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HOMEPLACE: AN AFTERSCHOOL CLUB FOR ADOLESCENT BLACK GIRLS
AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

Graduate School of Leadership & Change

Antioch University

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

Jana L. Johnson-Davis

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September 2024

HOMEPLACE: AN AFTERSCHOOL CLUB FOR ADOLESCENT BLACK GIRLS
AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE MIDDLE SCHOOL

This dissertation, by Jana L. Johnson-Davis, has
been approved by the committee members signed below
who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of
Antioch University
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

HOMEPLACE: AN AFTERSCHOOL CLUB FOR ADOLESCENT BLACK GIRLS
AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Jana L. Johnson-Davis

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Yellow Springs, OH

Adolescent Black girls often experience marginalization in schools due to zero-tolerance policies, oppressive classroom curricula, and teachers who lack cultural competency. The literature on adolescent Black girls in school revealed that there are spaces within schools that can serve as homeplaces for Black girls. This study explored how adolescent Black girls experienced homeplace in an afterschool club at a predominantly White middle school in Decatur, Georgia. This research also expands bell hooks's (2001) theory of homeplace from the home environment to school buildings. Narrative inquiry was the methodology used for the study, and interview data was analyzed through thematic analysis. Black feminist thought served as the theoretical lens. The findings revealed that during their participation in the afterschool club, the study's participants experienced homeplace through: (a) a sense of belonging, (b) experiences that provided them the opportunity to grow and develop, and (c) access to caring Black women who facilitated a safe space that the girls needed. Recommendations for school policy and practice that may reduce the marginalization of Black girls and increase access to homeplaces inside schools are included. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: homeplace, bell hooks, adolescent Black girls, White middle school, marginalization

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My grandmothers, Vera Lee Cotton and Blanche Myrick Johnson, women who could make a homeplace with their eyes closed.

My grandfather, Odie Cotton, who was a close second to my grandmothers in creating a homeplace for me.

My grandfather, Everett Johnson, who made me feel at home whenever I was with him.

My brother, Craig Jason Johnson, and aunt, Jennifer Hampton, whose absence and presence, I still feel every day.

My dear friend, LaTanya Faye Small, who cheered me on until the very end.

My father-in-law, Big Mel Davis, for his consistent encouragement to make my dream a reality.

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Mama: Thank you for your commitment to public school education, thank you for making sure that I attended the best public schools in Chicago, and thank you for providing me with experiences that fostered my love of learning. Even in retirement, you continue to be a model teacher.

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Mama Etta: Thank you for your continued love, support, and for always showing up.

Kobie and Khari: All I needed to hear was one of you say, “You got this, Ma!” and I could write a little more. I can’t tell you how much it means to know that my boys believe in me. Thank you!

Mawuli: Thanking you could require me to write another dissertation. I will simply say thank you for encouraging me to go back and complete this dream. Thank you for all the ways that you have supported this process. Thank you for being my forever cheerleader. Thank you for loving me the way that you do.

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Dr. Betty Overton-Akins: Thank you for staying with me!

Dr. Michael Simanga: Thank you for the never-ending support of me and my family.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In 2010, I began teaching at a predominantly White middle school in Decatur, Georgia. Shortly after my arrival, I was asked to serve as the sponsor of an afterschool club that focused on Black girls. I refer to the club by the pseudonym, Ladies of Distinction (LOD). While participation in LOD was aimed at Black girls, club membership was open to all the school's Grade 6–Grade 8 girls. However, the club only attracted African American girls and girls from the local African immigrant community. During my 6-year tenure as the club sponsor, I witnessed the *marginalization* that members of the all-Black club endured daily. Marginalization, in the context of Black girls, can be defined as racialized sexism that ignores their experiences, thus making Black girls invisible (Anderson, 2020). Consequently, Black girls and their experiences are pushed to the margins. I attribute the marginalization of LOD's membership to the middle school's zero-tolerance policies, oppressive classroom curricula, and teachers who lacked cultural competency. My experiences as the LOD sponsor led me to understand why adolescent Black girls need access to a culturally affirming space when they attend a predominantly White school.

When I became the LOD sponsor, the previously established protocol was for the girls to "dress up" for the club's bimonthly meetings. Dressing up meant that the girls were expected to wear clothing that they would wear on a special occasion. It was always fun to watch the girls' excitement when they arrived at school on LOD meeting days. Those mornings, you could typically find a group of LOD members in a school bathroom enthusiastically checking out each other's outfit. Unfortunately, their excitement was quickly extinguished as they were approached by a school administrator who reprimanded them about their dresses being too short, their pants being too tight, or their tops being cut too low. While

the middle school's student handbook outlined the school's dress code policy, the handbooks for school years spanning 2013–2016 are no longer available. During that period, the middle school's dress code had length requirements for skirts, dresses, and shorts. The dress code also prohibited girls from wearing leggings and tops that exposed their chests and shoulders. Prior to confronting the girls, the school administrator would have already received an email from a teacher complaining about how members of LOD were in violation of the school's dress code policy. Inevitably, I would also be confronted by the assistant principal who warned that if the girls did not change their clothes, they would be written up and sent home. Of course, none of the girls had an extra change of clothes at school, or a parent available to bring them one. The attire of LOD members became such an issue that I completely changed the club's dress protocol for meetings. Consequently, I designed and purchased club t-shirts for all LOD members and instructed them to wear their shirts and jeans on the club's meeting days.

School dress code violations were not the only issues that contributed to the marginalization of LOD's members. The girls often had difficult interactions with their teachers, most of whom were White and deficient in culturally responsive pedagogy. The teachers of LOD's members often accused the girls of having "bad attitudes" and being insubordinate. Shortly after becoming the LOD sponsor, I noticed the adverse and cumulative impact that dress code violations, contentious teacher interactions, and the struggle to connect with classroom curricula was having on girls in the club. Girls in LOD were often written up for being disruptive in their classes, which typically resulted in disciplinary consequences such as in-school suspension. Additionally, many of the girls struggled academically due to the cultural dissonance that they experienced from their teachers and the curricula taught in their classes. As a result of my observations, I began developing club programming that I believed would counter the harm

that LOD members routinely faced in school. Specifically, I planned activities that affirmed the girls' cultural and racial identities. With the new programing, LOD meetings became a space where the girls could be their authentic selves, without the fear of White gaze. As a result, during LOD meetings, the girls began to express themselves and openly discuss the racism that they encountered in their classes. What I did not know then—but what my study of the literature has led me to understand now—is that the liberated behavior the girls exhibited in LOD meetings was the result of them experiencing what cultural scholar and educator, bell hooks (2001), described as "homeplace." My introduction to bell hooks's theory of homeplace was so significant to my research on Black girls that I decided to examine it further.

According to hooks (2001), homemaking was a conventional role assigned to Black women. However, Black women expanded the role to include "caring for one another, for children, for black men, in ways that elevated our spirits, that kept us from despair, that taught some of us to be revolutionaries able to struggle for freedom" (hooks, 2001, p. 385). Homeplace, as defined by hooks (2001), is the task of "making home into a community of resistance" (p. 384). Furthermore, hooks (2001) posited that homeplace "was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist" (p. 384), despite the cruel reality of racist segregation and sexist domination. Ultimately, hooks (2001) claimed that Black women must recommit to homeplace politically to "address the needs and concerns of young Black women who are groping for structures of meaning that will further their growth, young women who are struggling for self-definition" (p. 389). Hooks's theory of homeplace resonated with me as I reflected on my time with LOD. It is apparent to me now that LOD meetings served as a homeplace for its membership as they struggled against being pushed to the margins in school.

The disparity in school discipline that I witnessed with the girls in LOD is consistent with the literature on how zero-tolerance policies in United States public schools disproportionately impact Black girls. Sellers and Arrigo (2018) described zero-tolerance as a "widely implemented disciplinary policy administered throughout the United States public education system. The policy designates predetermined punishments for school-based infractions, regardless of circumstance or context" (pp. 1–2). Zero-tolerance policies emerged in the 1990s when police in large urban cities began arresting people for minor infractions, with the intention to prevent more serious offenses in the future. Following the Columbine High School shooting in 1999, surveillance in schools expanded, with the objective of increasing student safety. However, in "Black Girls Doing Time for White Boys' Crime? Considering Columbine's Security Legacy Through an Intersectional Lens," Addington (2019) argued that the deadly shootings at Columbine High School led to a variety of policy proposals that "contributed to the current punitive school climate that has negatively affected students, particularly students of color" (p. 1). Consequently, Black girls have become the fastest-growing demographic to suffer the consequences of exclusionary discipline (Morris, 2016). Since the tragedy at Columbine, zero-tolerance policies have expanded to include automatic suspension for a variety of infractions, including but not limited to fights, the threat of violence, and dress codes.

Narrative Research

In Chapter III, I describe the narrative research methodology I employed in this study. Creswell (2013) called narrative research a method that "begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals" (p. 70). Furthermore, Creswell (2013) explained that the procedures for implementing narrative research consist of "focusing on studying one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences (or life

course stages)" (p. 70). The central question of my research was: How did adolescent Black girls experience "homeplace" in an afterschool club at a predominantly White middle school in Decatur, Georgia? My inquiry is significant to the academy because it expands hooks's (2001) theory of homeplace to an approach that can be utilized to counter the marginalization that Black girls face in predominately White schools. I used Black feminist thought as the theoretical lens for this study. Scholars such as Kelly (2020) and Goins (2011) underscored the appropriateness of this selection.

Organization of Study

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. Chapter I was devoted to the introduction of the study. In the introduction, I argued that the marginalization of Black girls that I witnessed while serving as the sponsor of Ladies of Distinction—an afterschool club for Black girls—can be attributed to the middle school's zero-tolerance policies, oppressive classroom curricula, and teachers who lacked cultural competency. Furthermore, I argued that Black girls benefit from having access to a culturally affirming space, such as a homeplace, when they attend a predominantly White school. In Chapter II, I review the literature on countering the harm of Black girls in schools, homeplace, and belonging. In Chapter III, I provide an overview of the methodology and research design that I employed for the study. In Chapter IV, I present the research findings and analysis. Lastly, in Chapter V, I articulate the significance of my study, policy implications, recommendations, and considerations for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review that spans 2000–2012 is organized thematically. The themes that emerged from my review of the literature on adolescent Black girls and school are: “Countering the Harm of Black Girls in School,” “Homeplace,” and “Belonging.”

Emergent Themes

Countering the Harm of Black Girls in School

A cursory review of the literature on the experiences of adolescent Black girls in America’s urban schools revealed that the disparate treatment they encounter today is not a contemporary phenomenon. During the 18th century, girls who were in trouble with the law—including enslaved adult Black women—were sent to semi-penal institutions like asylums and reformatories. Children in these institutions were allowed to engage in activities that would morally rehabilitate them, and some were even permitted to attend school for 4 hours each day. However, Black children were not placed in those institutions, and their recourse was limited to a mob lynching or confinement in adult prisons (Morris, 2016). Once Black girls were allowed in facilities that were designed to reform children, the conditions and access to services remained unequal. This inequitable treatment remains true today and has been amplified by the enforcement of zero-tolerance policies in schools.

In the 1990s, zero-tolerance policies gained popularity as inner-city police began arresting people for minor crimes as a deterrent to more serious infractions. In 1994, the Gun Free Schools Act was implemented after a series of school shootings across the United States. Then, in 1999, following the Columbine High School massacre, schools throughout America increased their surveillance practices. Yet, in “Black Girls Doing Time for White Boys’ Crime? Considering Columbine’s Security Legacy Through an Intersectional Lens,” Addington (2019) argued that the Columbine tragedy resulted in school policy changes that had negative

implications for Black and Brown children. Furthermore, Addington (2019) argued that the policy changes resulted in the increased use of security personnel and the dependence on exclusionary discipline practices, despite the lack of evidence that either approach reduces school violence.

Addington (2019) asserted that the adverse consequences experienced by Black girls from post-Columbine policies have not been adequately addressed in the literature. Additionally, the authors posited that "this omission not only conceals the harms experienced by Black girls but also limits an understanding of the full extent of racial disparity in school discipline" (Addington, 2019, p. 5). For example, Addington presented data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, which highlight the disproportionate use of exclusionary school discipline on Black girls. According to Addington (2019),

> Data collection from the 2015–2016 school year reported that Black girls made up 8% of students but were 14% of students who were suspended and 10% of the students expelled. Black girls were the only female racial group disproportionately disciplined. (p. 5)

Additionally, Addington's (2019) study confronted "the irony of this pattern as the Columbine shooters as well as almost all the mass school shooters since have been White males" (p. 2).

Joseph et al. (2016) also used data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) to emphasize the discipline disparities that exist between Black and White students in grades K–12. In "Black Female Adolescents and Racism in Schools: Experiences in a Colorblind Society," Joseph et al. (2016) underscored the contradiction in how the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 requires disaggregated data regarding discipline by race and action to be collected to reduce school suspensions and negative discipline policies, yet "the law takes no proactive stance regarding racial justice issues in its approach to changing discipline practices" (p. 5). Furthermore, the authors asserted that this approach to changing discipline practices, or lack

thereof, is "colorblind." Consequently, Black girls are a demographic group significantly impacted by this colorblind approach. Like many of the other scholars cited in my literature review, Joseph et al. argued that policy makers and educational leaders need to focus their attention on increasing the educational opportunities and outcomes for Black girls.

In *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, Morris (2016) presented an exhaustive examination of how zero-tolerance policies influence the school-to-confinement pipeline for Black girls. Morris highlighted how—more than 2 decades after the Gun Free Schools Act was implemented—Black girls have become the fastest-growing demographic to suffer the consequences of school suspensions and expulsions. According to Morris (2016), Black girls in southern states are the most vulnerable to exclusionary discipline practices. In that region, 56% of Black girls are suspended and 45% of Black girls are expelled. Black girls also hold the unfortunate designation of being the most suspended among all students in 10 southern states (Morris, 2016). Regrettably, those sobering statistics are not limited to the south. In Chicago during the 2013–2014 school year, 23% of Black girls in high school received out-of-school suspensions, compared to 6% of Latina girls, and 2% of White and Asian girls. In-school suspensions in Chicago doubled for Black girls in high school from 10% to 20% between the 2008–2009 and 2013–2014 school years.

According to Morris, Chicago is a city where racial tensions permeate the learning environment of Black girls. During the summer of 2014, Morris (2016) interviewed several young women who were high school age or slightly older, who had attended Chicago Public Schools at some point in their academic careers. One theme that arose from the interviews was how surveillance measures and the presence of school resource officers made school feel like prison. During one of her Chicago interviews, Morris asked Michelle, a participant, what it felt

like to have metal detectors in her school. Michelle responded, "Annoying as hell. ... It's a downer for your morning to have to walk through a metal detector, you know?" (Morris, 2016, p. 77). Nala added, "I felt like I was visiting somebody in jail. ... They search through your bags and stuff" (Morris, 2016, p. 77). The surveillance of Black girls in schools extends to their bodies through the enforcement of school dress codes. According to Morris, school dress codes have become tools for disciplining Black girls. Morris (2016) stated that "rules about how they wear their hair and clothes become grounds for punishment rather than tools to establish a uniform student presentation" (p. 93). Gina, a young woman whom Morris (2016) interviewed in New Orleans, explained her experiences with dress codes:

> I was in the eleventh [grade]. … They made you leave school because you didn't have on the right shoes, you didn't have on a belt … for real, you're going to stop my education because I don't have this stuff? (p. 93)

Morris argued that dress codes only "slut-shame" Black girls, cast them as deviant, and serve to reinforce destructive social ideas about their identities. Likewise, Morris argued that dress codes are mainly about upholding a social order that submits girls to the approving or disapproving scrutiny of adults.

Morris (2016) also examined the "attitude" of Black girls and how perceptions of their attitudes typically result in disciplinary consequences. According to Morris (2016), the attitude of Black girls "is an open inquiry, one that informs not only how adults engage with Black girls but also how these girls identify themselves as young people and as students" (p. 58). Morris (2016) asserted that "across the country, the student identity of Black girls is typically filtered, assessed, and understood through how much 'attitude' she gives to others around her" (p. 59). Teachers and school administrators often talk about the attitudes of Black girls as if they are as concrete as eye or hair color. Nancy, a lead teacher at a small alternative school in California, believed that Black girls act out because of the insecurities associated with puberty (Morris,

2016). Nancy posited that girls exhibit certain behaviors to get more attention and to build their confidence. Nevertheless, the behavior typically results in the negative attention of teachers. According to Morris (2016), the expressive nature of Black girls is often misunderstood when they give their unsolicited opinions, when they stand up for themselves, or when someone is speaking to them in a way that they deem disrespectful. Mia, one of the girls interviewed by Morris (2016), stated,

> Us Black girls, like, if we don't get it, we're going to tell you. … If we don't feel that it's right, we're going to tell you. Where everybody else want to be quiet, it's like, no … we're going to speak up, we're going to speak what's on our mind. (p. 62)

The student-teacher relationship is a key factor in how a Black girls' comments are received. If a Black girl has a teacher who has a good rapport with her, the teacher may take the student's comments as a part of her expression and learning (Morris, 2016). However, a teacher who does not have a connection with the girl may receive the remarks as an insult to their authority. For many Black girls, a temperament like Mia's often results in a punishment that removes them from class or escalates to interactions with law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Morris (2016) assumed "it is unlikely that administrators of these schools are intentionally of the mind to punish youth of color more than their White counterparts" (p. 66). Yet, Morris made it clear that punitive responses are customary in schools with high numbers of students of color, and the responses are typically led by school leaders who believe that frequent punishment will correct behavior.

The literature also revealed how the harm inflicted on Black girls in schools has been normalized through *adultification*. Epstein et al. (2017) conducted a study, which indicated that adults view Black girls between the ages of 5–14 as needing less nurturing, protection, comfort, and support. The study also revealed that adults perceive Black girls as less innocent and more

independent than their White peers. The researchers referred to this process as adultification. Epstein et al. (2017) defined adultification as a "social or cultural stereotype that is based on how adults, perceive children in the absence of knowledge of children's behavior and verbalizations" (p. 7). Consequently, adultification strips Black girls of their childhood freedoms. In Brown and Outley's (2022) article, "The Role of Leisure in the Dehumanization of Black Girlhood: Egypt's Story," the authors highlighted Epstein et al.'s study and how the childhoods of Black girls are constantly eliminated by systems of oppression and power. While Brown and Outley conveyed an appreciation of Epstein et al.'s contextualizing of Black girls' experiences as adultification, they argued that the term does not adequately capture the dehumanization that Black girls encounter daily. Brown and Outley's (2022) definition of dehumanization as "a psychological process that entails making someone seem less than human or not worthy of humane treatment" (p. 3) is consistent with my observations of how the girls in LOD were treated in school.

Likewise, Morris (2016) explained how the sexual exploitation of Black girls also leads to negative educational experiences in schools. For example, in *Pushout*, 14-year-old Diamond described herself as a prostitute who was trafficked between cities in California. Diamond explained, "When you're a prostitute, 'cause I have been one for a couple of months now, like, when you're a prostitute, you *gotta* stop going to school because it's something that you have to do all day" (Morris, 2016, p. 97). Morris clarified that girls like Diamond do not choose to become sex workers but are forced into the sex trade. Diamond continued, "You could still go to school for like a couple of months, you could still get your education … that's if he lets you" (Morris, 2016, p. 97). Diamond's teachers and administrators missed the signs that she was being trafficked. Diamond was eventually expelled from school after writing on a wall, "I hate the bitches at this school" (Morris, 2016, p. 97). Diamond had been teased by classmates who had

seen her working as a prostitute. Consequently, Diamond was left without a school community. Eventually, Diamond was arrested for truancy and confined to a secure detention facility. According to Morris (2016), Diamond's situation was not unique, "It has become commonplace to talk about truancy, discipline, and bullying as ways that children are pushed out of school, but quite often ignored is how sexual violence can also become a pathway to confinement" (p. 101).

As the crisis of Black girls gains more attention in academia, educators and educational scholars have been looking for approaches to counter the harm inflicted on Black girls in school. Kumashiro's (2000) research summarized and critiqued the four main approaches that educational researchers have cited in the literature on how to engage in anti-oppressive education. The four approaches are:

- Education for the other,
- education about the other,
- education that is critical of privileging and othering, and
- education that changes students and society.

Additionally, Kumashiro (2000) indicated that anti-oppressive education should include schools providing "separate spaces where students who face different forms of oppression can go for help, support, advocacy, resources, and so forth" (p. 28). Kumashiro's findings support the scholarship that calls for Black girls to have access to spaces in school that are safe and affirming of their cultural identities.

Jones and Lee's (2020) research examined how a culturally responsive group intervention could positively impact the engagement of Black girls in middle school. Their study provided evidence for how an intervention focused on ethnic identity can strengthen a student's "sense of self-satisfaction and empowerment, despite their experiences with marginalization in

the school system" (Jones & Lee, 2020, p. 92). Jones and Lee's study supported the findings of a report by Jones-DeWeever (2009), which recommended that schools develop affinity groups for Black girls to help them develop a healthy sense of self through rite of passage programs. Rite of passage programs serve as an introduction to historical and cultural information, which counter the unhealthy images and associations of Black womanhood pervasive in American society.

Morris (2019) continued this discussion in *Sing a Rhythm, Dance a Blues: Education for the Liberation of Black and Brown Girls*. In the book, Morris explored a variety of approaches to transforming schools into spaces of learning and collective healing for girls of color. Morris (2019) used an analogy of the blues and its expressions of pain and power to advocate for a pedagogy of liberation that would restructure the "entire approach to the education of Black and Brown girls in crisis" (p. 8). Morris also discussed the trauma that is perpetuated on Black girls by the patriarchal, heteronormative, and Eurocentric pedagogical approaches that are used in most public schools. Morris (2019) asserted that,

> The work of the educator, and anyone seeking to be responsive to trauma among girls of color, is to create and elevate opportunities that support a more rigorous interrogation of the culture, the policies, and the internalized ideas informing what we teach and how we teach it. (p. 46)

Additionally, Morris argued that teachers should assess curricula and lesson plans for opportunities to be responsive to their full student bodies. According to Morris (2019), it is also critical that educators incorporate "themes and frameworks that present more-integrated narratives for information that actually reflects the lived experiences of all our ancestors" (p. 69). Furthermore, teachers must confront their personal biases that inform how they transfer knowledge. Ultimately, Morris (2019) concluded that "beneath it all must be the intent to shift the prevailing consciousness about Black girls and other girls of color so that their pain is recognized, and their narratives are included in our collective learning in schools" (p. 82).

Homeplace

The theory of homeplace is another theme that emerged in the literature concerning Black girls and schools. Homeplace is a term coined by hooks (2001) to describe a practice that Black women have historically engaged in as a "tool of liberation" from the oppression of White power and control. Hooks (2001) posited that because,

> Sexism has delegated to females the task of creating and sustaining a home environment, it has been primarily the responsibility of [B]lack women to construct domestic households as spaces of care and nurturance in the face of the brutal harsh reality of racist oppression, of sexist domination. (p. 384)

Moreover, hooks (2001) argued that the establishment of homeplace was not just a service that Black women provided, but that it was also about creating a safe place where Black people could be affirmed by each other in ways that lead to healing from the trauma imposed by racism. According to hooks, the making of homeplace is an act of resistance that has been employed globally by Black women against White supremacy. Furthermore, hooks (2001) posited that the task of making homeplace has been and continues to be a "radically subversive political gesture" (p. 384).

Kelly (2020) investigated the theory of homeplace as she analyzed the experiences, survival, and resistance strategies of Black girls at a predominately White high school. In "I Love Us For Real: Exploring Homeplace as a Site of Healing and Resistance for Black girls in Schools," Kelly (2020) revealed how a group of Black 12th grade girls co-constructed homeplaces in school and in digital spaces that helped them resist the "oppression that they experience through their racialized and gendered identities" (p. 450). Examples of spaces that served as homeplaces for the girls in the study include sitting at a specific table in the library during their lunch period, a group chat that was exclusive to Black seniors, and ultimately, the study's focus group meetings became a homeplace for the participants. According to Kelly

(2020), “this study highlights how understanding the schooling experiences of Black girls is necessary for developing schools that foster healing, solidarity, and a critical consciousness necessary for social transformation” (p. 450). Furthermore, Kelly (2020) concluded that “schools committed to social and educational equity must take on the responsibility of challenging racism and actively supporting students whose identities subject them to intersecting forces of oppression” (p. 463).

Building on hooks’s (2001) theory of homeplace, Goins (2011) explored how friendships among Black women serve as a homeplace. According to Goins, friendships for Black women are an important homeplace, because Black women can connect with each other in unique and significant ways. Goins’s explanation of how friendships function as homeplaces for Black women corresponds to hooks’s description of homeplace as a space of affirmation. Goins (2011) stated, “friendships are necessary relationships for Black females because they affirm Black females’ sense of self and nurture their spirit in an environment that often contradicts their experiences in the world” (p. 532). In her study, Goins used nonparticipant observation to examine two friendship groups during informal get-togethers. During the gatherings, the researcher and her assistants listened, observed, and videotaped the conversations of the women. In her analysis, Goins (2011) identified four reoccurring subjects in both groups’ conversations, “each with its own set of contradictions: finances (spending/saving), language (‘good’/‘bad’ English), appearance (satisfaction/dissatisfaction), and race (acceptance/rejection of otherness)” (p. 537). Accordingly, the stories that the women shared with each other were embedded with discursive tensions that were validated and affirmed by their friendships within the groups. Goins (2011) asserted that the women “used their relationship with each other, a homeplace, to manage the *ceaseless interplay* of the tensions” (p. 543). This interplay allowed the women to manage

the tensions that they experience at the societal level, while concurrently distancing themselves from the authoritative discourses of American society.

In Pastor et al.'s (2007), "Makin' Homes: An Urban Girl Thing," the researchers reflected on the theme of "home," that "constantly surfaces in the lives of adolescent girls" (p. 75). Pastor et al.'s study was not centered solely on Black girls, but it included "urban" girls at an alternative public middle school and at a traditional comprehensive high school in New York City. The authors posited that girls of all colors are searching for homeplaces that can be defined "broadly to include comforting, safe spaces in institutions such as schools or in social groups such as clubs, social movements, or gangs" (Pastor et al., 2007, p. 75). Using field notes, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations made through a 2-year poetry workshop, Pastor et al. (2007) concluded that "young women of many colors are hungry for spaces in which to talk and dressing rooms for trying on (and discarding) ways to be women: White, African American, Latina, Asian American, straight, lesbian, bisexual, celibate" (Pastor et al., 2007, p. 93). Ultimately, the researchers resolved, "Do we not, as adult women and men, have an obligation to help them reinvent and create their own homeplaces?" (p. 93).

Belonging

The topic of *belonging* frequently appears within the scholarship on adolescents and middle school. Belonging is a concept that Abraham Maslow deliberated in his analysis of the hierarchy of human needs. Maslow asserted that the needs of human beings can be divided into a five-tier model, which is typically represented in the form of a triangle. The base of the triangle includes physiological needs such as food, water, warmth, and rest. The second tier is comprised of the need for security and safety. The third tier includes the need for belonging, love, intimate relationships, and friendships. The fourth tier consists of self-esteem needs, and the fifth tier encompasses the desire for self-actualization (Causton & MacLeod, 2020).

In the context of students' senses of belonging in schools or classrooms, Goodenow and Grady (1993) defined a student's sense of belonging as "the extent to which they feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others—especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment" (pp. 60–61). The literature indicates that a sense of belonging is critical for children of all ages. However, Allen et al. (2018) argued that a sense of belonging is,

> Particularly relevant to the unique and specific needs and challenges of adolescents (age 12–18) compared with other developmental stages. Adolescence is a period of identity formation, shifting social relationships, priorities and expectations, and the need to navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood. (p. 3)

Barron and Kinney (2018) posited that students who belong,

- "Feel a sense of identification with a group,
- feel safe at school—both physically and psychologically,
- feel that they have a voice in school,
- feel respected,
- believe in their own indispensability to the group,
- trust their teachers and their peers,
- believe that they have as much value as anyone else,
- are confident that others see them as valuable,
- feel securely connected with others in their school and classes,
- see themselves as being a part of a supportive community,
- not only feel support but also are able to accept it,
- feel wanted and needed,
- feel like individuals, not stereotypes, and
- perceive and trust that the belongingness they feel is likely to continue" (p. 5).

Thus, students who have a strong sense of belonging are more successful in school, compared to students who do not have the same connection to school (Barron & Kinney, 2018). Furthermore, students who enjoy a sense of belonging in school experience lower absenteeism, fewer adverse emotions in class, lower stress, and fewer behavior problems (Barron & Kinney, 2018).

Conversely, Barron and Kinney (2022) posited that there can be "dire consequences" (p. 3) when a student's need for belonging is not met in school. Students who lack a sense of belonging at school can experience feeling out of place, alienated, or rejected. Likewise, "the failure to feel a sense of belonging is negatively associated with emotional distress, loneliness, increased anxiety, boredom, and depression—and with frustration and sadness in situations of academic engagement" (Barron & Kinney, 2018, p. 7). According to Barron and Kinney (2018), students who are disconnected from school are more likely to display increased self-consciousness, deteriorating motivation, and social isolation. A lack of belongingness is also linked to mental and physical illness, and a wide range of behavioral problems including criminality and suicide (Osterman, 2000). Consequently, a connection can be made between the occurrence of violence in schools and the isolation that perpetrators experienced in school (Barron & Kinney, 2018).

A sense of belonging is a spectrum, where students often fall somewhere between feeling like they belong and feeling like a complete outsider (Barron & Kinney, 2018). If a student is unsure about whether they belong, they will often spend large amounts of time and energy looking for cues in the environment that indicate whether they are welcome. For example, students from underrepresented or negatively stigmatized groups, who are aware of the negative stereotypes about their groups, are often and distracted from learning because they are trying to figure out if they belong (Romero, 2018). According to Romero (2018), "questions about

belonging undermine performance and are more pervasive and persistent for students from underrepresented and stigmatized groups, they contribute to achievement gaps" (p. 2).

Schools play a significant part in forming groups and social networks for students, and they offer distinctive opportunities for students to foster a sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2018). To avoid the risks associated with the absence of a sense of belonging, Barron and Kinney (2022) argued that there are three practices that schools can engage, which help students to develop a sense of belonging. These practices include the following:

- "A safe environment that communicates an authentic sense of caring, trust, and inclusion among all members.
- Clearly communicated, consistently observed, and equitably enforced behavioral and academic expectations.
- Access to autonomous experiences and successful engagement in relevant, personalized learning endeavors" (Barron & Kinney, 2022, pp. 4–5).

Accordingly, Allen et al. (2018) claimed that,

> School belonging is not simply a phenomenon that exists within the individual, but is also affected by peers, families and teachers (i.e. the microsystem); the school's social and organisational culture and interactions with parents (i.e. the mesosystem); linkages across multiple micro- and mesosytems (i.e. the exosystem); broader policies, norms and cultural values (the macrosystem); and temporal aspects (the chronosystem). (p. 4)

Black Lives Matter Movement

The participants of this study were members of Ladies of Distinction from 2013-2016, and during that time, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement figured prominently in the social-political climate of the United States. The BLM movement began in 2013 as the social media hashtag, "#BlackLivesMatter." The hashtag was created in response to the acquittal of

George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin (Howard, 2016). According to the Black Lives Matter Foundation Board (2024),

> Black Lives Matter emerged to meet the challenge with something that took the form of a hashtag, a slogan, a call to action, a plea for a fundamental reminder of what should be universally obvious to everyone, and ultimately powerful movement to dismantle white supremacy and build a world where Black Lives don't just Matter, but where Black people thrive. (para. 10)

My research sought to examine how the intersection of the BLM movement and participation in LOD impacted the club's membership.

Theoretical Lens

Black Feminist Thought

Black feminist thought recurringly appears in the literature concerning Black girls because it is regarded as an appropriate theoretical framework and relevant body of knowledge for conducting research on behalf of Black women and girls. The term "Black feminism" was coined in the 1970s, and while many scholars argue that it emerged during the civil rights movement, Johnson (2015) argued that its history can be traced to the abolitionist (i.e., anti-slavery) movement of the 1800s. In tracing the history of Black feminism, Johnson asserted that Black women began engaging in feminist and racial discourses as they were excluded from the anti-slave societies that White women established in the 1830s. Consequently, "northern free Black women organized their own groups whose mission was to combat slavery, women's rights, and racism" (Johnson, 2015, p. 228). While Black women abolitionists did not call themselves Black feminists, Johnson (2015) argued that they acted as such. The Black feminist movement reemerged during the civil rights movement, when Black women established formal organizations following their experiences with subjugation in the Black Power Movement of the 1960s (Johnson, 2015).

Black feminist thought is a tool used by Black feminists to name and resist their oppressions, and to rearticulate their experiences and consciousness. According to Nyachae (2016), "Black feminism centres on the standpoints and subjectivities of Black women" (p. 790). Likewise, Lindsay-Dennis (2015) explained Black feminist thought as a culturally based perspective that "takes into consideration the contextual and interactive effects of herstory, culture, race, class, gender and other forms of oppression" (p. 509). Johnson (2015) argued that there are six distinctive features of Black feminist thought including:

1. The recognition of how the ties between experience and consciousness impact the everyday lives of Black women.
2. Black feminist thought is intended to incite activism among Black women.
3. Black women's diverse responses to oppression create their own body of knowledge.
4. The ways that Black women engage in dialogue about oppression will differ according to their social location.
5. Black feminist thought must change as social conditions change.
6. Social justice is important for all humans.

There are a variety of reasons scholars use Black feminist thought as a theoretical lens for their research. Goins (2011) used Black feminist thought as a theoretical lens in her study, because it "can provide further insight into the contradictions and discourses of relational dialectics, with a particular focus on Black females" (p. 534). Likewise, Kelly (2020) advocated for the use of Black feminist thought in research concerning Black woman and girls, because it "challenges positivist frameworks that aim for emotional distance which are rooted in white, patriarchal structures of scientific inquiry" (p. 452). Joseph et al. (2016) conducted a study that

is grounded in critical race theory, critical race feminism, and Black feminist thought, because the authors wanted to use research frameworks that affirmed Black girls, unlike typical research on Black girls that is conducted through a deficit lens. However, Joseph et al. (2016) asserted that critical race feminism is limited in how it takes “into account the nuances of distinct experiences of Black women in the United States” (p. 9). Therefore, the researchers chose to include Black feminist thought in their examination of how Black girls perceived racism in schools. According to Joseph et al., Black feminist thought advances critical race theory and critical race feminism by focusing particularly on the intellectual thought that emerges from the nuanced examination and analysis of the distinct experiences that women of African descent have experienced in the U.S.

Summary

In this review of literature on adolescent Black girls, I highlighted how the marginalization of Black girls in schools has a long but overlooked history. Furthermore, the literature revealed how the massacre at Columbine High School in 1999 led to policy changes in schools that continue negatively affecting Black girls today. Consequently, Black girls experience discipline disparity rates that are not only greater than those for Black boys, but also for White and Latinx girls. However, the literature also indicated that there are opportunities in some schools, such as rite of passage programs and afterschool clubs, which can serve as homeplaces against the harm that Black girls encounter. Belonging is another theme that surfaced in my review of literature on adolescents and middle school. The literature revealed a strong correlation between academic and social performance in school and a student’s sense of belonging. My review of the literature also explained why many scholars use Black feminist thought as a theoretical lens when engaging in studies—like this dissertation—that center the voices of Black girls.

CHAPTER III: METHOD

Research Design

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the research methodology that I used for this study. Narrative inquiry is a literary form of qualitative research that D. Jean Clandinin and E. Michael Connelly introduced in a 1990 article titled, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). According to Clandinin (2013), narrative inquiry is "the study of experience as story" (p. 13). Clandinin (2013) further defined narrative inquiry as "an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (p. 17). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) recommended using narrative inquiry when a researcher has people willing to tell their stories and when the stories follow chronological events. Furthermore, narrative inquiry is a collaborative process, which relies on interviews as a significant source of data.

Narrative inquiry research can take various forms. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) argued that the form of a narrative study is determined by answers to the following questions:

- Who writes or records the story?
- How much of a life is recorded and presented?
- Who provides the story?
- Is a theoretical lens being used?
- Can narrative forms be combined?

In response to these questions, my study combined multiple elements of narrative research, including interviews with two former Ladies of Distinction (LOD) members.

Narrative inquiry supports all the human sciences; however, Kim (2016) posited that the methodology gained popularity within the field of education because it highlights the experiences of teachers and students. Kim (2016) argued that “the main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that narrative is a way of organizing human experience, since humans lead storied lives individually and socially” (p. 18). It is for these reasons that I chose narrative inquiry over other methodologies. I considered my study to be educational research because I wanted to understand the experiences of adolescent Black girls who participated in an afterschool club at a predominantly White middle school. Furthermore, narrative inquiry was an appropriate methodology for this study because it allowed for collecting stories to be co-constructed between the researcher and the participants. For example, narrative inquiry provides the opportunity for the story to develop through the interaction or discourse of the researcher and the participant(s) (Kim, 2016). The collaborative feature of narrative inquiry was ideal for my study because of my relationships with the participants and our shared experiences in LOD.

Institutional Review Board

I successfully completed Union Institute & University’s (UI&U) “Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Research Training Course” and received the completion certificate. As such, during the study, I adhered to UI&U’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures. The Informed Consent Form provided to the study’s participants is included in Appendix A.

Participants

The participants in this study represented a purposeful sample of former members of LOD. Criteria for inclusion included participation in LOD for all three middle school years. Additionally, participants had to be at least 18 years old. The sample size consisted of two

participants, both of whom self-identified as Black females. Both participants were born and raised in the United States to parents who immigrated to the United States from Africa. Each of the participants also practiced Islam, as did approximately 50% of the membership of LOD. However, the faith choice of the participants was not a focus of this research. The participants were selected not only because they met the criteria for inclusion, but also because of my continued relationship with each of them. I was intentional about who I asked to participate because I believed their stories would capture the essence of many of the girls who participated in LOD. Yet, I acknowledge that the participants' stories will not be reflective of all the girls who were members of LOD. Creswell (2013) stated that he "found many examples with one or two individuals, unless a larger pool of participants is used to develop a collective story" (p. 157). However, Creswell and Guetterman (2019) argued that a collective story of more than two individuals runs the risk of diluting the narrative story of any one individual, thereby, resulting in a lower quality narrative study.

The identities of the study's participants remain confidential. To minimize the risk of breaching confidentiality, the pseudonyms Halima and Jahara, were used and written into the interview transcripts. In addition to this dissertation, the results of the study—including all collected data—may be published in future journal articles and professional presentations, and on internet sites, while maintaining participant confidentiality. However, any records or data obtained because of participation in this study may be inspected by the Union Institute & University's IRB, provided that such inspectors are legally obligated to protect any identifiable information from public disclosure, except where disclosure is otherwise required by law or a court of competent jurisdiction. I kept these records private in a password-protected file on my

computer. I will retain all study data for a minimum of 3 years—as required by the IRB—and then it will be destroyed. Additionally, no compensation was provided to the study's participants.

Data Collection

I collected first-order narratives from two former LOD members, who participated in the club from 2013–2016. Clandinin and Connelly referred to the stories told by research participants as "field texts" (Creswell, 2013). Field texts can include interviews, journal entries, observations, field notes, photographs, or letters sent by the interviewees. Interviews served as the primary source of data collection. Specifically, I conducted semi-structured and focus group interviews (see Appendix B). According to Robson (2011), focus groups are an efficient technique for collecting qualitative data because they can increase the range and amount of data collected at one time. Both the individual interviews and focus group interviews were conducted face-to-face. I determined that face-to-face interviews were most appropriate for this study because Robson (2011) argued that the technique allows the interviewer to observe the social cues of participants.

Prior to beginning interviews, I shared the first three paragraphs of bell hooks's (2001) "Homeplace (A Site of Resistance)" with the participants to give context to the theory of homeplace. I also shared the first six paragraphs of Weaver's (2021) article, "To Thrive, Students Need a 'Homeplace' at School," to help the participants understand the contemporary concept of homeplace in schools. Photographs taken during the participants' tenure in LOD were used to stimulate their memories during the interviews. Additionally, I used probes to solicit more expanded responses from the participants. Probes are a commonly used tactic by interviewers when their intuition tells them that interviewees have more to say in response to a question (Robson, 2011).

The interviews were conducted at the local recreation center that was once the "Black gym" when Decatur was legally segregated. Consequently, many of the Black children in the community, including my interviewees, participated in activities at the recreation center and were comfortable in that environment. I rented a small classroom in the recreation center to provide a level of privacy during the interviews. In my dissertation proposal, I stated that I planned to interview each participant twice for the duration of 1 hour. I also explained that I would lead one, 1-hour focus group with the study's participants. However, due to conflicts with scheduling, I only interviewed each participant once individually for 1 hour, and I conducted a 1-hour focus group. Yet, a subsequent review of the data revealed that more data collection was needed. Consequently, I led a second, 1-hour focus group with the participants. The questions for the second focus group can be found in Appendices D and E. Robson (2011) recommended audiotaping the interviews, because "the tape provides a permanent record and allows you to concentrate on the conduct of the interview" (p. 300). Taking Robson's recommendation into consideration, I chose to use Zoom to record the interviews while I also took handwritten notes. Once the interviews were completed, I uploaded the audio recordings to the website Transcribe.com, to transcribe the interviews. I reviewed the transcriptions multiple times while listening to the audio for accuracy. When appropriate, redundancy of language and phonetic pronunciations were kept to maintain the authentic responses of participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a critical process in qualitative inquiry, and I agree with Robson's (2011) assertion that qualitative data should be analyzed systematically. Likewise, Creswell (2013) argued that this process is best represented as a spiral image, during which "the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach" (p. 182). I conducted a *thematic analysis* of the stories that participants shared in the interviews.

According to Kim (2016), "in thematic narrative analysis, we are not necessarily interested in the form of the narrative, but rather its thematic meanings and points as they emerge in the process of recapitulating the told in the telling" (p. 213). After transcribing the interview recordings, I analyzed the transcripts and notes added during transcription in three phases: (a) line-by-line, (b) thematically, and (c) holistically by hand. During the first phase of data analysis, I looked for thematic codes that emerged. Next, I placed excerpts from the transcript under the thematic codes, before converting the codes into themes and looking for epiphanies. Subsequently, I interpreted the larger meaning of the participants' stories. Finally, in Chapters IV–V, I present narration of the themes and my interpretations, as I retell the stories of the former LOD members. The data analysis was shared with the study's participants.

Validity

Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and it is based on assessing whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, participant, or the readers of the account (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), qualitative validity involves the researcher verifying the accuracy of the findings by using specific strategies and procedures. I used two validity strategies to check the accuracy of the research findings: (a) employing rich, thick description to convey findings, and (b) clarifying the bias. Using the first validity strategy in this study—the inclusion of rich, thick descriptions—provided me with multiple perspectives about the themes, which support and contribute to the findings. The second strategy of clarifying the bias brings to the study an open and honest narrative from the researcher about how my interpretation of the findings were shaped by gender and race.

Positionality Statement

As the author of this study, I acknowledge my standpoint as a Black woman who—as a girl and as an adult—has experienced multiple oppressions rendered by race, class, and gender. For 8 years, I served as a club sponsor for Ladies of Distinction, whose membership was solely comprised of Black girls. During my tenure as the club sponsor, I developed relationships with the study's participants, who I assigned the pseudonyms, Halima and Jahara, and we have remained in contact since they finished middle school in 2016. It has been my privilege to know both participants since they were in Grade 6 and to observe the influence that LOD had in their lives. It was because of our relationship and watching their development over the years that I asked Halima and Jahara to participate in my study. My work involves highlighting the marginalization that adolescent Black girls encounter in school and the approaches that have been successful in countering that harm.

Summary

In conclusion, Chapter III detailed narrative inquiry as the research methodology used for this study, and I explained why it is appropriate for my research. Additionally, I reviewed the criteria for participant selection and the process for data collection and analysis. In Chapter III, I also explained the strategies used to ensure the validity of the study, including my positionality statement as the researcher. In Chapter IV, I detail the results and analysis of the data collected in the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of my research was to explore how adolescent Black girls experienced "homeplace" in an afterschool club at a predominantly White middle school in Decatur, Georgia. In Chapter I, I described the marginalization of Black girls that I witnessed at the middle school where I previously taught and served as the club sponsor of Ladies of Distinction (LOD), an afterschool girls' club. I argued that the marginalization that many Black girls experienced can be attributed to the middle school's zero-tolerance policies, oppressive classroom curricula, and teachers who lacked cultural competency. Furthermore, I asserted that Black girls need a culturally affirming space, or a homeplace, when they attend a predominantly White school.

In Chapter II, I reviewed literature relevant to the study's central question: How did adolescent Black girls experience "homeplace" in an afterschool club at a predominantly White middle school in Decatur, Georgia? The literature review in Chapter II was organized thematically with literature that spans from 2000–2022. The themes that emerged from the literature are "Countering the Harm of Black Girls in School," "Homeplace," and "Belonging." Additionally, I explained how the literature indicates that despite the disparities Black girls face in school, there are still spaces within school buildings that can serve as homeplaces, which counter the harm experienced by Black girls. In Chapter III, I described narrative inquiry as the research methodology that was used for this study. Narrative inquiry has gained popularity within the field of education because the methodology highlights the experiences of teachers and students (Kim, 2016). Furthermore, narrative inquiry allows collaboration between the researcher and the participants as they co-construct the narrative story. The collaborative nature of narrative inquiry made the methodology ideal for my study because of my relationships with the participants and our shared experiences in LOD.

Here in Chapter IV, I provide a report of the study's data. According to Creswell (2013), it is the composition of a narrative report that synthesizes the research study. Furthermore, Creswell explained that multiple narrative structures can be used when writing the report. I developed the study's report of results through a thematic analysis of the data, which Braun and Clarke (2006) defined as a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail" (p. 79). Accordingly, in Chapter IV, I present three themes that emerged from the data that reflect how former members of LOD experienced homeplace in an afterschool club at a predominantly White middle school in Decatur, Georgia. The report will also provide evidence for each theme by using a compilation of the participants' interview and focus group responses.

Participants

As stated in Chapter III, the participants in the study consisted of a purposeful sample of former members of LOD. Criteria for inclusion in this research included participation in LOD for all three middle school years. Additionally, participants had to be at least 18 years old. The sample size of the study consisted of two participants, both of whom self-identified as Black and female. Both participants also practiced Islam, but their faith of choice had no significance in the study. As was previously stated, I used the pseudonyms, Halima and Jahara, to protect the privacy of the participants. Each of the participants reviewed the transcripts from their individual and focus group interviews. The participants' edits are included in the data presented here in Chapter IV.

Halima

Halima was a 22-year-old senior at Clayton State University, majoring in public relations. Halima participated in LOD from Grade 6 though Grade 8. Halima's family immigrated from Mauritania; however, she was born and raised in the United States. Halima is Muslim, the

youngest of eight children, and she would be the first member in her immediate family to graduate from college. English was not the first language spoken in Halima's home. In addition to being a full-time student, Halima rented a kiosk at Old National Mall, a local flea market in College Park, Georgia, where she sold hair products and traditional clothing for Muslim women. Halima planned to one day own a stand-alone retail store.

Jahara

Jahara was a 22-year-old senior at Georgia State University, majoring in respiratory therapy. Jahara participated in LOD from Grade 6 through Grade 8. Her family immigrated from Somalia; however, Jahara was born and raised in the United States. Jahara is Muslim, the middle child of five siblings, and the only girl. Jahara would also be the first member in her immediate family to graduate from college. English was not the first language spoken in Jahara's home. At the time of her interview, Jahara worked full-time at T.J. Maxx. After graduation, Jahara said she planned to attend nursing school, with the long-range goal of becoming a nurse practitioner. Nurse practitioners are clinicians who "must complete a master's or doctoral degree program and have advanced clinical training beyond their initial professional registered nurse preparation" (American Association of Nurse Practitioners, n.d.).

Themes

Creswell (2013) posited that "themes in qualitative research (also called categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (p. 186). Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) asserted that a theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (p. 82). For this study, I used an inductive approach to thematic analysis to identify themes in the data. In an inductive analysis, the themes are strongly connected to the data, thereby making this approach data driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During

inductive analysis, the data is coded without an already established coding frame or the researcher's preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I also conducted a latent thematic analysis to distinguish the themes of the study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), when conducting a thematic analysis, the researcher must decide the "level" at which themes will be identified. I chose to perform a latent thematic analysis versus a semantic analysis because in the former, the researcher looks beyond the semantic content of what the participant has stated, and "starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations—and ideologies that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

Fifteen codes initially emerged in my review of the data from the interview and focus group transcripts. I then reduced and combined those codes into themes. Consequently, three themes were evident from the data analysis:

1. Homeplace: Expressions of Belonging,
2. Homeplace: Expressions of Space, and
3. Homeplace: Expressions of Need.

Homeplace: Expressions of Belonging

Belonging was the first theme to emerge as I analyzed the participants responses to questions about the meaning of homeplace. Goodenow (1993) defined belonging as,

> Students' sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. More than simple perceived liking or warmth, it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual. (p. 25)

During Halima's and Jahara's interviews, they each provided responses that illustrated Goodenow's definition of belonging as they discussed their experiences in middle school and as members of LOD. Additionally, as Halima and Jahara shared their insights, they both used

language that I believe they would not have used as 12-, 13-, or 14-year-old middle school students. However, I presume that the words and phrases they expressed as 22-year-old adults were acquired through the maturation process that comes with more lived experiences. Consequently, the sophisticated language that Halima and Jahara employed to discuss their experiences as members of LOD was beneficial to me as the researcher, because it aligned with academic concepts in the literature concerning Black girls in school.

As stated in Chapter III, prior to beginning the first interview, I invited Halima and Jahara to read the first three paragraphs of bell hooks's (2001) "Homeplace (A Site of Resistance)" and the first six paragraphs of Weaver's (2021) article, "To Thrive, Students Need a 'Homeplace' at School." The intent of having the participants read the articles before initiating the interviews was to help Halima and Jahara to understand the theory of homeplace and to give context for the contemporary concept of homeplace in school. I began the first interview by asking Halima, "As you think about hooks's (2001) and Weaver's (2021) explanations of homeplace, what do you think makes a space a homeplace?" Halima's response was informative concerning her interpretation of homeplace. Halima explained,

> I feel like what makes a space a homeplace is somewhere you can feel comfortable and be yourself, and you're around people you are comfortable with. And there's no need to act a certain way because you're around certain people, and everyone is nonjudgmental. It's just safe.

Probing further, I asked Halima what "safe" meant to her in the context of LOD. Halima asserted,

> It means I was able to be open and be myself. I was able to be vocal about the way I felt or my opinions, without anybody, you know, saying anything or having something negative to say. And yeah, that's why it felt like a safe space for me.

Halima explained how the racial and ethnic composition of the membership in LOD contributed to her feeling of safety. According to Halima, she enjoyed "being around other people who are

just like me." When asked Halima to clarify what she meant by "people who are just like me." Halima responded,

> The girls in the group were mainly African Americans. And some girls were Muslim, other girls were Christian, and some girls wore hijabs, just like me. So, that's why the girls looked like me. And me knowing some of them were Muslim, it kind of made me feel like a little bit more at home.

I probed Halima about whether it was because the girls were Black or Muslim that she felt more at home. Halima stated that the girls in the LOD meetings were, "other Muslim girls, who I knew from my neighborhood and who I hung out with and talked to on a daily basis. Being around them, it kind of made me more comfortable in coming to LOD." I questioned if there were other places where Halima felt safe during her middle school years. Halima answered, "Not really, besides home of course. Because when I was in middle school, I went to an afterschool program, but that was kind of it." I asked Halima if she had the same feeling of safety in the afterschool program, to which she replied, "No." I questioned why, and Halima responded,

> That was just me going somewhere to go do my homework. So, I wouldn't really consider that a homeplace, because it's not like there were clubs there that were similar to LOD or anything. So, LOD was just a place that I could come and just, you know, be a girl and be around other girls.

Jahara expressed similar feelings of safety as she responded to the question concerning whether she had felt safe in LOD meetings. Jahara explained,

> Yeah, I felt safe because I wasn't being judged. Usually, when I'm in my other classrooms, if I do something wrong or if I am talking with another student, I get in trouble right away, you know? But when I'm in LOD, it's a more comfortable environment, where I can be myself, but still be respectful and without the teachers or sponsors being not respectful to me. If I did do something wrong, the club's sponsors come at what I did in a better way than other people.

As I interpreted the data, it appeared that the common experiences of Black girls was what Jahara believed made Black girls comfortable in a homeplace. When I asked Jahara to

reflect on hooks's (2001) and Weaver's (2021) explanations of homeplace, she described homeplace as,

> Somewhere that I can go and not be judged about nothing. Feel like I'm wanted there. Feel like the people there, they're caring, no matter what. Like they care for me and everything. And knowing that they're not judging me based off skin color or my religion. When I compare hooks to the other author's essay, I realize that Black girls all around the world, no matter who they are, they have similar experiences. And how they can relate back to like the same homeplace, like where they feel welcome, and don't feel judged, or none of that. They can all relate, no matter where they're from.

I wasn't clear on what Jahara meant when she said, "No matter where they're from," and I needed to clarify the meaning of "from" for Jahara. Jahara clarified,

> For me, *from* means like country-wise, area, school, religion-wise, all that. It just means they're all there. They're all Black, but they all have the same experiences, no matter where they live. They don't have to live in the same area, because they experience the same type of stuff, usually.

Additionally, I asked Jahara if being Black was enough to establish the commonalities between Black girls, regardless of their city, school, or country of origin. Jahara replied, "Yes."

With the next question, I delved deeper into Halima's and Jahara's understandings of homeplace. In response to the question, "What elements are necessary for a space to feel like a homeplace for Black girls?" Jahara described the characteristics of what she considered the "perfect" place for a Black girl. According to Jahara, "A place that I think that would be perfect for a Black girl would be somewhere she knows she's loved. Somewhere she knows she's going to meet new people, that she knows will be good for her too." I inquired about how Jahara knows when people are good for her. She responded, "To be honest, you can't tell when someone's good. But if they share the same interests, most likely they'll look out for you, because you have the same mindset." As a follow-up, I asked Jahara, "What kind of interests does a person need to share with you for them to be good for you?" Jahara quickly responded, "being Black." Probing

further, I asked, “Are there specific things that come with being Black, which let you know that someone is good for you?” Jahara replied,

> Well, I know people are going to be good for me if they respect my boundaries. If we have an understanding of knowing what’s wrong or right to do in our relationship, not trying to change someone, and always have the good for you.

In Halima’s individual interview, I asked her “What elements are necessary for a space to feel like a homeplace for Black girls?” Halima explained how her comfort level in LOD was positively influenced by the fact that there were other girls in the club who practiced Islam. According to Halima, “A homeplace for me is to be around other people like me. Like, I’m Muslim and like to be around certain Muslims.” I asked Halima, “How did having other Muslim girls in LOD impact your involvement?” Halima shared,

> I wouldn’t have known about LOD if it wasn’t for all the other Muslim girls, and my cousin talking about, “You want to go to LOD?” or “You should join LOD.” Then I come to LOD, and there’s a lot of other girls that actually look like me! So, it made me comfortable, and it made me want to continue coming.

While Halima shared that she enjoyed being around the other Muslim girls in LOD, she did not make any critical or disparaging comments about the LOD members who did not practice Islam. Nor did she make statements indicating that she did not like being around the girls who were not Muslim. In reflecting on Halima’s statement, “there’s a lot of other girls that actually look like me,” I was curious about what the girls in her first LOD meeting looked like to make Halima think the girls resembled her. So, I asked Halima, “What physical characteristics did you see in the club’s membership that made you feel comfortable enough to continue attending the LOD meetings?” Halima explained, “A Black girl who also wore a hijab.” A hijab is a head covering that is worn by Muslim women.

Halima’s statement, “there’s a lot of other girls that actually look like me,” was significant because in 2013, when Halima attended her first LOD meeting, the middle school was

55% White, 33% Black, 5% multiracial, 6% Latino, and 1% Asian (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). Furthermore, Halima comes from one of Decatur's African immigrant families, many of whom practice Islam. Generally, Muslim girls from that community dress in traditional attire, including long skirts, dresses, and hijabs. Halima's excitement when she saw girls that looked like her, along with Jahara's desire to participate in a club where she was not judged, reflected the students' need for *relatedness*. Osterman (2000) posited that relatedness "involves the need to feel securely connected with others in the environment and to experience oneself as worthy of love and respect" (p. 325). Additionally, Osterman (2000) explained that the need for relatedness is essentially "the need to experience belongingness" (p. 325).

Having other Muslim girls in LOD was not as critical for Jahara's sense of relatedness or belonging, as it was for Halima. However, Jahara believed that because all the girls in LOD were "minorities," they were more comfortable being their authentic selves in the club's meetings than in their classes. According to Jahara,

> I do think, like since we're all minority, it just made us feel like we can do whatever we want, and not feel like people are watching us, because in regular classrooms, you just have to be quiet before they say, "Oh, you're talking too loud," all that. And they think you're a problem, but there is no problem. You can do what you want in LOD, as long as you are like, respectful.

Since Jahara described herself and the other girls in LOD as minorities, I wanted to clarify what she considered a minority. When I asked Jahara, "What is a minority to you?" she explained that "A minority is anybody that is a person of color, basically. And in this sense, it's Black girls. Because the majority was all Black." To clarify, I asked Jahara, "So, when you said, 'since we're like all minority,' you meant all Black girls?" and Jahara replied, "Yeah, in the sense of who's in the club." Jahara continued,

> If there's a hundred white people and there's about maybe 10 black people there, they're the minority of that group. So, in the sense, I mean like minorities is when we're in our classes, we are the minorities in the classes.

I asked Jahara if she considered herself a minority in her classes, because the majority of the students her classes were White, and she replied:

> Yes, White, and there's maybe two, or maybe you're the only Black person in the class. So, once we get to the LOD meeting, we're all the same. We have all the same experiences. So, you're more comfortable and you can do what you want, but just be respectful and don't go overboard. And most of the time it's not overboard in classrooms, but they make it overboard.

In the second focus group, I probed Jahara further concerning the behaviors she thought were acceptable in LOD meetings, by asking, "What kind of behaviors were exhibited by the girls in LOD meetings, when you stated, 'we could do what we want'?" Jahara answered,

> Well, I don't mean like do the extreme. But in the sense of our other classrooms, we go to throughout the day. Like talking to another person sitting next us will get us in trouble. Or, getting up will get us in trouble. Stuff like that shouldn't really get you in trouble, unless you do something that is destructive for the class.

I questioned whether there were specific behaviors that Jahara associated with Black girls or "minorities," or if she just felt more comfortable being herself in the meetings. Jahara stated,

> No, I felt comfortable with being myself, knowing that no one's going to judge me for it. Because usually I get told not to talk. Most of the time, I get in trouble for talking too much. On report cards, I get in trouble for that. But when I'm with other minorities, we have a sense of being respectful, we understand. If I'm with people that are not in my background, I kind of feel uncomfortable sometimes, because of the way they might look at me. But when I'm with people that are of similar backgrounds, I don't feel that judgment, and I feel comfortable being myself.

Jahara's connection to the other girls in LOD, as minorities, resurfaced when she answered the question, "Knowing what you know about hooks's (2001) and Weaver's (2021) explanations of homeplace, what connections can you make between the idea of homeplace and your experiences in LOD?" Jahara explained,

> Like how Weaver's ready to go from her private school back to home, for me, like every time I got out of class, I was ready to go to the LOD meetings. Because I knew it's going be fun. I knew I was going to be appreciated, like, I feel loved there. I have friends there. I can be who I want to be, instead of how I was earlier in the day, in regular classes. And I liked how it was a group of us, like we were all minorities, so, it just made me feel 10 times safer.

Halima's response was similar to Jahara's, concerning the connections she made between hooks's (2001) and Weaver's (2021) explanations of homeplace and her personal experiences in LOD. According to Halima,

> In the Weaver article, she talks about how she was on the school bus, and it's like a sigh of relief when she left school. Going to LOD, it felt better once we were in the club with the girls.

Listening to Halima's explanation of the hooks and Weaver articles, I got the sense that she experienced her own sigh of relief when she left her classes and entered the LOD meetings.

To provoke more memories of her time in the club, I presented Halima with pictures of herself during LOD meetings and trips. I then asked Halima, "What feelings are attached to your memories from LOD meetings and activities?" Her response was one that I was not expecting. Halima shared how looking at the pictures was "bittersweet." When I asked, "Why?" Halima responded,

> I just remember how I was when I was younger and then comparing that to myself now. In these pictures, I was probably all over the place. Thinking about how far I've come from this young girl not knowing anything, to who I am today, is just bittersweet, because I know I've grown a lot from how I acted in middle school, outside of LOD. The pictures make me feel happy, and they make me feel a little sad.

Halima continued, "I am not that young girl anymore and she's come a long way. Thinking back to the Halima in LOD and the Halima now, those are two different girls. LOD impacted the Halima I am today." I was intrigued by Halima's response that she had a "sad" feeling when she looked at the pictures, and I wanted to get more information on whether she had any experiences that made her sad while she was in LOD. Halima quickly responded, "No, it was always happy

moments. Every time I came to LOD, I was always excited for our activities and excited for our fieldtrips.” Halima went on to say that her experience in LOD was “a blessing.”

Jahara did not share the bittersweet feelings that Halima expressed when I put the old LOD pictures in front of her. When I asked Jahara, “What feelings are attached to your memories of the LOD meetings and activities?” Jahara answered,

> The feelings that are attached are of being a kid and not having any responsibilities. I felt like I was having a lot of fun during that time too. Like when we did stuff with each other all the time, it just feels warm. I don’t know why. There’s a good warm feeling when I saw the pictures. I was like, wow. Its’s crazy, looking back at stuff. It’s a good feeling though.

Homeplace: Expressions of Space

During the individual and focus group interviews, Halima and Jahara discussed the variety of experiences they had as members of Ladies of Distinction, many of which were first time experiences for them both. Halima and Jahara also shared the impact that those experiences had on them as middle school students, and now as young adults in college. In “Homeplace (A Site of Resistance),” hooks (2001) explained how traditionally, Black women created and kept homeplaces within a culture of White supremacy to give their families a space where they had the “opportunity to grow and develop” and “nurture our spirits.” As I listened to Halima and Jahara’s responses, it appeared to me that they remembered LOD as a place for them to grow and be nurtured.

In the first focus group, I asked Halima how she would describe what took place in LOD meetings. According to Halima,

> In the meetings, we did lots of activities that would benefit us in the future. We would do vision boards, and on those vision boards, we will put long term goals or short-term goals. I remember putting a lot on my vision board. Most of it is just like something that I dreamed to happen, but yeah, in due time.

When Halima stated that LOD meetings provided "lots of activities that would benefit us in the future," I inquired about how she knew that the club's activities would help her in the future. Halima explained,

> Most of the activities we did was kind of preparing us for our future, giving us a look into what we wanted for life, and setting goals for ourselves, whether they were long term or short term. And my favorite one that I did was the vision board. So, putting stuff on the vision board, kind of gave me an idea of how I wanted to live the life that I'm living now. For example, maybe I put a car on there, or kids and a family, a career. It just kind of gave me a picture of what I want to do for myself and how I want my life.

As Halima discussed the vision board activity, I asked her if she remembered how she felt putting the pictures on her vision board, and she replied:

> Yeah, mostly excitement and like wanting things like to, you know, speed up, wanting life to speed up and get to that point in my life where I'm not a child anymore and I'm just growing and being able to navigate my way through life, however I want.

Following Halima's comment, Jahara added, "So, the vision board kind of sets things for how I want, and then after that, it's just up to me to kind of follow it." I asked Jahara if the vision board activity planted the seeds for where she is now, and she answered:

> I would say yes, because I kind of remember certain things. I remember I wanted to work in the medical field, so I put a doctor on my vision board. I'm still completing that, but it's still something in the medical field. I never thought about goals before then, in middle school. And then I feel like we did that near the end of middle school years. So, once you got to high school, you start thinking about it more and more, and you look back at it.

While we continued to discuss LOD activities, I asked Jahara how she would describe LOD meetings. Jahara explained the meetings as "a way to build your confidence, maybe become a better person, like look at your wrongs." Halima quickly chimed in, "It makes you better," to which Jahara affirmed, "Yes, it makes you better." I then asked Halima, "How do you describe your overall experience in LOD?" and she proceeded to explain the impact that LOD activities had, not only on her as a middle school student, but also now as a young adult:

> I would say that it was a blessing, because I learned a lot in LOD that I still use utilize now. For example, the etiquette lessons in the restaurants. So, I feel like LOD was a big help, and all the small tasks that we did on our Thursdays, they impact me outside, in the real world. So, everything that I learned was very helpful, and it helped me navigate my way to life now.

To solicit more feedback from Halima concerning her experiences in LOD, I probed further by asking, "What are some one-word responses that you can give to describe your experience in LOD?" Halima responded with "inspiring, motivating, uplifting, and happy." However, Halima did not need much probing when it came to talking about her favorite memories of LOD meetings. Halima eagerly discussed her participation in activities like Zumba and dining etiquette lessons, both of which she experienced for the first time while a member of LOD. Halima explained,

> One of my favorite activities was Zumba, because it was very active, and it was just fun. I noticed that most of the things that we did in LOD, we never did that anywhere else. Coming to LOD, it was like a place where you could try new things, like etiquette lessons. Nobody ever took me to a restaurant. Everything was like new to us as Black girls. It was really nice.

Jahara explained how it was a college tour that was her most impactful LOD experience. According to Jahara, "I liked going to Tuskegee. I loved it because it's one of the colleges I wanted to go to. I love seeing historical stuff. We went to Booker T's house, I think?" To which I responded, "Yes, we did." Jahara continued,

> So, when we walked around seeing all the history, I love learning about history and everything. That was a really fun trip. I always think about that when I think of LOD, as one of the main trips. Another thing I always think about is the banquet, because the food was good too. It was a lot of fun there and we're just enjoying everybody's company. Those are the main two things, the banquets and the Tuskegee trip.

Listening to Jahara talk about the annual end of the year LOD banquet made me curious about what elements of the banquet stayed with her after all these years. Following up, I asked Jahara, "Regarding the LOD banquet, what things did you walk away with?" Jahara replied,

> I feel like I became a little bit of better of a person. Before, I used to be more like, not go with the flow, like I didn't care what I did around others. But since I've been going to the banquet, seeing what we all have done, looking at the memories and everything. It's really like I'm changing a little bit, like I see a change in me, and I want to keep changing to a better person.

Halima stated that the relationships that she developed in LOD were her most impactful experience while in the club. According to Halima,

> I feel like with LOD, I built a lot of relationships with the girls. Even if I don't talk to them every day, here and now, I still hear from them. From all these years, even though we all have different lives, and probably people are married and have babies, we always know that they're here. And I see them, whether it's on social media, I can reach out and there's always a conversation that can be had. I feel like the relationships between the girls in LOD, they were kind of long lasting, in my opinion. Because all the girls that I met, I'm still friends with or I still talk to.

For clarification, I asked Halima if she had relationships with the girls before joining LOD, and she responded, "No." I followed up by asking, "What made the relationships with the girls in LOD long lasting?" According to Halima, the girls in LOD,

> Shared a connection over the 3 years to 7 years, going through middle school together, and then going through high school, and then graduating. It made a long-lasting relationship because we were together all those years. And most of us lived in the same neighborhood, so, there was always easy access to them.

Jahara then inserted, "We still hung out after LOD meetings, like at the gym, the center, and other places." Halima continued the discussion by adding, "We were like basically never without one another." In response to their comments about the long-lasting relationships that developed in LOD, I asked Jahara and Halima, "What role did LOD play in those relationships?" Jahara responded, "LOD kind of started the relationship, in a sense. Because before LOD, so many of the girls I never talked to before, and I didn't even have classes with them. They weren't even my grade level." Halima then stated,

> I feel like LOD basically planted the seed for that long lasting relationship. And hanging out with each other in LOD or being around each other, outside of LOD, it just built a stronger connection between us all. And here we are now.

During the discussion about the girls' relationships in LOD, Halima mentioned how the relationships that were established in LOD continued during high school years. As the LOD sponsor, I remember being intentional about trying to establish a way for LOD members to maintain a relationship with the club as they transitioned from middle school to high school. Once former members of LOD matriculated to high school, they were able to continue their relationships with LOD's members at the middle school by participating in the Annual LOD Reunion. The Annual LOD Reunion was an event that brought former LOD members back to the middle school for an informal conversation with the girls in the club. During the first focus group, Halima shared why the LOD Reunion was another one of her favorite LOD activities:

> I enjoyed seeing the high school girls come back and talk to us about their experience in high school. I enjoyed the advice they would give, and sometimes they would talk about their drama. I do remember that. So, it's just really nice to hear from an older girl's perspective of what was going on in her life or what was going on at their high school. And how from them being in LOD, to their life in high school, and how it was different and how they used what they learned in LOD. It was nice to hear.

As a follow-up, I asked Halima, "Why was it nice to hear former LOD members talk about their life in high school?" Halima answered,

> It really just made me think about how my life would be, because when I was younger, I was always fantasizing about my future. So, getting that information and getting a look into their lives, their experiences in high school, and the things that they were going through, just gave me an idea of how I'll have to go through these things when I'm their age or when I get to high school. So, it just kind of gave me that eyeopener and made me kind of think about how I'd assess a certain situation if I'm in it and things like that.

I also questioned Halima about whether she did anything differently as a middle school student, after hearing former LOD members talk about their experiences in high school. Halima responded,

> It made me want to be more serious within my education and with myself. Because, when I was in middle school, I was playing a lot. I was always getting in trouble. So, them saying, “Oh your teachers don’t care if you don’t turn your work in, they don’t care. They’re just going to give you a zero.” In middle school, the teachers, would coddle you and make sure you get your work done. But knowing that I had to go to high school, and the teachers don’t care, and they will fail me, it kind of got me a little scared. So, it made me want to fix myself. So, by the time I got to eighth grade, second semester, I started to grow up a little bit and take initiative to stop putting myself in positions where I’m getting in trouble or I’m not doing my work. It made me want to do better for myself.

Homeplace: Expressions of Need

In reflecting on their experiences in LOD, Jahara and Halima both agreed that homeplaces are necessary spaces for Black girls in middle schools, particularly because of the access that LOD gave them to caring Black women. During the focus group, I asked Jahara and Halima, “What would you tell administrators at the middle school about why access to a homeplace is important for Black girls?” Halima asserted,

> I’d say it’s necessary because I noticed people, like young girls, they probably go through a lot at home. Like even now, you don’t know what’s going on in their household. So, they come to school, and then they’re probably struggling with classes and just going through a lot, and they don’t really have anybody to talk to. So, homeplace is important because you want a place to go to. For example, LOD was my place to go to, or coming to you was my place to go to when there was a problem. Coming to LOD made me forget that something just happened at school, and when I go home, I know I’m about to get in trouble. LOD made me forget about that for a moment. I feel like people need that. Young girls go through a lot, whether it’s depression and pain, or parental issues. They want to have a place where they can feel safe. So, it’s needed.

I probed Halima further by asking what happened in LOD meetings to make her forget the troubles that she was having at school. Halima answered,

> The meetings were always fun. The girls, they were so open and outgoing. There’s always laughing, and there’s basically just never a dull moment. So, for like that hour or hour and a half, it’s just good vibes and good energy between everybody. So, you kind of just forget, “Oh I’m about to get in trouble,” or “Oh I have this going on.” You just forget for the moment, because it’s just that fun, and that’s how much fun you’re having.

Jahara continued the conversation concerning how she would forget about her problems during LOD meetings by stating, “The things that gave me a break from stuff that’s happening outside

the club would be like, we are having fun during the club. I'm engaged and participating. Usually, I don't participate in class." I asked Jahara why she did not participate in class, and she stated, "Sometimes, I don't want to, like the topic is not in interesting. In LOD, we usually cover topics that has some type of correlation to me, that can better me, or stuff like that."

Jahara's disconnection with the topics that were being taught in her classes is an example of the disruption to learning that occurs when Black girls do not see themselves reflected in curricula. According to Morris (2019),

> Black and Brown girls who don't see themselves in the curriculum, in narratives that aren't as diverse as their communities are in real life, detach from the material and come to view education as a game rather than as a tool for their freedom. (p. 65)

Jahara's lack of engagement in her classes is also supported by Jones and Lee's (2020) research, which indicated that Black girls are at an increased risk for low school engagement compared to other racial groups. According to Jones and Lee (2020), "Engagement has been proposed as a multidimensional construct encompassing a number of behavioral, psychosocial, affective, cognitive, academic, and/or environmental factors" (p. 76). Furthermore, Jones and Lee's research highlighted how a student will have reduced identification with school when they have oppressive experiences, like the experiences that Jahara described in her classes. A study by Steel and Aronson (1995) revealed that disidentification can also result from chronic experiences with discrimination, stigmatization, feelings of inferiority, and stereotype threat. For Black girls, Jones and Lee (2020) posited that "as race and gender are increasingly made salient with the developmental transition from childhood to adolescence, socialization and racial identification also have disparate impact on African-American females in comparison to African-American males" (pp. 79–80). I followed up on Jahara's commentary about the disidentification that she

experienced in her classes by asking if there were topics that she remembered connecting with during LOD meetings. Jahara then clarified,

> I think it's more of being around people who I'm close with or had some type of relationship with. So, just being in that environment was good enough for me. And just talking to each other, because usually, I don't talk to them throughout the day. We might not have classes together, or hang with each other, due to school.

When I asked Jahara what she would tell administrators at the middle school about why access to a homeplace is important for Black girls, Jahara echoed Halima's sentiments about the necessity for Black girls to have access to a club like LOD. Jahara asserted,

> I think LOD is needed, especially for young Black girls, because you read most of the time, they're the ones singled out of every group, and they usually don't have anyone to talk to about their feelings. They're always told it's a taboo like, "Oh, you don't have anything wrong with you, no depression and stuff like that." So, when we come to these places, it makes us feel like we're loved, we could talk to anyone. It's just a safe place for young Black girls, due to the leaders being black women too. So, they know how to guide us and tell us what we need to know and how to move around.

As I continued to analyze the data, it appeared to me that having the opportunity to develop a relationship with the Black women who were sponsors of LOD contributed to Halima's positive feelings about why adolescent Black girls need access to homeplaces in school. Halima emphasized why the relationships with LOD's sponsors were important to her as she responded to the question, "What did it mean to have a relationship with the club's sponsors and did those relationships affect your experiences in school?" In her response, Halima shared,

> The relationship with you, the club sponsor, I feel like it was such a great relationship. You were in the school, and you know, we have LOD, and you were always there. So, if ever there was a problem, we report to you, and you would somehow regulate it. So, I knew having you there, it was comfortable for me. You were probably like my homeplace. I just liked it, and post LOD, we still maintain a strong relationship.

Jahara also referenced the relationships she established with the adults in the club when she stated, "I made a lot of friends from the group. I remember making connections with the administrators and teachers, like you for example." In addition to her relationship with me, as a

club sponsor, Jahara also held a special appreciation for Ms. Clark, another LOD sponsor. Jahara recalled a memory with Ms. Clark, that 8 years later, still evokes feelings of love. Jahara stated,

> I had a positive interaction with Ms. Clark. We were doing the vision board thing, and I was stuck on what I was supposed to do. She started telling me, "Just go with what you would like to do, like do you like cooking?" She gave me ideas on what I should do. I appreciate her for doing that. Ms. Clark was always there to help. That's just one thing that I love about her.

The significance of Halima and Jahara's relationships with the Black women who were sponsors of LOD is reflective of B. Evans and Leonard's (2013) research that highlights the impact of Black teachers on Black students. B. Evans and Leonard (2013) argue that,

> Although behaviors cannot be generalized, Black teachers are more likely to be familiar with the cultural nuances and vernacular of Black students and have the skills and ability to motivate them to learn. Moreover, Black teachers, historically, have served as inspirational models for college attainment. (p. 2)

During the first focus group, I asked Jahara and Halima if participation in LOD improved their middle school experience or hindered it. Halima answered,

> It influenced it in a good way, because being in LOD made me better. Before I joined LOD, I was in sixth grade, and I was getting in trouble. Being in LOD kind of stopped me, or it made me behave better, because I know I'm representing this club. So, I have to act a certain way and carry myself differently. Before that, I was probably getting sent out of class. I was getting in trouble, being rude. And then knowing that you were in the building, and if one of my teachers reported me to you, I was probably going to miss out on an activity or a field trip. So, it made me act better and move in a respectful manner.

Jahara agreed with Halima's summation that being in LOD positively influenced her middle school experience. Jahara expressed,

> I felt like it improved my school experience because I've done a lot of stuff that I would have never done without being in the group. I experienced bigger things. I learned where I wanted to go to college and which pathway I wanted to go to. And I learned new things I never knew about. And I got advice from the women when they would come in. It gave me an eye opener.

The women who Jahara referred to are the Black women that I would invite to participate in panel discussions for the girls in LOD. The purpose of the panel discussions was to expose

LOD's membership to women in different professions and with different life stories. I asked Jahara, "What kind of advice do you remember receiving from the women who would come and talk to LOD members?" Jahara answered,

> Well, some advice I would receive is that, since I am a Black girl, well you kind of, I'm not saying you have to change your ways, but like you have to be cautious of what you do around other people. Maybe not the ones in your background, because they might see it as like being destructive or being like crazy or stuff. But I was taught to be respectful. If you be respectful, it should go a long way.

For clarification, I asked Jahara if she interpreted the women's statements as saying there may be people who will have perceptions about her as a Black girl, and that she needed to be conscientious about those perceptions. Jahara replied affirmatively and stated, "You can't let them have the idea. You can't prove them right. Keep cool because, if you're respectful, then there should be no issues. There should not be, but could be." I inquired about whether Jahara considered the advice that she received as a middle school student from the women on the LOD panels as helpful today. Jahara responded, "I feel like it is, because once I'm in a certain setting, I act a certain way, but I'm still myself. I just think about what I do, before I do it." Halima then added, "Before someone questions."

Jahara's description of how she would modify her behavior because of the perceptions of Black girls is consistent with K. Evans's (2019) research on how Black girls respond to the racial disparities and oppression that they experience in education. According to K. Evans (2019), Black girls,

> Find themselves having to suppress their perceived racial characteristics by aligning themselves with the dominant race to engage in more meaningful ways with the education system. … This raceless persona that rejects any behavioral and attitudinal characteristics that are attributed to the Black identity is interpreted by educators as obedience and engagement and not a response to the daily microaggressions Black girls face. (pp. 78–79)

K. Evans (2019) further argued that ultimately, Black girls use a raceless personality to fight and protect themselves from the trauma that ensues from how society regards them.

As we wrapped up the second focus group, and without any prompts, both Halima and Jahara wanted me to know how lucky they felt to have been members of LOD in a predominately White school system. Halima shared,

> I also feel like being in LOD, we were kind of lucky, because we had that opportunity to do all this stuff. Most other girls didn't really have that opportunity. I feel like being in the school system, it opened us up to a lot of stuff. I was very fortunate.

Jahara added,

> Especially going to a predominately White school. The school I came from, we were not doing all of this. We did not have this much fun. We couldn't do as much. When I came here, it changed a lot. There were so many opportunities, resources, and all. I am thankful for that.

I wanted to know more about who the girls were that Halima referred to when she asserted that, "Most other girls didn't really have that opportunity" to do the kinds of things that girls in LOD were doing. I asked Halima if she was referring to girls who were not in LOD or girls outside of our school system. Halima responded,

> I would say girls outside of the school system. Most times, I'm around teenage girls and just hearing things they say, they don't really have that opportunity that I had, when I was coming up. So, when I hear them say they don't have any clubs or there's nowhere for them to go and be with other girls, it just makes me think about how I had it. I was very fortunate for like all the opportunities, the lessons that I learned within LOD and the people that we talked to. It was good for me, and I benefited a lot.

I questioned Halima about how she benefited from her participation in LOD, to which she replied,

> It gave me a broader perspective on life. Like how I want to live my life and my future. It made me, like grow up to be the woman I am today. It was a very thankful opportunity for me. And I feel like the people that you did bring to talk to us, if I could go back have some of the same conversations, I feel I could probably network more and utilize more of the resources that you presented us with. It could probably improve who I am today.

Black Lives Matter Movement

Neither Halima nor Jahara remembered the activism or social justice events that took place at the inception of the Black Lives Matter movement, which were primarily sparked by the murder of Trayvon Martin. Both participants were familiar with Trayvon Martin's name, however, they could not recall any of the details that surrounded his death. Halima and Jahara did not remember the activism of the Black Lives Matter movement having an impact on LOD club activities or discussions while they were members.

Summary

I began Chapter IV with a review of Chapters I–III, an introduction to the study's participants, and an explanation of how themes were developed from the individual and focus group interviews. I also described the detailed results and analysis of the data collected in this narrative inquiry. I organized the data was according to three themes, and the findings address the central question: How did adolescent Black girls experience "homeplace" in an afterschool club at a predominantly White middle school in Decatur, Georgia? In Chapter V, I provide a discussion of the major findings, the limitations of the study, implications for policymakers and practitioners, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of my research, and perhaps the focus of my life's work, was forever changed during the fall of 2022 as I participated in an individualized study course for my doctoral program. At the time, I was reviewing literature on the experiences of Black girls in school, and I came across an essay by bell hooks (2001) titled, "Homeplace (A Site of Resistance)." In the essay, hooks described the fear that she experienced as she and her family traveled through segregated White neighborhoods, amid the angry stares of White people, to get to her grandmother's house in a Black community. When hooks explained the feeling of "homecoming" that she experienced as she reached the edges of her grandmother's yard, I understood how she felt because as a little girl, I had also experienced feelings of safety, love, and homecoming when I would reach the front steps of my own grandmothers' homes on the South Side of Chicago.

As I read hooks's essay, I was also reminded of the expressions of relief and safety that I witnessed on the faces and in the body language of the girls in Ladies of Distinction (LOD), as they would cross the threshold into the club's meeting space. After reading hooks's essay, I wanted to learn more about the theory of homeplace and explore whether the connections that I was making between homeplace and the experiences of LOD members was accurate. Ultimately, the participants of the study, Halima and Jahara, revealed that my assumptions were correct. Halima and Jahara felt the love and protection of homeplace when they were present in LOD spaces, just as hooks and I did in our grandmothers' homes. Additionally, these spaces were commonly created and facilitated by Black women who were keenly aware of the racialized and gendered oppression that saturated the world outside of their homeplaces. In the end, my research explains why homeplaces are necessary spaces for Black girls at a critical time in their

development and adolescence, particularly when they attend a predominantly White middle school. Here in Chapter V, I present a summary of the study, the rationale for using Black feminist thought (BFT), and key findings drawn from the data that was presented in Chapter IV. I also provide an explanation for the relevance of this study's findings to existing research literature, as well as the study's limitations. I conclude Chapter V with recommendations for practice, policy, and future research.

Summary of Study

Narrative inquiry was used to answer the central question: How did adolescent Black girls experience "homeplace" in an afterschool club at a predominantly White middle school in Decatur, Georgia? The sample size of the study consisted of two participants, both of whom self-identify as Black and female. Both participants practice Islam, however, their faith of choice was not of any significance to this study. I used the pseudonyms, Halima and Jahara, to protect the privacy of the participants. Data was collected during an interview with each participant and two focus groups. All interviews were held in-person. As stated in Chapter IV, during the individual and focus group interviews, Halima and Jahara both used language that I believe they would not have used as 12-, 13-, or 14-year-old middle school students. However, I presume that the words and phrases they chose to express their thoughts and feelings—as 22-year-old adults—were acquired through the maturation process that comes with lived experiences.

Black Feminist Thought

There are many ways to understand the data that was revealed by the study's participants. I chose to use Black feminist thought as a theoretical lens instead of other frameworks because it is one of the most comprehensive sociohistorical lenses for framing the experiences of Black girls in school, when considering the racialized and gendered oppression they encounter. Furthermore, Lindsay-Dennis (2015) asserted that BFT "centers on African American girl's

experiences and empowers them with the right to interpret their reality and define their experiences" (p. 509).

Key Findings

Three themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the study's data:

1. Homeplace: Expressions of Belonging,
2. Homeplace: Expressions of Space, and
3. Homeplace: Expressions of Need.

As I reviewed the data to summarize my findings, I found myself surprised by Halima's and Jahara's abilities to recognize and call out the marginalization that they had encountered in their middle school classes. I was surprised because Halima's and Jahara's reflections indicated that, even when they were adolescent girls, they understood that they were not the problem in their classes, despite the adults in their classes trying to make them to believe otherwise. It was also encouraging to hear Halima and Jahara discuss the many ways that participation in Ladies of Distinction helped them to navigate their marginalization. Ultimately, Halima and Jahara confirmed what I thought to be true of LOD when they revealed that they experienced homeplace in LOD through: (a) a sense of belonging, (b) experiences that provided them the opportunity to grow and develop, and (c) access to caring Black women who facilitated a safe space that the girls needed.

Homeplace: Expressions of Belonging

The initial finding of the study reveals that Halima's and Jahara's participation in LOD provided them with a sense of belonging that is inextricably connected to how they experience homeplace. However, before I could arrive at this finding, I had to establish why LOD served as a homeplace for Halima and Jahara. During the individual and focus group interviews, both participants expressed their belief that a homeplace is a space where Black girls feel safe, cared

for, nonjudged, and comfortable enough to be their authentic selves. It is also important to note that Halima and Jahara expressed these same feelings as they discussed how they felt when they participated in LOD meetings. Halima shared the following when she explained what it meant for her to feel safe in LOD meetings:

> It means I was able to be open and be myself. I was able to be vocal about the way I felt or my opinions, without anybody, you know, saying anything or having something negative to say. And yeah, that's why it felt like a safe space for me.

Likewise, Jahara used similar language to discuss why she felt safe in LOD meetings. Jahara stated,

> Yeah, I felt safe because I wasn't being judged. Usually, when I'm in my other classrooms, if I do something wrong or if I am talking with another student, I get in trouble right away, you know? But when I'm in LOD, it's a more comfortable environment, where I can be myself, but still be respectful and without the teachers or sponsors being not respectful to me. If I did do something wrong, the club's sponsors come at what I did in a better way than other people.

As I compared Halima's and Jahara's descriptions of homeplace to their explanations of how they felt in LOD meetings, it became clear that for both girls, LOD meetings served as a homeplace. Furthermore, when I compared the definitions of belonging that are listed in Chapter II to Halima's and Jahara's statements about how they felt in LOD meetings, I was able to conclude that one of the reasons why LOD meetings were in fact a homeplace for the girls was because it was a space where they felt like they belonged. According to Barron and Kinney (2018), in the context of school, belonging is a state in which students "feel close to, a part of, and happy at school; feel that teachers care about the students and treat them fairly; get along with teachers and other students, and feel safe at school" (p. 5).

It is evident from Halima's and Jahara's statements about their experiences in LOD that they felt seen and heard during the club's gatherings, which contrasted with how they were made to feel in their classes. To be seen and heard affirmed to Halima and Jahara that their lives

mattered, even at a predominantly White school, where they were often subtly, and at times blatantly told that they did not. The timing of the LOD experience was critical for the Halima and Jahara because it occurred during adolescence, a period in children's lives when their identity and sense of agency are still being developed. Based on these findings, I assert that one of the ways that Halima and Jahara experienced homeplace as members of LOD was through the sense of belonging that the club provided.

Homeplace: Expressions of Space

The second finding to emerge out of the data was that as members of LOD, Halima and Jahara experienced homeplace through the new opportunities that participation in the club provided. Experiences such as Zumba, attending college tours, and participating in dining etiquette lessons are a few of the activities that Halima and Jahara expressed were first time experiences for them while they were members in LOD. For example, Halima stated,

> One of my favorite activities was Zumba, because it was very active, and it was just fun. I noticed that most of the things that we did in LOD, we never did that anywhere else. Coming to LOD, it was like a place where you could try new things, like etiquette lessons. Nobody ever took me to a restaurant. Everything was like new to us as Black girls. It was really nice.

Both participants also explained the lasting impact that LOD activities had on their lives. As Jahara shared how much she enjoyed the annual end of the year LOD banquet, she explained,

> I feel like I became a little bit of better of a person. Before, I used to be more like, not go with the flow, like I didn't care what I did around others. But since I've been going to the banquet, seeing what we all have done, looking at the memories and everything. It's really like I'm changing a little bit, like I see a change in me, and I want to keep changing to a better person.

LOD experiences and the lasting impact that they had on Halima and Jahara are significant to the theory of homeplace because they are examples of what hooks (2001) explained took place in homeplaces. According to hooks (2001), "It was there on the inside, in that 'homeplace' most

often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits" (p. 384).

I believe that the experiences provided to the girls in LOD, were life changing for Halima and Jahara. What made the experiences so impactful was the exposure that Halima and Jahara gained to the world outside of their school and community. For example, when LOD toured college campuses, Halima and Jahara were often traveling to a city that they had never visited before. Neither Halima nor Jahara had ever been to Tuskegee, Alabama when the club traveled there to tour the campus of Tuskegee University. Prior to attending college tours with LOD, Halima's and Jahara's exposure to higher education had been limited. Both Halima and Jahara will be the first members in their immediate families to graduate from college. Additionally, LOD activities like yoga, Zumba, and dining etiquette lessons were taught by Black women entrepreneurs, who introduced LOD members to nontraditional occupations, while also teaching the girls skills that would benefit them well beyond their middle school years. Furthermore, I would argue that the opportunities that Halima and Jahara experienced through LOD expanded their imaginations beyond the racialized and gendered barriers that they encountered in their predominantly White middle school.

Homeplace: Expressions of Need

The final finding of the research indicates that Halima and Jahara experienced homeplace in LOD through their interactions with the Black women who served as sponsors of the club. Both Halima and Jahara unequivocally expressed that Black girls need access to homeplaces in middle school. In their explanations of why, Halima and Jahara each expressed how LOD provided them with access to Black women, who gave them guidance and who contributed to Halima's and Jahara's feelings of safety. When I asked Jahara what she would tell school administrators about why Black girls need a homeplace in middle school, Jahara answered,

> I think LOD is needed, especially for young Black girls, because you read most of the time, they're the ones singled out of every group, and they usually don't have anyone to talk to about their feelings. They're always told it's a taboo like, "Oh, you don't have anything wrong with you, no depression and stuff like that." So, when we come to these places, it makes us feel like we're loved, we could talk to anyone. It's just a safe place for young Black girls, due to the leaders being black women too. So, they know how to guide us and tell us what we need to know and how to move around.

Jahara's strong stance that Black girls need a homeplace, particularly in environments where they are "singled out" and "want a place to go to," is reflective of the reason why Black women took on the responsibility of establishing homeplaces. According to hooks (2001), Black women created homeplaces,

> Where all black people could strive to be subject, not object, 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. 384)

The homeplaces that hooks referred to in her writing were spaces she remembered from her childhood, that women like her grandmother created and maintained. However, it is clear from Jahara's and Halima's reflections, that decades later, as middle school students, and now as 22-year-old adults, Jahara and Halima believe that homeplaces for Black girls are still relevant and necessary spaces.

Limitations

There are several limitations to consider, including the fact that it has been 8 years since Jahara and Halima were members of Ladies of Distinction. Consequently, their memories may not be clear or complete concerning LOD events and activities. Furthermore, this study is a narrative inquiry that tells the experiences of two individuals. Generalizations cannot be made about how all members of Ladies of Distinction experienced homeplace. My relationships with Jahara and Halima also present a limitation, as they may have conveyed sentiments about their experiences in LOD that they believed I would like to hear.

Minoritized religious, racial, and gender identities have been addressed in this study. As was stated in Chapters III and IV, both Halima and Jahara practice Islam. However, during the interviews, the topic of religion only surfaced when Halima expressed comfort in seeing members of LOD who looked like her, because they also wore a hijab, or head covering. Religion was not a focus during the interviews. As the former club sponsor of LOD, I do not recall religion or any of the tenets of religion being discussed during LOD meetings. Furthermore, there were never any observable conflicts between the Muslim and non-Muslim members of LOD. Yet, non-Muslim members of LOD may have different perceptions of what took place in LOD meetings, as well as their interactions with LOD members who practice Islam.

Recommendations

This study addressed the gap in the literature concerning the experiences of adolescent Black girls with homeplaces at predominantly White schools. Furthermore, the study expands hooks's theory of homeplace from the home environment to school buildings. As a narrative study, my research has centered the voices of two Black women as they reflected on their experiences as middle school students with marginalization and homeplace. Butler (2018) wrote that "seeing Black girls is the first required action in activism for and with Black girls, as it then pushes toward hearing girls, believing girls, understanding Black Girl matters, and articulating why Black girls matter" (p. 40).

The audience for this research is teachers, school and district administrators, and parents because they are the people who can influence district and school level policies and practices that directly impact Black girls. It is my recommendation that school districts adopt policies that eliminate inequity in discipline practices that marginalize Black girls. Policies should also be implemented that support ethnic diversity in school curricula, thereby guaranteeing that Black

girls see representations of themselves in curricula. In practice, it is my recommendation that school administrators establish afterschool clubs that can serve as homeplaces for Black girls, particularly when they attend predominantly White schools. Furthermore, as a practice, school administrators should prioritize routine professional development for teachers and staff that focuses on cultural competency.

I recommend future research that:

- Expands this study with a larger pool of participants and with participants who are from different faith backgrounds,
- explores how Black girls experience homeplace in predominantly Black middle schools,
- investigates how schools can provide spaces during the school day that can serve as homeplaces for Black girls,
- examines the connections between sense of belonging and educational outcomes, and
- explores how homeplaces that are co-constructed with the input of Black girls impact how they experience homeplace.

Summary

As I think back to my time as a sponsor of Ladies of Distinction, a salient memory comes to mind of the girls—Muslim and non-Muslim—laughing and talking as they walked home together after a LOD meeting. In my memory, some of the girls are wearing a hijab, the LOD club t-shirt, and a floor length skirt, while other girls wore the club t-shirt and blue jeans. A different observer of this memory might have made assumptions about the differences between the girls based on how their attire was an expression of their religious beliefs. However, what I

remember seeing was how homeplace did not end when the LOD meeting ended. I remember watching how Black girls of different faiths and backgrounds carried their shared sense of belonging with them as they walked home together.

I began this study as a narrative inquiry into how adolescent Black girls experienced homeplace in an afterschool club at a predominantly White middle school in Decatur, Georgia. Through the participants' narratives and a thematic analysis of the data, I have concluded that as members of Ladies of Distinction, Halima and Jahara experienced homeplace through: (a) a sense of belonging, (b) experiences that provided them the opportunity to grow and develop, and (c) access to caring Black women who facilitated a safe space that the girls needed. In conclusion, homeplaces are critical spaces for adolescent Black girls during a time in their lives when they need the guidance and support of caring Black women on how to navigate the marginalizing experiences of attending a predominantly White middle school.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Homeplace: An Afterschool Club for Adolescent Black Girls at a Predominantly White Middle School
Principal Investigator (PI): Jana Johnson-Davis
PI Telephone Numbers: [redacted]
PI E-mail: [redacted]
Faculty Advisor/ Faculty PI/ Dissertation Chair: Dr. Nancy Boxill
Faculty Telephone Numbers: [redacted]
Faculty E-mail: [redacted]
Location of Study: [redacted]

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jana Johnson-Davis. The researcher conducting this study will describe this study to you and answer all your questions. Please read the following information and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether to take part in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can refuse to participate at any time, and you can decline to answer any questions at any time. Simply tell the researcher that you wish to stop participating. All data collected before you stop will be destroyed and not used in the data analysis or results of this study. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent form for your records. A summary of the study results will be provided to you upon request.

The purpose of this study is to explore how adolescent Black girls experienced "homeplace" in an afterschool club at a predominantly white middle school in Decatur, Georgia.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in two, one-hour, in-person, audio-recorded interviews by yourself, and then a one-hour focus group interview with the other participant in the study.
- Review a transcript of your interview tape for accuracy.

The total estimated amount of time that you will be involved in this study is four hours.

Potential risks of being in this study:

- Loss of confidentiality if your name is associated with your responses.
- This potential risk is minimized through the use of pseudonyms that will be written onto interview tapes and used in the transcript of your interview tape.
- If recalling certain events during the interview causes you to become emotional, you may take a break for a few minutes. You may choose to continue, reschedule, or withdraw from the study. All data collected before your withdrawal will be destroyed and not used in the data analysis and written report.

Potential benefits of being in this study:

- The opportunity to make suggestions that may help adolescent Black girls in similar situations in the future.

Compensation/ Costs:
You will not receive any financial compensation for your participation, nor will you incur any costs as a result of your participation in this research.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections:
Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. Results of the study, including all collected data, may be published in my dissertation, in future journal articles, professional presentations, and Internet sites, but your name or any identifiable references to you will not be included. However, any records or data obtained as a result of your participation in this study may be inspected by the persons conducting this study and/or Union Institute & University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), provided that such inspectors are legally obligated to protect any identifiable information from public disclosure, except where disclosure is otherwise required by law or a court of competent jurisdiction. These records will be kept private in so far as permitted by law. All study data will be retained for a minimum of three years as required by the IRB and then destroyed.

If we communicate by e-mail during this study, please be aware that e-mail is not a secure form of communication. However, my computer has security software, and I am the only person who has access to my e-mail account. No one else will read our communications.

Termination of Study
Your participation in the study may be terminated by the investigator without your consent under the following circumstances: You fail to appear at a scheduled time for participation or fail to respond to a request to set up a time for your participation on two occasions. This study may need to be terminated without prior notice to, or consent of, participants in the event of illness or other pertinent reasons.

Subject and Researcher Authorization
I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable federal, state, or local laws.

Signatures

Participant Name (printed): ____

Participant Signature: ____

Date: ____

Principal Researcher's Name (printed): ____________________________________
Principal Researcher's Signature: ____

Date: ____

Note: You may contact the individuals listed at the top of this form with any questions about this study. You may also contact the IRB Director at Union Institute & University with any questions about your rights as a participant at [redacted], or at [redacted]. In the event of a study-related emergency, contact the individuals listed at the top of this form and the IRB Director within 48 hours.

APPENDIX B: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Now that you have read excerpts on "homeplace" from hooks (2001) and Weaver (2021), I want to get your thoughts on what you read. What questions do you have from the readings?
2. When you think about hooks (2001) and Weaver's (2021) explanations of homeplace, what do you think makes a space a homeplace?
3. What elements are necessary for a space to feel like a homeplace to a Black girl?
4. When you look at these pictures from our LOD meetings and activities, what feelings are attached to those memories?

   Probe: Can you say more?
5. How do you describe your experience in LOD?

   Probe: What words best capture how you feel about your participation in LOD?
6. When you think about your participation in LOD, what would you say impacted you the most?
7. Describe an activity or an interaction in LOD that really affected you.
8. What is the connection between the idea/concept of homeplace and your experiences in LOD?

   Probe: What elements of homeplace did you experience in LOD meetings?

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP #1 QUESTIONS

1. When you think back on LOD meetings, how do you describe what took place in those meetings?

   Probe: What words best explain LOD meetings?

2. What do you remember most about LOD meetings?

   Probe: What are your favorite memories of LOD meetings? What are your least favorite memories of LOD meetings?

3. When you consider what you now know about homeplace, how did LOD meetings serve as a homeplace for you?

   Probe: What made LOD meetings feel like a homeplace?

4. What would you tell the administrators at your middle school about why access to a homeplace for Black girls is important?

   Probe: How do you think Black girls at your middle school benefit from having a homeplace available to them?

5. Did participation in LOD influence your middle school experience?

   Probe: How did participation in LOD improve your middle school experience? How did participation in LOD hinder your middle school experience?

6. How did the Black Lives Matter impact your participation in LOD?

   Probe: How did events like the murder of Trayvon Martin or the Black Lives Matter protests that followed the news of his death affect the topics of discussion or activities of LOD?

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP #2 QUESTIONS FOR HALIMA

1. Where is the flea market where you have a kiosk?
2. What things did you learn while you were in LOD that you now apply to your everyday life?
3. What made a homeplace feel safe for you?
4. Were there other places that made you feel safe while you were in middle school?
5. What did you mean when you said that there were girls that "looked like you?" How did they look like you?
6. What made you think that LOD activities would benefit you in the future?
7. What made it nice to hear former LOD members talk about their life in high school? What did having that info do for you?
8. How did participating in LOD make you feel safe enough to forget about the challenges that you were experiencing?
9. What made the relationships with the girls in LOD long lasting?
10. In your interview, you said, "Most other girls didn't really have that opportunity. I feel like being in the school system, it opened us up to a lot of stuff. I was very fortunate". Please say more about that.

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP #2 QUESTIONS FOR JAHARA

1. Where do you work?

2. What college do you attend?

3. Where do you fall in the order of your siblings?

4. What did you mean when you said that Black girls can “relate to each other, no matter where they are from”?

5. What do you mean by “from”? Is “from” a neighborhood, country, school, or some other place?

6. How do you know that people will be good for you?

7. What does “perfect” place for Black girls mean to you?

8. What kind of advice do you remember receiving from the women who would come and talk to LOD members?

9. How was that advice helpful?

10. Is that advice still helpful today?

11. What is a minority to you?

12. Why did being with other minorities impact how you behaved in LOD meetings?