reinforcement and did not permit the degradation of Black girls and women in the space. For example, at the beginning of the year, most of the girls referred to one another and to Black girls outside of the class as "bitch." While not employing a zero tolerance policy for the word, Ms. C worked with the girls to think about what it meant to define themselves in that way. By the end of the course, she noted a marked difference in the way girls were employing the word:

> And so even though terms like that still show up in my classroom, I feel like I noticed a shift with it, I definitely noticed a shift with it, um, where they're more apt to, it's not the only word they use. They might use that word, but they also might use different things like woman or girl, or they're already expanding what that means, or even just how they relate to it. I felt like, at the beginning of the year they were using that word more as an identity descriptor and now I felt like they were using it as more of what it really is, as an insult. You know what I mean, so what does it mean to have an insult be how you define your identity?

Thus while the term was still used to levy an insult during a story or in the context of talking about a teacher or administrator someone felt wronged by, they were no longer hailing each other as "bitches."

While Ms. C was working with her Black girl students on reframing how they identified one another, so too were MDP instructors with their Black boy students. Many instructors insisted that boys not us the "n word" in their classrooms, and even offered alternative descriptors such as "brotha" or "king." While the n word is attached to a more obvious highly racialized and violent history, the "b word" has particular gendered and racialized connotations when levied against Black girls and women. Both Ms. C and MDP instructors worked with their students to refrain from referring to their male or female counterparts in these terms as well. In other words, in both boy and girl spaces, educators were working toward a moratorium on the use of the "n word" and the "b word."

Similarly, the discipline philosophy and practices Ms. C employed in her classroom closely mirror the pedagogical choices of many of the MDP instructors. Ms. C and MDP instructors shared ideas such as reframing what counts as a disciplinary moment, or refusing to send students to the office (even if they sent students out of the classroom). In these instances, regardless of whether the space was created for Black boys or Black girls, these philosophies and practices are rooted in these critical Black educators' understanding of the schools' disciplinary structures as inherently anti-Black. In fact, in both spaces, their approach to discipline essentially began with their disapproval of the ways adults in the school interact with children and the ways those interactions inform students' understanding of what it means to be disciplined.

BLACK GIRL BEGINNINGS

While there was significant ideological and pedagogical overlap in Ms. C's class and the MDP classes, there were also marked points of departure that

highlight the importance of separate spaces that attend to students' intersectional identities. For example, given that Black girls must consistently negotiate their existence in a school and society where their skin tone, hair texture, and physical features are positioned in opposition to an aesthetic ideal, there was a symbolic (and sometimes literal) violent response to being in an exclusively Black-girl space. Ms. C notes:

> In the first two months of school, every week had two or three major conflicts between people that were just like, "I refuse to be in the same room as her" or "Imma rip her head off," and all of this really violent . . . almost like they were just raging at each other, and coming into this room together. It was like, you know, when you try to put magnets together and they're the opposite side, it was like that. Like, that's how absolutely vicious the self-hate was, and I felt overwhelmed every single day because of the things I said before about not having the support and those other, you know, and the way this space is so different than other spaces. And if I had kind of just had a, you know, hard line, I run the risk of losing all of them, but at the same time, that can't happen. So I had times, I did a lot of mediating, and I was like, vent to me and get it all out so that you don't go and fight homegirl because it's not worth it. Like, tell me what's really going on. So I had to take a lot of that and listen to a lot of . . . you know in the cartoons, like when the hair's flowing back [laughs]. Really just strengthening myself, so then having the mediations, and that was before Sista Latifah was here. And my little ass, I'm trying to sit people down, and talk to them, and make sure, like, you ain't gonna jump on her and [it was] RIDICULOUS!

I share Ms. C's words here to illustrate the significance of what it means to create, develop, and produce Black space together. That is, you cannot simply put Black people together and wait for a Black liberatory experience. Rather, Black space in this context is purposefully constructed (and often contested) by all actors within the space. In the beginning of the year, the same kinds of interactions Black girls were having with one another outside of this class were explicitly present within it. Further, Ms. C suspects that the fact that the space was all Black may have actually increased the tension. She notes:

> I actually feel like if it was mixed race, I actually think there would've been less conflict, which is ironic because people think about racial beef amongst students, but I actually feel like they're really comfortable being in mixed classes because they're in that all

> the time. So when you make it all Black, the self-hate, it comes up real BIG. Like, the internalized stuff, it really comes up because your sister sitting next to you is your reflection and everything you're uncomfortable in yourself, it's in your face for a whole hour. So some really intense dynamics came up.

According to Ms. C, being in a classroom with all Black girls forced the students to confront their own self-hatred in the context of an anti-Black world. While in other work, my colleagues and I have discussed the comfort Black boys described feeling in all-Black spaces (see for example, Givens et al., 2016; Nasir et al., 2013; ross et al., 2016), Ms. C asserts that in this context, the opposite was initially true. This analysis is supported by the ways Black girls themselves described their original feelings about being in an exclusively Black-girl class and the ways they felt about Black girls overall.

When asked how they felt about having a class with all Black girls, all respondents reported being concerned that the class would be a negative experience as a result of bringing Black girls together. Shaunté explains,

> *Shaunté:* To be honest at first I thought, like, oh my gosh, like, this gonna be hecka messy. Like, there's gonna be hecka drama and hecka stuff like that, but it turned out to actually be a very good moment.
>
> *Interviewer:* Why did you think it was gonna be messy at first?
>
> *Shaunté:* Cuz it was just like, I don't know, like, just a class full of Black girls, so I'm just like, oh my gosh, like.

Other students commented, "at first, I'm thinkin, like, its gone be a riot in dis class" or "all these girls gone be ratchet and stuff" or "all I know is Imma end up slappin somebody. I don't care, you look at me the wrong way Imma slap you" or "all Black females is not gon work." Additionally, it was not uncommon for students to make comments that denigrated Black girls more generally. Statements such as "bum bitches do bum things" or "bitches with raggedy purses don't care about shit," for example, were a painful reminder of the ways Black girls were perceiving and rearticulating negative societal images of themselves. Although students reported feeling markedly different as the year progressed, in order to understand how Black girls reimagine Blackness, it becomes critical to consider where Black girls *begin* with one another; this starting point, while often overlooked, renders the kinds of transformative positioning occurring in these spaces all the more meaningful.

BLACK GIRL HYPERSEXUALIZED

In addition to the initial struggles Black girls had with one another, they also discussed what it meant to be a Black girl in particular—an experience often markedly different from that of their male counterparts. For example, many class conversations spanned what it meant to be a Black girl at Jefferson and the various ways girls felt sexually harassed at the school. Particularly during extremely hot spells, girls struggled with wearing something that kept them cool but also didn't create a space where they would receive unwanted attention from boys. While these conversations were mostly around things boys would say to them (i.e., "look at all that ass" or "ratchet" or "can I touch it?"), there were also instances where both male and female administrators made comments to girls that made the girls uncomfortable. For example, one day Daronda came to class upset at the way a White female administrator indicated her shirt was too revealing. Daronda noted the administrator said, "You're blessed in a way that I'm not so I'm gonna need you to cover those." During our interview, Laquita discussed a time a male administrator indicated her shirt was too revealing:

> I was—actually, it was a principal, actually. It was Mr. James. I was in the cafeteria sitting there eating my food, and he came and sat with us, and then I had my shirt, my shirt was down, but I didn't know it was down. Nobody was saying nun so I didn't know. And he came up to me and was like, "why yo chest all out like that, you need to put them thangs up," and I was like, why are you looking at me that kind of way, and I was uncomfortable. And I didn't have no jacket, so I couldn't just, like, cover up, I was, like, stuck so I'm just like, wow. And everybody was just like, did he really just say dat to you? He had said somethin else, I forgot what he had said, and I was just like, you are our principal. You are a grown man who has kids our age probably, and you sayin stuff like this. That's not coo.

Beyond the regular sexual harassment girls reported hearing from boys in their school, both Daronda and Laquita are also forced to navigate inappropriate language from school administrators. While they both felt uncomfortable in the situations, neither girl felt like there was any possible resolution. Rather, these kinds of situations are simply another aspect of schooling Black girls must endure.

More than verbal assaults, girls also discussed instances in which they were touched inappropriately. The following excerpt from field notes represents one such example.

> I notice that Dalesha is not here today. I asked Ms. C why Dalesha was absent and she indicated that apparently Dalesha had on very short shorts because it was extremely hot today. Dalesha left early because she was upset because boys kept slapping and grabbing her bottom. Ms. C said she told her she is never wearing shorts to school again and commented on how the boys at her school are disrespectful. Ms. C begins to discuss how this is a rampant issue for girls and how the administration does nothing about it and/or may even shame the girls for wearing something that "invites" that kind of behavior. (excerpt from field notes, 4/3/13)

In this instance, Dalesha decided to leave school because she felt she had no other recourse to prevent the sexual harassment she was experiencing. Further, as opposed to boys having to change their behavior, it is Dalesha who decides she will alter her dress for the foreseeable future.

Ebony also discusses the ways she sees the differences between what boys and girls have to navigate at Jefferson:

> Yeah, cuz it's like—the boys . . . it's like it don't really be too much going on with them but it's like, the girls, it's like, hecka drama, hecka mess, hecka stuff like that and then it's like when it comes to the boys and going at towards the girls, it's like the boys disrespect the girls, tell them stuff, and it's like, you always hear, like, a boy calling a girl the b word, or a ho, or hecka stuff like that.

Here Ebony notes that girls are faced with more "drama" with one another, in addition to the regular harassment they face from boys in their school. In other words, Black girls in her school must navigate both the "mess" they have with other Black girls and the ways they are consistently disrespected by Black boys on campus. This precarious positionality illuminates the necessity of Black girls building Black girl solidarity; outside of the space they have created together, Black girls remain in tension with one another, and with their male counterparts.

EXCLUSIVELY BLACK SPACES

In recognizing that anti-Blackness is endemic to how we make sense of human life (Dumas & ross, 2016), exclusively Black spaces in education are born, created, and in direct response to the rampant anti-Blackness in the larger world, and in U.S. public schools (ross, in press). Like many of the MDP students articulated about their Black boy spaces, all students in this study agreed that there should be more spaces like this for Black

girls. Despite the initial challenges of the space, all students were clear that spaces like these would be a positive force in Black girls' lives. Kenosha notes, "Every school need to have a program like this. Just for us to have a chance. I bet you it'd be so much of a difference, like, it'd be a difference in every school." For Kenosha, the class was not only something that she herself enjoyed; she understands it as a necessary structure in every school serving Black girls. In fact, these spaces are wholly necessary for Black girls to "have a chance." Within Kenosha's statement is a recognition of the myriad obstacles Black girls face in their schools and in life more broadly. Her statement that there would be "so much of a difference" is indicative of what she understands as the current educational Black girl reality.

Ms. C also articulates the magnitude of exclusive spaces themselves. She notes, "I really believe strongly in having our own spaces and I think that it's really important to have a space for folks who identify as such and can just be them . . . I believe in the concept whole-heartedly." A part of "just being them" entails the creation of a space where Black girls can hash out what it means to be themselves in an anti-Black, patriarchal society. Ms. C continues, "So the monoracial space brings up an intensity, but at the same time though, I feel like it has to happen. So I felt like there's some things that girls can get here that they couldn't get in a mixed-race space. There were some things that we would never talk about, ever, even if other people were bringing it up." For Black girls attempting to navigate a school, and a broader society where they may represent the antithesis of an aesthetic norm, openly discussing the aspects of yourself that mark you as unattractive or undesirable can be particularly traumatic. This is especially true for Black girls, as girls and women are more likely to be valued (or not) based on their physical appearance. Yet, in this course, a part of creating Black girl space was the ability to engage in difficult but critical conversations about how we navigate existing as ourselves in hostile environments. Ms. C notes, "All Black girls deserve it. It shouldn't be, like, an extra thing or they get it and then they don't . . . I feel like there was such a high need and I really feel like they deserve it, and I feel like, um, the fact that um the African American Male Achievement is so focused on the males is really missing, they're missing a lot when they do that, with what's happening with Black girls."

Like Moesha, Ms. C is frustrated with a program focused solely on Black boys, as Black girls are consequently erased from the larger conversation on the needs of Black students and denied essential resources and opportunities. As noted earlier, this women's studies class was not (as MDP was) sponsored or supported by a school district. As significant as this space was for the Black girls who participated, it was a "one-off," offered for 1 year as a result of the commitment and dedication of one Black woman instructor. Regardless of the significant ways Black girls experience

anti-Blackness in schools, or the overwhelmingly positive impact this exclusively Black-girl space had on everyone involved, at the time the kind of structural support available for Black boys simply didn't exist for Black girls. However, I want to offer that rather than being frustrated with programs that exclusively support Black boys, we might simultaneously celebrate the existence of those programs, while also critiquing any structure that always already presumes the need for this kind of support for Black boys and fails (or refuses) to consider Black girls.

At present, a growing number of initiatives are expanding their missions to include a focus on Black girls and the struggles they face in schools and in society more broadly. One example of this is Oakland Unified School District's new African American Female Excellence Initiative. While this program is still relatively new, the fact that the district has created and is committed to supporting a program specifically for Black girls is a step in the right direction. All of our children deserve institutionalized structural supports that push back against anti-Blackness in schools and in society more broadly. This kind of commitment signals to Black girls that they matter, that their struggles matter, and that their voices will be heard.

NOTES

1. Although a district initiative for Black girls did not exist at the time of this research, Oakland Unified School District recently developed a program for Black girls, African American Female Excellence.
2. I identify geographic region, but use pseudonyms for school names and students so as to protect the confidentiality of the students and educators.
3. #BlackGirlMagic is a hashtag created by CaShawn Thompson to celebrate Black girls and women.

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