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The only one : exploring identity development in Black adolescent girls who are both educated and raised in White spaces

Jessica L. Ricardo
Smith College

Jessica Lauren Ricardo
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Are Both Educated and
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ABSTRACT

This theoretical study offers insight into how racial isolation experienced by Black adolescent girls living and educated in white spaces hinders their overall wellbeing and sense of identity. By focusing on Black adolescent girls who are raised and educated in predominantly white settings, my research adds and expands the often rigid and incomplete narrative that is found in academia regarding the psychosocial functioning and development of Black adolescent girls.

This research uses both Erikson's model for Adolescent Development and Objectification Theory to illuminate the challenges posed by the encompassing experiences of racial isolation on positive self-image and identity development for Black adolescent girls raised and educated in predominantly white spaces.

Finally, this research closes with recommendations, relevant for both clinicians and educators to more effectively work with Black adolescent girls who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, and offers insight into available resources and supports for this population group.

THE ONLY ONE:

EXPLORING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN BLACK ADOLESCENT GIRLS

WHO ARE BOTH EDUCATED AND RAISED IN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE

SPACES

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Jessica Lauren Ricardo

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, MA 01063

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

For Black adolescent girls, the consequences of living in and being educated in predominantly white spaces is, at best, complex, and at worst, alienating and discriminatory. Racial isolation in many forms is a constant for Black girls living in and being educated in white spaces as they try to navigate between the micro and macro systems in which they live. This inescapable racial isolation poses unique challenges to Black adolescent girls' ability to develop a healthy sense of self, and has particularly negative effects on the development of a healthy and positive self-image of the Black female body.

This theoretical study offers insight into how forms of racial isolation experienced by Black adolescent girls living and educated in white spaces hinders their overall wellbeing and sense of identity. The psychosocial stages of adolescent development derived from the work of Erik Erikson (1968) as it relates to 'identity crisis' will be used to understand the emotional and social dynamics present for Black adolescent girls being raised and educated in predominantly white spaces during the critical stage of their development. My second theory, Objectification theory, provides a theoretical framework for understanding the experience of being a Black female within a sociocultural context that sexually objectifies the female body and diminishes Black adolescent girls' personal and corporal identity. This theoretical study encourages social workers to investigate the

ways that contextual factors, like sexual objectification and racial isolation, impact the lives of Black adolescent girls living in and being educated in white spaces, as well as how Black girls are tasked with managing, coping with, and resisting these negative experiences. Furthermore, this study encourages social workers and other clinical practitioners to examine issues of racial inclusion and oppression on micro-social (i.e., interpersonal) and macro-social levels (i.e., environmental and institutional levels) and to work towards social justice and equality for Black adolescent girls surrounded by white spaces.

Study Phenomenon

The pervasive racial isolation experienced by Black adolescent girls who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces poses unique challenges to their ability to develop a healthy sense of self, and has particularly negative effects on the development of a healthy and positive self-image regarding their Black female bodies.

Need for Study

In January 2012, the Manhattan Institute for Policy and Research published a report entitled "The End of the Segregated Century: Racial Separation in America's Neighborhoods, 1890-2010" (Glaeser, 2012). Using "neighborhood-level" Census data on race spanning from 1890-2010, the report tells a narrative of decreasing racial segregation in America's neighborhoods (Glaeser, 2012, p.1). The report cited the migration of African Americans to the north between 1920 and 1960 as the first phase of the desegregation of the American community, and the enactment of the Fair Housing Act in 1968 as the beginning of the second phase, which the writer asserts still exists

(Glaeser, 2012, p. 2). In his research, "Black Youths in Predominantly White Suburbs: An Exploratory Study of Their Attitudes and Self-Concepts," Banks (1984) also cites this migration of Blacks into predominantly white spaces as an impetus for his study, reporting that "by 1980…a significant number of Black suburban residents lived in predominantly White communities" (p. 3).

The Manhattan Institute's report speaks to levels of racial isolation as a measurement for decreasing levels of segregation (Glaeser, 2012, p. 3). Their use of the concept of racial isolation is intended to measure the extent to which African Americans in the U.S. live in all-Black or all-White communities. This report counted communities with only two to seven percent Black families present as integrated, versus segregated (Glaeser, 2012, p. 3). Within the narrative of this report, a family comprising only two percent of its community racially is not isolated because they are assumed to have regular access to White and other non-Black families. Isolation, in this context, would specifically mean isolation from other races, rather than isolation from members of the same race. Still, it can be argued that the experience of being isolated from other members of one's race very much constitutes a form of isolation. The effects of this isolation is discussed in this thesis by exploring the experience of Black adolescent girls who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces.

Traditionally, and presently, much of the academic discussion about Black people in the U.S. focuses on populations living in financially under-resourced urban communities. There is very little room in the American narrative for the realities experienced by the growing number of Black families who live and educate their children in financially resourced and predominantly White communities and school systems. In

her 1999 book "Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril Among the Black middle Class," Mary Pantillo-McCoy (1999) attempted to broaden the space in the Black American narrative by looking at experiences of the Black middle class. Ultimately, though, Pantillo-McCoy's (1999) focus settles on Black middle class families residing in Black middle class communities, thereby continuing to advance the dominant narrative's blind spot to the particular isolation experienced by Black families who live their lives as "one of the only ones" in predominantly White communities.

Pantillo-McCoy (1999) sought to write the story of a different Black family, and to offer the image and story of the growing Black middle class. In her book she aimed to make the dominant narrative of the Black American family both more diverse and more accurate by offering a new character to the story; that of Black middle class. She drew important distinctions in quality of life and available resources between White middle class communities and Black middle class communities, thus, maintaining her focus on Black Americans who reside and learn in predominantly Black communities.

A similar gap in the Black narrative exists in writings about Black adolescent girls and their psychosocial functioning. Not only do many of these writings focus on Black adolescent girls living in predominantly Black communities and attending predominantly Black schools, but many of them additionally posit that access to Black elders, mentors, and peer groups all serve as a buffering system to the risks that the ideals of the White dominant culture poses to Black adolescent girls' development of self, identity, and self-esteem.

While research shows that Black families in the U.S. are moving in increasing rates both into previously all White communities and into the American middle class,

there is also the parallel, and perhaps a resulting process, of a growing population Black adolescents being educated in predominantly white spaces at an increasing rate (Glaeser, 2012; Pantillo-McCoy, 1999). Robert Cooper (2012) discusses this particular shift in his chapter, "Enhancing the Schooling Experience of African American Students in Predominantly White Independent Schools: Conceptual and Strategic Considerations to Developing a Critical Third Space," in the book, "Black Educational Choice: Assessing the Private and Public Alternatives to Traditional K-12 Public Schools" (Slaughter-Defoe, Stevenson, Arrington & Johnson, 2012). Cooper (2012) first cites both the "proliferation of alternatives to traditional public schools" and the 1960's wave of "policies of nondiscrimination" that swept private and independent schools and eventually led to these schools "actively recruit[ing] minority students in efforts to create a more diverse student body on their campuses" (p. 222-223).

Arrington & Stevenson (2012) discussed the potential impact of the "racial dissonance" that occurs in "schools in suburban areas as well as private and independent elite schools" (p. 78). They define this "racial dissonance" as the state of "schools where a student's racial group comprises less than 20 percent of the student population" (Arrington & Stevenson, 2012, p. 78). Arrington and Stevenson's (2012) focus on this "racial dissonance," marked by a level of racial isolation in the school setting, stems from their assertion that schools play a pivotal role in the racial socialization of Black children (p. 78). They state that, "In the home and at school, youth are learning how to be as a person who is a member of a specific family and a unique individual with certain attributes," and "how to be a person who belongs to one or more racial communities" (Arrington & Stevenson, 2012, p. 79). Johnson, Slaughter-Defoe & Banerjee (2012) also

reference the racial socialization that occurs in the school setting, referring to schools as "secondary socialization contexts where racial/ethnic socialization messages are either intentionally or unintentionally communicated" (p. 106). Johnson et al. (2012) paint the picture of racial socialization as something that occurs both within the home and the school setting stating that "the home is a mainstay context of these [racial socialization] processes, and the school context is the next major environment where race-related socialization of children occurs" (p. 107). When considering the issue of racial isolation in my thesis, the focus is specifically on isolation that occurs in both the school and home community settings.

In their work, Poran (2002), Sabik, Cole & Ward (2010), Kroon Van Deist Tartakovsky, Stachon, Pettit, & Perez (2014), and Hesse-Biber, Nagy, Howling, Leavy, & Lovejoy (2004) also note that much of the dominant research about Black women and their experiences of their bodies reference past findings of Black women, specifically findings in which African American women report lower levels of body dissatisfaction than White women. Much of the existing research referenced by Poran (2002), Sabik et al. (2010), Kroon Van Deist et al. (2014) and Hesse-Biber et al. (2004) cite African American "culture" as the root of what Sabik et al. (2010) refer to as the "buffering process," by which African American women are less likely to be affected by the dominant culture's White thin body ideal (pg. 141).

The notion of Black women as somehow buffered from the White thin beauty ideal is problematically held out as a generalizable notion, with little attention to the variation in access that Black women and girls have to a broader Black culture in their daily lives. If the buffer is understood as a consistent countering of the dominant ideal by

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a wider Black culture, then Black adolescent girls who are both living and being educated in predominantly white academic settings can be argued to be at a greater risk of lacking that buffer and of developing negative body image that is specifically promoted by their experience of racial isolation. Sabik et al. (2010) are unique in their questioning of whether or not this principle of cultural buffering is truly generalizable. Sabik et al. (2010) looks at the experiences of Asian American, African American, and European American women and the extent to which group members internalize the White thin body ideal and the differences in those experiences correlated with higher levels of "exposure to predominant culture" (pg. 141). Sabik et al. (2010) found that African American women with "high levels of exposure" to the White dominant culture tended to struggle more with internalization of the dominant ideal and body dissatisfaction (pg. 145).

Historically, academic discussions and research specific to body image, body dissatisfaction, and disordered eating patterns have predominantly looked at these issues through the experiences of White upper-class women, generalizing those reported experiences as the dominant norm (Kroon Van Deist et al., 2014; Hesse-Biber et al., 2004; Rayner, Schniering, Rapee, & Hutchinson, 2013; Poran, 2002, pg. 65.). Research that does intentionally look to the experiences of women of color with their bodies often offer categories of Asian American, Latin American, and African American, with an implicit assumption that the experiences of those groups are ones that fit within a monolithic narrative (Poran 2002, Hesse-Biber et al. 2004, Kroon Van Deist et al. 2014). The narratives offered by these studies do not recognize or honor the differences that exist within in-group narratives (Sabik et al. 2010, Warren & Rios, 2012).

Purpose of Study

This research is intended to make space for a variation within the narrative about Black adolescent girls. Specific attention is given to the development of Black adolescent girls' self esteem and identity when they are both raised and educated in white spaces and do not have the benefit of the "buffer" that is assumed to be established by the existence of a surrounding Black community of elders and peers.

Specifically, this research investigates the experiences that occur for Black adolescent girls when they are raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, with awareness that many of these spaces are what the Manhattan Institute for Policy and Research Report might define as integrated. This research posits that the experience of being the two percent Black in a ninety eight percent sea is, in fact, isolating; so much so that it stands to threaten the self-integration of the Black adolescent girls living and learning as only a small percentage of those white spaces.

Study Assumptions

The assumptions considered in this theoretical study are: Black adolescent girls living and educated in predominantly white spaces experience racial isolation, that this experience of racial isolation is particularly significant at the time of adolescence due to the drive in this stage to form and understand one's identity and place in the world. It is further assumed that this experience of isolation is also particularly significant for girls and young women who are already tasked with the uphill climb of developing a healthy and positive view of their physical selves and that, ultimately, this experience of racial

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isolation stands to position this population at heightened risk for self-denigration of one's body shape, skin tone, hair texture, and general self.

Application to Social Work Practice

The intended audiences for this research are those actively engaging with the population being studied: social workers, teachers, school administrators, school counselors, etc. The goal for targeting this audience is to better inform practices with this population and to offer a nuanced understanding of the particular challenges faced by Black adolescent girls in predominantly white academic settings as they navigate the dominant culture of White beauty in an attempt to develop a psychical sense of oneself.

Significance of Study

The pervasive homogeneous narrative of Black adolescent girls and their experiences of their bodies results in a high need, within the field of research, to recognize the experiences of Black adolescent girls in predominantly white academic settings as a unique one and to explore them as such. This research study attempts to narrow the lens and, in turn, offer a narrative that more specifically nods to the often-erased experience of this particular subset of the Black adolescent girl population.

This systematic erasure, in the majority of the existing literature, positions the experience of White women as a generalizable narrative for all women (Poran, 2002, p. 66; Kroon Van Deist et al., 2014, p. 445; Hesse-Biber et al., 2004, p. 50). Although the body of research that does make room for the experiences of women of color is growing, it is still not nearly sufficient or exhaustive. Even within these additions there are still researchers, like Rayner et al. (2012) out of Australia, who form entire studies looking at the effects of peer networks on body image issues and disordered eating, and whose study

consists of almost all White participants and whose study never mentions race as a potential variable affecting girls' experience of their bodies.

Unfortunately, much of the research that does focus on the experiences of women of color paints with a broad stroke, further essentializing people of color and purporting single narrative experiences for large and diverse populations. In their article, "The Relationships Among Acculturation, Acculturative Stress, Endorsement of Western Media, Social Comparison, and Body Image in Hispanic Male College Students," Warren & Rios (2013) do attempt to locate their participant population by focusing on the specifics of participants' familial immigration status, economic status, and first language (p. 196). They are more specific about their population, and thus more accurately tell the story they intend to offer with their research. Warren & Rios appear to be rare amongst current and past researchers in this area of research.

In their qualitative studies on beauty perceptions among differing ethnic groups and the affects of acculturation stress on body dissatisfaction, respectively, Poran (2002), Kroon Van Deist et al. (2014), Miller, Gleaves, Hirsch, Green, Snow & Corbett (2000) and Kronenfeld, Reba-Harrelson, Von Holle, Reyes & Bulik (2009) also collapse the experiences of whole populations by reporting findings on Latin American women, for example, without looking at the distinct differences that might be present for the women in the study when considering differences of skin tone, perceived race and the racial impact of both the participants' home and school communities. These pieces of research, again, establish populations of women or girls of color as homogeneous, both in social location and experience of the world and of themselves.

By focusing my research on Black adolescent girls who both live in and are educated in predominantly White communities, I make room for a variation on the narrative of Black adolescent girls. Much of the academic writing, research, and framing done around Black girls and women in the U.S. tend to focus on those in urban, predominantly Black housing and school settings. The narrative of Black people living exclusively in urban settings and always isolated in communities only populated by other Black people is an intentional and comfortable story that we tell about the Black American. It is also a story that erases Black individuals and families in the U.S. who live outside of urban areas or who, either, live in integrated communities or reside, work, and educate their children in predominantly white spaces.

Definition of Terms/Explanations

Black is being used in this research to delineate those who identify and would likely be perceived as being Black in the United States. I am specifically focusing on the United States because, as one moves the discussion into other countries, racial demarcations begin to shift from those used in the U.S. While it is globally common for fairer skin to be considered favorable over darker skin by dominant standards of beauty, the labels we ascribe to people of varying shades of brown differ from country to country. Focusing only on those who would be perceived as, and would identify as, Black in this country aims to define this research more clearly. Additionally, the U.S. has a specific history of devaluing Blackness, Black bodies, Black hair, and Black skin. Intentionally focusing on what Black means in the U.S., allows for this legacy to be drawn out and remembered when

considering the ways in which this population, in particular, comes to navigate their Black bodies in white spaces.

The decision not to further identify Black or White by specific ethnic categories, throughout my research, is a conscious one. The goal is to focus on perceived race, a perception that is heavily influenced by one's skin tone, hair texture and other physical attributes. In concentrating on, both, self-identified race and perceived race I aim to allow the focus to rest in the experience of moving through the world in a body that is perceived as outside the White ideal. One could, for example, be of Cuban descent but be perceived as White, perhaps blonde haired and blue eyed. One could also be Cuban with dark skin, dark eyes, and kinky hair. The world interacts with both of those bodies differently, and living in both of those bodies allows for a person to feel closer or farther from what the dominant culture tells us is beautiful. The variable, as clarified with this example, is not the ethnic background but the Blackness or Whiteness itself.

Girls refer to those who identity as female and are also likely to be perceived as female. The first distinction is intended to allow for the highlighting of the specific pressures felt by people who are female identified to hold to certain rigid and gender specific body ideals. The distinction for considering only those who would additionally be perceived as female is intentional. There are, of course, many women and girls who identify as women or girls, but whose gender the world regularly challenges due to the dominant culture's expectation of feminine presentation. For the sake of feasibility, these women are not the focus of my research because, in order to tell the narrative accurately, one would need to

closely consider not just the variable of race and gender, but also notions of expected gender performance, gender identity, and sexuality as well. The decision to focus the usage of "girls" to people who both identify as and are widely perceived as girls sets a notable and significant limitation on this research.

The admittedly problematic decision to focus on the aforementioned population is a practical one. Time constraints to complete this research, number of variables to be examined and the added dimensions and particular experiences of trans and gender non-conforming Black adolescent girls in predominantly white spaces requires expansion that falls outside of the frame of my current research. I am, however, acutely aware that, with the decision to exclude these population from the definition of girls used herein, this research contributes to the pervasive cultural erasure of these populations of girls and women. I do recognize and am sensitive to the fact that this decision definitively and intentionally colludes with the ongoing silencing of these populations' varying narratives.

Adolescent references those who are in, and of appropriate age to be enrolled in secondary school settings.

White is used to describe those who both identify as and would be perceived by others as White. One's identification as White lends itself to a personal identification with the White body ideal, and one's likelihood to be perceived as White speaks to a plausible level of closeness that a person can feel they are to that White body ideal.

White spaces and white settings are used interchangeably to refer to spaces in which

Whiteness dominates in number, in culture, and in what is considered desirable

and normal.

Learning environments, in this research, specifically refer to secondary schooling

settings.

Theoretical Frameworks

Two theories will be used to examine the phenomenon of Black adolescent girls

who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces. These theories are Erik

Erikson's (1968) theories of adolescent development and Objectification theory. The

theoretical application of Eric Erikson's (1978) developmental model will show how

racial isolation in adolescence impacts Black girls' ability to develop a healthy sense of

self and an integrated and cohesive identity.

Objectification theory, which specifically focuses on the socialization of women

and girls to internalize external female body ideals, places emphasis on the bodies of

women and girls as objects for external evaluation (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Used

in this research, Objectification theory helps to explain how Black adolescent girls

internalize this constant external gaze, devaluing and stunting the development of a

healthy and positive self-image of their own Black female bodies and view of the self.

Summary

This chapter defined the phenomenon to be explored and discussed the study's

need and relevance to social work practice. This chapter also served to introduce the

theoretical frameworks used in this research. Chapter II discusses my study's

conceptualization and methodology, including methodological biases and the strengths and limitations of this study. Chapter III expands on the study's phenomenon. Chapters IV and V provide detailed applications of my study's theoretical frameworks and Chapter VI discusses implications for social work practice and the study's conclusion.

CHAPTER II

Conceptualization and Methodology

This chapter serves as an overview of the research methodology and theoretical conceptualizations that guide this study. The two theoretical frameworks discussed in this chapter provide understanding of the development of Black adolescent girls' identity and self-worth when they are both raised and educated in white spaces and when they lack the "buffer" of a surrounding and supportive Black community of elders and peers. Racial isolation, or being "one" or "being among the few," threatens one's identity and social development in predominantly white spaces.

Two theoretical frameworks are chosen to explore the phenomenon of Black adolescent girls being raised and educated in predominantly white spaces and the challenge to their self-integration, self-worth and identity development that is manifested by these white spaces. The first of these theoretical frameworks is Erik Erikson's theory of adolescent development with specific reference to the development of ethnic identity in adolescence. French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber (2006) asserted that there is a growing need to study and apply theory to the development of ethnic identity in children and adolescence. They stated, "with each passing year, the number of children of color grows, and they will eventually outnumber European American children, thus necessarily

making issues relating to the development of children of color central themes in psychology" (French et al., 2006, p. 1).

The primary theme from Erikson's (1968) model used in this research is his framing of identity development as "the critical psychosocial task of adolescence" (French et al., 2006, p. 1). I will use both Erikson's (1968) developmental model for adolescence and his focus on identity development during the adolescent stage as vehicles for exploring how racial isolation impedes the healthy and full development of adolescent's of color identity. Erikson's (1968) model is also used in this research to further discuss the ways in which this isolation-based barrier to identity development functions as a threat to the mental health and well being of Black adolescent girls.

My use of Erikson's (1968) developmental model, in this research, holds at its center the identity crisis that Erikson positions as primary to the adolescent developmental stage. Erikson (1968) describes this crisis as a period in which one engages in a "search for a sense of continuity and sameness" both within one's self and within one's environment (p. 128). By focusing on this crisis, my use of this model intends to address how racial isolation impacts psychosocial development. I intend to use this theory with additional attention to the possible effects of a stymied process of identity development on success in later life stages. Speaking to the impact of adolescence on adulthood, Erikson (1968) stated "this process has its normative crisis in adolescence, and is in many ways determined by what went before and determines much that follows" (p. 23).

The second theoretical framework that I use to understand the phenomenon of identity development for Black adolescent girls raised and educated in predominantly

white spaces is Objectification theory. Objectification theory specifically focuses on the socialization of women and girls to internalize external female body ideals. Tiggemann (2013) explains that Objectification theory rests on the foundational assumption that "women and girls in Western societies exist in a culture that both implicitly and explicitly sexually objectifies the female body," thereby constructing the bodies of women and girls as "object[s] to be looked at and evaluated, primarily on the basis of appearance" (p. 36).

The basic principal of this theory is that the objectification of women and girls' bodies is so ubiquitous (in social narrative, daily lived experiences, the media, and more) that women begin to internalize this constant external gaze. Objectification theory posits that this internalization is not just of the external gaze, but also an internalization of the very notion of women's bodies as objects to be gazed at and valued based on outward appearance, presentation and evaluation (Tiggemann, 2013, p. 37). The theory particularly anchors on this concept of "self-objectification," a process marked by the adoption of the "observer's perspective on the self" (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, p. 179). This frame will help to explain the unhealthy impingement upon Black adolescent girls' identity and social development as they navigate the internalization of an unattainable White beauty ideal. Both Erikson's (1968) model for adolescent development and Objectification theory allow me to engage in a dialogue around the ways in which challenges of racial isolation hinder the capacity for the development of a healthy and affirming positive self-image of the Black female body.

Methodological Bias

The acknowledged bias in this research methodology is my own personal investment in and perspective on this research topic their subsequent influence on and my

final discussion chapter. My own experiences as a Black adolescent girl educated and raised in predominantly white spaces and the impact my own experiences of racial isolation have had on my development have heavily influenced my selection of Erik Erikson's (1968) theory for adolescent development and of Objectification theory. I acknowledge that my own intersecting identities and my own history represent a version of the story that this research stands to tell. Without this personal-historical positioning, another researcher may have chosen other frameworks and, subsequently, may have built their research in service of a different overall narrative. Despite this bias, a notable strength of my research is that it addresses and seeks to open room in the narrative of an important, but often academically neglected population.

Summary

This chapter identified the theoretical frameworks for this study and discussed why the selected theories are significant and relevant in understanding the development of Black adolescent girls' identity and self-worth when they are raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, and the potential affects of these experiences on later stages and in the areas of mental and emotional health. A synopsis of each theoretical framework, their subsequent application to Black adolescent girls' identity formation and potential methodological biases also were defined. Chapter III discusses the phenomenon and provides an overview of related literature.

CHAPTER III

Phenomenon

This chapter provides an overview of the phenomenon of Black adolescent girls who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, and the ways in which that experience influences their development of self and identity. This phenomenon is particularly influenced by the context of cultural, institutional and systematic devaluation of the bodies of Black women and girls. I look closely at the ways in which racial isolation affects girls' ability to formulate "a cohesive and positive sense of self," as is tasked in the adolescent developmental stage (Mandara, Gaylord-Harden, Richards, & Ragsdale, 2009, p. 1660).

In their 2009 article, Mandara et al. note the interconnectedness of one's group identity with their individual identity stating that, "one's self-concept consists of an individual identity domain and a group domain" (Mandara et al., 2009, p. 1660) Regardless of setting or gender, Black adolescents are subject to both overt and covert racist messages about their racial group. Both positive self-esteem and a positive sense of racial identity, Mandara et al. argue, serve as protective factors for Black youth in the adolescent developmental stage. They cite research that show positive racial identity serving as a buffer for adolescents' attempting to cope with racism and discrimination, and as being additionally linked with positive mental health outcomes for Black

adolescents (Mandara, et al. 2009, p. 1660-1661, 1663). In their research, Mandara et al. use an assessment tool that measures racial identity along the following criteria:

> (a) An understanding and acceptance of one's socially constructed racial label, (b) knowledge of one's racial group history and cultural norms, (c) a sense of shared activities, (d) beliefs about the social position of one's racial group and (e) feelings of pride regarding one's racial group. (Mandara et al., 2009, p. 1661)

Problematically, the racial isolation that persists in the daily experiences of Black adolescent girls living and being educated in predominantly white spaces can hinder the development of the above listed criteria for positive racial identity. Mandara states that one's "social context determines the form of racial identity [adolescents] will develop" (Mandara et al., 2009, p. 1662). This emphasis on one's social context during identity development speaks directly to the danger that racial isolation within a predominantly White setting poses for this population. Social context becomes an additionally complicating factor when that context is so marked by dominant White ideal that, both, implicitly or directly reinforces a devaluing narrative of Black girls' bodies rather than actively producing affirming counter narratives.

Without the bolstering affect of a positive racial identity and group identification, Black adolescent girls raised and educated in predominantly white spaces are tasked with countering the dominant society's devaluing of their racial identities and their racialized bodies on their own. This need to engage in counter narrative work in isolation can lead to higher levels of self-denigration consistent with Erik Erikson's (1968) identity crisis. Using Erikson's (1968) theoretical framework, it can be understood that if Black adolescent girls successfully navigate this identity crisis, then they are afforded a clarity

and groundedness in both their individual and group identity, leading to healthy adjustment and relationships in adulthood and a healthy level of self-acceptance. If, however, the struggle to self and racially identify within an isolating predominantly white setting sufficiently hinders this navigational process, Erikson's model would suggest an outcome of a shaky sense of self in one's environment and subsequent negative mental health and relational outcomes.

Objectification theory offers a heightened understanding of this phenomenon by allowing for a closer examination of the intersection of race and gender as it presents for this population. Through the lens of Objectification theory, it can be argued that Black adolescent girls living and being educated in predominantly white spaces are at an increased risk for self-denigration, particularly of their racialized physical attributes. Objectification theory would argue that women and girls are already at an increased risk of self-objectification. For this population, there lies an additional potential for lasting and heightened levels of self-objectification along racial lines with the potential to result in an increased subsequent risk to mental health and relational success later in life.

Ispa-Landa & Conwell (2015) use the concept of racialization to examine impressions that Black students may have about differing school settings, and the extent to which these beliefs influence their framing of Black identities. They define racialization as "the process through which, in each sociohistorical period, individuals and groups acquire racial identities and meanings" (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015, p.2). They argue that while traditionally researched as a "categorization process" that applies to individuals and groups, racialization also applies to whole institutions, including

schools. Their research shows predominantly White schools often become racialized by its students as "White schools" (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015, p. 2).

Problematically, they argue that the racialization of an institution, in this case a school setting, leads to the racialization of the characteristics within that setting (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015 p. 2). One might argue that this racialization of characteristics includes the racialization of the dominant norms of that space and the correlated dominant ideals. To this end, they state that the "racial classification of institutions has implications for the reproduction of symbolic meanings attached to race" (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015, p. 2). Erikson (1968) describes the adolescent identity crisis as a phase during which adolescents begin to try on casts of identities in a venture to solidify one's own identity. The racialization of characteristic norms and ideals associated with a "White School" serves as a barrier to this experimental phase of identity formation in classifying positive characteristics within the space (whether it be academic achievement, certain social behaviors or other areas of excellence) as white. Through the racialization of a school setting, even if the initial racialization is based on the actual racial make-up of the school community, characteristics within that setting also become racialized. Thus problematically, while in the adolescent identity crisis, the pull to try on different identities is thwarted by the fact that the lone Black student in a predominantly white setting is faced with characteristics and identities that have already become inaccessible or are at odds with the adolescent, due to their racialization as "White." This limiting of identity options, through a process of institutional and characteristic racialization, challenges the already fraught identity formation process that Erikson positions as central to the adolescent stage of development.

Ispa-Landa & Conwell use, as an example, the case of "black girls at an elite, predominantly white private school," which the girls overwhelmingly referred to as a "White institution (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015, p. 3). They hold central in their analysis that it is not only the racialization of the spaces that proves problematic, but specifically that this characteristic racialization firmly plants Blackness as falling outside the bounds of many desirable and community-valued characteristics and identities. Ispa-Landa & Conwell report that their interviews produced a theme that showed "these black students were forced to navigate their position as outsiders who represented difference from the invisible norm of whiteness" (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015, p. 3). With attention to Erikson's (1968) developmental model and the adolescent identity crisis, we can begin to see the profound burden held by Black adolescent girls as they attempt to manage their age appropriate identity crisis within an environment whose racialization inherently otherizes them. They further note that this added hurdle to identity formation experienced by Black adolescent girls in predominantly White school settings are unique to the setting and present themselves at a lesser rate and degree within "predominantly Black institutions or institutions where actors have deliberately sought to unsettle whiteness as the invisible "norm" (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015, p. 3).

In addition to marking the identity crisis with an adolescent desire to experiment with different identities in an effort to forge their own, Erikson (1968) also points towards the importance, in adolescence, of feeling some level of in-group joining. Ispa-Landa & Conwell (2015) offer that the aforementioned outsider positioning often includes the added injuries of having one's difference held as central to one's whole self, as an "inferiority," stating that "some [interview subjects] talked of feeling 'tired' or

'annoyed' by having their difference be the focal point of their interactions with…students and teachers" (p. 8). They point specifically to one interviewee who reported the following of her experience of being othered in her predominantly White school:

> Okay, so you're a minority first, and like kids in Chilton, they are fascinated— like, 'you are different people from a different place where I don't live.' So, mostly all the kids in your grade know who you are…You're just, different from everybody, and everyone gets to know you. (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015, p. 8)

This positioning of Blackness within a predominantly White school setting, as both an outsider identity and central to one's identity, further hinders one's ability to engage in the practice of "trying on" identities and joining with the group during the adolescent identity crisis. Additionally, as Erikson (1968) warns of a stymied identity formation process, Ispa-Landa & Conwell (2015) also point to the psychological and mood related consequences of this outsider effect.

Ispa-Landa & Conwell (2015) continue on to describe that, along with the challenges Black adolescent girls navigate to join with, and self-identify within their white academic spaces, comes an additional and eventual internalization of Black stigma and a subsequent effort to distance oneself from negative Black stereotypes (p. 11). They describe a process of "defensive othering," in which the Black adolescent girls they interviewed enacted a separation of sorts from other Black students, Black neighborhoods, and all things that might associate themselves with Blackness in a negative light (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015, p. 11). Ispa-Landa & Conwell (2015) state,

"defensive othering occurs when members of a discredited group accept the legitimacy of a devalued identity and respond by claiming that the identity does not apply to them personally" (Ispa-Landa & Conwell, 2015, pg. 11). This defensive othering stands as yet another instance in which Erikson's (1968) posited adolescent identity crisis is further muddled and challenging for Black adolescent girls who are both educated and raised in predominantly white settings.

Objectification theory is further applicable to this phenomenon, particularly when considering the myriad ways in which racial isolation facilitates the internalization of an external view of self. When Black adolescent girls are impacted by gender role socialization, sexual objectification and rejection, they begin to treat and view their bodies as they perceive the outside world evaluates them. Some of this internalization process can be seen in a need for Black adolescent girls in white spaces to adopt the dominant cultural identity or general values and ideals of their white environment. This adoption of dominant ideals often takes place as an act of self-preservation and to limit experiences of being othered and having their racial and cultural differences highlighted.

The study of adolescent Black girls living in white spaces is important. As a significant socializing context, living spaces have the capacity to positively contribute to psychosocial adolescent development. Becoming comfortable with a changing body form and image and learning how to deal social relationships and sense of self are each important developmental tasks during adolescence. Consistent experiences of racial isolation, limited ethnic bonding and negative in-group images produce increased experiences of rejection for adolescent Black girls. Objectification theory hypothesizes that a preoccupation with appearance and a need to fit-in and belong solidify the

groundwork for a self-objectifying gaze towards themselves and their bodies. This self-objectification, in turn, increases the opportunity for feelings of shame and anxiety and contributes to a variety of mental and physical problems, such as eating disorders, sexual activity, and depression among Black adolescent girls, especially those living in white spaces (Buchanan, Fischer, Tokar, & Yoder, 2008; Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr, 2011; Moradi 2011).

In her article, "Black Women, Beauty, and Hair as a Matter of *Being,*" Cheryl Thompson (2009), looked closely at Black women's navigation of a White Beauty standard and a dominant society which not only reinforces this standard, but simultaneously marginalizes Blackness as an ugly other. Thompson (2009) offers several case examples in which she explores the social pressure felt by Black women and girls to fit their bodies and their hair into the framework of a beauty ideal that is definitively white and has historically denied space for Black bodies. Thompson (2009) implies that there is a process of beautifying through the physical assimilation of hair straightening, skin bleaching, dieting etc. This process of altering ones physical characteristics in a effort to hold more closely to the White dominant beauty ideal stands as an example of self-objectification and physical self-monitoring. The result of internalizing the White beauty ideal is a pattern of women and girls consistently comparing and grading themselves harshly against a sexist and racist beauty ideal.

Thompson (2009) focuses explicitly on the politics of Black women's hair as part of their identity and her many offered case examples show an internalization of the White beauty ideal, as it manifests through actual actions taken in an effort to assimilate one's hair to the dominant standard. Thompson (2009) quotes a woman who talks about

straightening her hair for the first time, "My hair made me different," and that "it just seems like we have to conform to some standard that's out there" (p. 842, 847). While there has long been, and continues to be, much debate around the extent to which Black women straightening their hair can or should be seen as adherence to a White ideal, Thompson (2009) notes that this particular research participant seems to argue that there is, at the base, an attempt "to emulate Whiteness" (p. 850). This notion of Black hairdressing as influenced by and, in some part, ascribing to the White beauty ideal can be seen as a practical example of the self-objectification that Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) warn is the natural consequence of regularly experienced objectification from the outside.

Tracey Owens Patton's (2006) article, "Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair?: African American Women and Their Struggles with Beauty, Body Image, and Hair," similarly looks at Black women and the pressure to squeeze themselves into the White beauty ideal. Patton (2006) gives a nod to Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) assertion in Objectification theory, that women in our society exist in a vacuum in which they are regularly objectified and defined by their physical selves. To this end Patton (2006) states, "we are socially constructed through language and mediated images to believe that what makes a woman beautiful is not her intelligence or her inner beauty but her outer beauty" (p. 39). Taking a historical perspective, Patton (2006) is conscious to root the internalization of this ideal, or the self-objectification practiced by many Black women, within a historical context in which lightness of skin tone and straight hair were not only once associated with beauty but with safety and even freedom. Patton (2006) states, "adopting White European traits was essential to survival" (p. 28). Objectification theory

would argue that regular objectification experienced within one's daily existence leads to a toxic self-objectification. However, when considering the historical context that Patton (2006) holds as central to her research, it can more widely be argued that regular racialized and gendered objectification can lead to an entrenched practice of self-objectification and adherence to the dominant sexist and racist White beauty ideal.

As in much of the research about Black women and girls and considerations of their bodies, Patton (2006) purports that "ethnic identification" (which she defines as having regular, consistent, and predominant social interactions with other members of the Black community) can act as a buffer against the internalization of the dominant beauty standard (p. 34). This buffer does not apply to my focus population. When considering this phenomenon through the lens of Objectification theory, it can then be deduced that racial isolation, in combination with both historical and daily sexual and racial objectification can lead to particularly salient practices of self-objectification for adolescent Black girls who are racially isolated in their predominantly White neighborhoods and school settings.

The following chapter offers an in depth exploration of the phenomenon of Black adolescent girls being raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, examined through the lens of Erik Erikson's (1968) developmental model of adolescent identity formation.

CHAPTER IV

Erik Erikson: Stages of Adolescent Development

This chapter uses Erik Erikson's (1968) theory of adolescent development to understand the impact of racial isolation on Black adolescent girls' identity formation. Erikson's (1968) developmental model of adolescence and identity development provides a lens for viewing the impact of racial isolation as a prohibitory factor in developing a healthy and whole social identity among Black adolescent girls living and being educated in white spaces. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of how this isolation-based challenge to identity development functions as a threat to the psychological and social health of Black adolescent girls.

In his theory on adolescent identity formation, Erikson (1968) posits that there is a struggle to mold and solidify one's identity that is inherent to the adolescent years. Erikson (1968) theorizes that this struggle is not only developmentally appropriate in the adolescent stage, but is, in fact, a central marker of the adolescent developmental stage. He wrote, "We have learned to ascribe a normative 'identity crisis' to the age of adolescence and young adulthood" (Erikson, 1968, P. 17). The assertion of adolescence as the birthplace of a self-forged identity supports my choice to focus on girls in the adolescent stage, emphasizing the significance of those years in one's ability to develop a sense of oneself. Erikson (1968), in his discussion of the adolescent need to self-define, discusses identity formation as a goal whose achievement is crucial, stating, "in the social

jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity"
(p. 130).

Despite Erikson's (1968) clear rooting of the identity crisis at the heart of the
adolescent developmental stage, he does, in psychoanalytic fashion, maintain the weight
of the effects of earlier development on this process (p. 23). Erikson (1968)
simultaneously notes that this developmental stage and the resulting sense of identity,
itself, goes on to affect later stages of development far into one's adult life. To this end he
stated that, "this process has its normative crisis in adolescence, and is in many ways
determined by what went before and determines much that follows" (Erikson, 1968. p.
23).

Erikson (1968) specifies that part of the pull towards self-identification in the
adolescent stage come from a desire to name oneself. Again, he added that within this
identity crisis period, there is also "a search for a sense of continuity and sameness" not
only within oneself but also with one's environment (Erikson, 1968, p.128). Erikson
(1968) describes this desire to find one's place within one's environment as an
ideological one by stating, "the adolescent mind becomes a more explicitly ideological
one…searching for some unification of tradition or anticipated techniques, ideas, and
ideals" (p. 130). Erikson (1968) describes this desire of ideological subscription as one
that is closely intertwined with the desire to feel that one has a place in their environment,
community and with those who make up those spaces. To this end, Erikson (1968) offers
that "it is the ideological potential of a society which speaks most clearly to the
adolescent who is so eager to be affirmed by peers, to be confirmed by teachers, and to be
inspired by worthwhile 'ways of life' (p. 130). Erikson (1968) describes this pressing

need to both self-identify within and to join with the ideology of one's environment as one that is near frantic in its nature. He suggests that the pressure to both identify and join is motivated by adolescents' desire "to keep themselves together," and often leads adolescents to "temporarily overidentify with the heroes of cliques and crowds to the point of an apparently complete loss of individuality" (Erikson, 1968, p. 132). Both the desire to join and the potential to move towards an over-identification with one's environment can pose particular difficulties for adolescent Black girls who are raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, in which the "heroes" and perhaps, also, the ideologies of value and beauty do not reflect themselves in fundamentally visible, undeniable and unattainable ways.

Erikson (1968) asserts that the process of forging one's identity is a social one by nature. He describes a process in which the adolescent stage is marked by a molding of one's identity, which involves a wrestling of both inner self-perception and outwardly imposed perceptions and expectations of the self (Erikson, 1968, p. 22). The adoption of the outside perception of oneself is, according to Erikson's developmental model, fundamental to the creation of an identity. He describes this navigation stating:

> In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them. (Erikson, 1968, p. 22)

With this, Erikson (1968) solidifies not only the important social nature of the identity formation process, but the significant role that, both, the gaze of the other and

environmental expectations of oneself play in that process and their ultimate influence on the resulting sense of identity itself. This notion of the social environment as pivotal to the identity formation process and resulting identity lends itself to my specific research focus on the effects of a racially isolating environment on the identity formation of Black adolescent girls.

Speaking to a relational quality of the identity formation process, Erikson (1968) states that, "the whole interplay between the psychological and the social, the developmental and the historical, for which identity formation is of prototypal significance could only be conceptualized as a kind of psychosocial relativity" (Erikson, 1968, p. 23). In this chapter, the concept of psychosocial relativity is essential to understanding how the identity formation process that takes place for Black adolescent girls who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces affects and uniquely challenges their resulting identity formation.

Korneinko, Santos & Updegraff (2015) and Covington (2010) also endorse the notion of psychosocial relativity in identity formation. Korneinko et al. (2015) state both that there is a "socioemotional prominence of peers during adolescence" and that "peers play an important role in shaping [ethnic-racial identity] processes" (p. 177-178). Covington (2010) similarly offers, "relationships are central to the development of girls' social and psychological growth" (p. 4). Both Covington (2010) and Korneinko et al. (2015) are speaking specifically to the role that peers play in navigating, making meaning of and internalizing or externalizing racialized experiences during adolescence. In their chapter, Korneinko et al. (2015) reference a study by Syed (2012) which "found that stories of discrimination were most likely to be told to peers…suggesting that peers may

be important agents of racial socialization" (p. 181). The general concept being that, it is amongst peers that adolescents develop understanding and, presumably, learn strategic and protective response mechanisms to experiences of discrimination. This holds significant implications for Black adolescent girls being raised and educated in predominantly white settings. For these girls, peer settings both at home and in school will be predominantly white. This level of racial isolation may serve as a barrier for this peer-to-peer sharing experiences of racism, as this sharing would require that one shares an experience with a peer who has never, themselves, had and may not validate the reality of a racist encounter. When sharing of these instances do occur, Black adolescent girls who are racially isolated may find themselves more frequently put in the position to prove the reality of their experience.

Adams-Bass, Stevenson & Kotzin (2014) echo the insistence that both peer and environmental exposure heavily influences one's racial identity development as well as their perception of their race as it sits congruently or in opposition to stereotypes that someone may encounter about their race. In their research, they found that "youth who receive affirming racial socialization messages seem more able to identify negative and positive stereotypes" (Adams-Bass et al., 2014, p. 384). They additionally note that "youth with higher Black history knowledge scores were also more likely to identify stereotypes, but not to endorse negative stereotypes as valid representations of Black people" (Adams-Bass et al., 2014, p. 384). Black adolescent girls who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces have fewer out-of-home opportunities for racial socialization that is framed by intentional and regular affirmation of their own racial identity. Furthermore, predominantly white spaces may either offer very few narratives of

Black experiences, if any at all, or may actually endorse negative and stereotypical narratives of Black experiences. Predominantly White school settings may pose an additional challenge to Black adolescent girls' ability to move through empowering and reflective learning opportunities around Black history; which is another protective factor noted by Adams-Bass et al., (2014).

In their research, Ispa-Landa & Conwell (2015) centralize Black adolescent girls' experiences with schooling and assert that the ways they negotiate their racial and cultural identities are closely tied to their identify formation and social development. Black adolescents, particularly when isolated in predominantly white settings, are racialized and their language, culture and bodies are often marginalized. This marginalization, aided by racial isolation, increases the risk for self-denigration by Black adolescents girls in majority white spaces.

Similarly, Alekhin & Ostasheva (2013), found, in their research, that personal relationships, the educational environment and recognition of one's social and cultural characteristics and heritage are critical to adolescent identity formation and social development. If these attributes are marginalized or diffused, adolescents begin to struggle with their sense of self. If they view themselves as not fitting into their social environment, their emotional wellbeing, attachment and ego strength are negatively impacted (Alekhin et al., 2013). Considering Erikson's (1968) concept of psychosocial relativity, it can then be understood that feelings of racial isolation, or marginalization, experienced by Black adolescent girls in predominantly white spaces affects and threatens their capacity to cope and maintain resilience.

Mowatt, French & Malebranche (2013) discuss racial isolation as a state that breeds both invisibility and hypervisibility (p. 644). They define invisibility as "a fundamental aspect of being Black in a White dominated society" (Mowatt et al., 2013, p. 645). For Black adolescent girls raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, this invisibility manifests in a gross lack of access to same race peers, educators, and racially relevant and affirming narratives producing a state in which their race and their racialized experiences are often erased completely from dominant discourse. Mowatt et al. (2013) posit that hypervisibility, conversely, "requires the recognition of race in conjunction with gendered body politics" and leads to the positioning of the hypervisible as a "spectacle" "rooted in racialized gendered intersections of power, privilege, and oppression" (p. 645). bell hooks (1992) speaks to this spectacle making in what she refers to as "the commodification of Otherness" (p. 21). She states that, "within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (hooks, 1992, pg. 21).

Adolescent Black girls raised and educated in predominantly white spaces find themselves to be one of very few Black bodies in a given setting for much of their day. Mowatt et al. (2013) argue that the very experience of being 'one of few' serves to painfully conjure the racist sexist histories of their academic institutions and, often, of their neighborhoods as well (p. 649). Even now, these histories live presently in the lack of Black faces in white spaces and serve as a reminder to Black adolescent girls that these neighborhoods and schools were not meant for them.

In his research on Black undergraduates in predominantly white schools, Harper (2013) discusses this sense of invisibility as one that has been intentionally and

historically constructed, stating "institutional histories…make it clear that several colleges and universities in the United States were created without any attention to Black students' needs and interests" and that "White stakeholders (students, faculty, trustees, alumni, etc.) have established cultural norms that have governed these campuses for decades, in some cases centuries" (p. 188). He, thus, seems to sustain that the sense of invisibility that Mowatt et al. (2013) speak to, exists both in the individual internal experience as well as in the experience of participating in a predominantly White institution as a Black person (Harper, 2013, p. 188). Harper (2013), alternatively, speaks to this sense of invisibility in his use of the concept of "onlyness" which he defines as "the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one's same racial or ethnic group" (p. 189). For adolescent Black girls being educated and raised in predominantly white settings, experiences of "onlyness" and invisibility interfere with and serve as barriers to Erikson's (1968) asserted need for adolescents' to both distinguish their own identities while also feeling able to master joining with their peers and environments.

Erikson (1968) reported that attaining adaptation, or fit with contextual demands, is especially challenging for African American youth because issues of race complicate the search for an adaptive identity. Because adolescence is a time when race and ethnicity are highly regarded, adolescents begin to differentiate friendships by ethnic group and status to show increased self-esteem and ethnic exploration. In the case of Black adolescent girls, they define themselves in relation to their social groups, relationships, and meaning of their racial and ethnic group. In predominantly white spaces, or when they are the "only one," an exploration of self through racial or ethnic

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grouping becomes less possible. Additionally, experiences with racial prejudice experienced in isolation minimize adaptation.

Erikson (1968) does note that the give and take tension between the inner self-perception and the outer gaze manifests differently for individuals from historically exploited populations. When applying his concept of psychosocial relativity, it must be considered that, for those whose communities have been historically exploited, the outside gaze is often a negative one leading to, what Erikson (1968) posits as a necessary, or at least inevitable, integration of what he calls an outwardly ascribed "negative identity" (p. 25). This concept of the presence and necessary navigation and incorporation of negative identities for exploited communities and individuals offers an additional lens through which to pick apart the challenges to identity formation for Black adolescent girls being raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, which is the focus of this research.

Harper (2013) considered this need to cut through "negative identities" when he discussed the concept of "onlyness" in his study, reporting that participants spoke of "onlyness" as being marked by "the burden they felt to be exceptional" while simultaneously experiencing being both "token[ized] and spotlight[ed]" (p. 188, 191). Harper (2013) found that his study participants' experience of being regularly singled out based on their race led the development of a "stereotype threat" which he defines as "an internalized fear of confirming negative stereotypes about one's racial group" (p. 191).

Mowatt et al. (2013) also speak to a burdening of Black women by the weight of historically and present negative narratives about their bodies stating, "the Black/female/body is under constant subjugation, scrutiny, and marginalization" (p. 649).

They spoke to this positioning of the Black female body as one that is deeply rooted in Western society, using the parading of Sara Baartman, dubbed the "Hottentot Venus," as an example of how "Black female bodies have historically been considered grotesque, animalistic, and unnatural" (Mowatt et al., 2013, p. 650). They reference a longstanding history of Black women's their bodies having been labeled as Jezebel's, Mammies, and Sapphire's (the angry black woman) (Mowatt 2013, p. 650-652).

For Black adolescent girls being raised and educated today, in predominantly white spaces, the struggle to move against negative stereotypes regarding their intellectual capacity, work ethic and the meaning of their bodies continues to be a present one, evidenced by the continued lack of representation of Black women and girls in the media as symbols of beauty and success. It is this unique hurdle that serves as an additional burden for Black adolescent girls living and being educated in predominantly white spaces as they attempt to develop a healthy and positive sense of self and identity.

Erikson's (1968) theory of adolescent identity development asserts that it is in the life stage of adolescence in which a person seeks to define themselves, both with an identity that feels whole from within and an identity that joins one with their outside world. This theory affirms my decision to focus my research on identity development with Black adolescent girls in particular. Erikson's (1968) concept of psychosocial relativity speaks to the importance of one's environment and relational experiences on one's ability to develop an identity and to the health of that resulting identity and sense of self. This particular concept from Erikson (1968) has been used in this chapter to further explore the fundamentally challenging nature of identity development from a stance of racial isolation, as it exists for this population. In the following chapter I will explore

Objectification theory and its use in further understanding processes of developing

identity and self-image among Black adolescent girls experiencing racial isolation in their

home and school settings.

CHAPTER V

Objectification Theory

In this chapter I use Objectification theory as my second theoretical framework to consider the phenomenon of identity development for Black adolescent girls who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces. Objectification theory specifically focuses on the socialization of women and girls to internalize externally imposed female body ideals. Tiggemann (2013) explains, as previously noted, that this theory rests on the foundational assumption that "women and girls in Western societies exist in a culture that both implicitly and explicitly sexually objectifies the female body," thereby constructing the bodies of women and girls as "object[s] to be looked at and evaluated, primarily on the basis of appearance" (p. 36). The basic principal of the theory is that the sexual objectification of women's bodies is so ubiquitous (in social narrative, daily lived experiences, the media, and more) that women begin to internalize this constant external gaze. Objectification theory posits that this internalization involves, not only the adoption of the external gaze, but an internalization of the very notion of women's bodies as objects to be gazed at and valued based on outward appearance and presentation (Tiggemann, 2013, p. 37).

For Black adolescent girls, beauty ideals can function as boundary markers that separate or divide them from white bodies or the white spaces in which they live and are

educated. For women and girls processing, or, at least simulating aesthetic ideals can serve to facilitate membership in the dominant group and enjoyment of status and material benefits that such membership may confer (Patton 2006; Thompson, 2009). When Black adolescent girls compare their bodies and beauty to that of their peers and are faced with a marked 'differentness', they may often feel unequal and not accepted.

Similarly to Erikson's (1968) assertion that one's identity formation involves the integration of the ideologies of one's environment and is, thus, a social process, Fredrickson & Roberts (1997), too, assert the significance of environmental context. With a specific eye on women and girl's bodies, Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) posit that "bodies exist within social and cultural contexts, and hence are also constructed through sociocultural practices and discourses" (p. 174). For Fredrickson & Roberts (1997), a primary theme of the Western sociocultural context and discourse is the sexual objectification of women, which they define as "the experience of being treated *as a body* (or collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others" (p. 174). They go on to further define sexual objectification, offering that it "occurs whenever a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they are capable of representing her (Fredrickson & Roberts, 199, p. 175). They further note that, while there is a significant range of manifestations of the sexual objectification of women's bodies, "the most subtle and deniable way sexualized evaluation is enacted-and arguably the most ubiquitous - is through gaze, or visual inspection of the body" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 175).

Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) note that women and girls most frequently encounter a sexualizing and evaluative gaze within their "interpersonal and social encounters" and through encounters with "visual media that spotlight bodies and body parts" (p. 176). It is notable, however, that Fredrickson & Roberts' (1997) aim in naming this phenomenon is not to explore its historical foundations or the reasoning for its persistence. Objectification theory, rather simply asserts that it is "a *given* that women exist in a culture in which their bodies are---for whatever reasons—looked at, evaluated, and always potentially objectified," (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 177).

If emphasizing the permeating presence of the sexual objectification of women and women's bodies is the primary goal of Objectification theory, it can be said, then, that the secondary goal is to draw the direct link between the regular experience of sexual objectification and *self-objectification,* a process marked by the adoption of the "observer's perspective on the self" (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, p. 179). Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) argue that the practice of self-objectification, in turn, leads to "a form of self-consciousness characterized by habitual monitoring of the body's outward appearance" (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, p. 180). Objectification theory is used in my research to explore the ways in which Black adolescent girls living and being educated in predominantly white spaces are regularly faced with the gaze of the other combined with the clear and starkly noticeable fact that their bodies may be one of few if not the only Black bodies in the classroom, on the school bus, and on the block. According to Objectification theory, women and girls have been socialized to understand their bodies as objects, become used to the external gaze to the point of internalization, and, in turn,

begin to direct that same critical and essentializing gaze on themselves in the form of self-objectification.

Despite acknowledging the likelihood of unique racially and culturally influenced manifestations of self-objectification, overall, Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) neglect to spend sufficient time discussing those differences and their potential implications for the theory itself and for its application to the lived experiences of non-White women. They do report, however, that sexual objectification of women of color has the distinct potential to serve to "combine with other oppressions" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 178).

My research aims to utilize the concept of self-objectification while intentionally lending particular attention to the inescapable intersection of race and gender and the role this intersection plays in the particular brands of objectification and self-objectification experienced by Black adolescent girls who are both educated and raised in predominantly white spaces. This further opening of the initial theory is required to allow for the nuanced experience of sexual objectification for women of color, as well as the affect of experiencing sexual objectification within a setting overwhelmed by a dominant culture. This racially weighted application of Objectification theory is central to my use of this theory.

For Black adolescent girls both living in and being raised in predominantly white spaces, the gaze that becomes problematically internalized is external to themselves, in its patriarchal origin and in its fundamental racialized quality. For this population, self-objectification involves the turning on the self with a gaze that represents a male patriarchal view of women's bodies, while also supporting the White beauty ideal. This

racialized component of self-objectification creates a dynamic for black adolescent girls

raised and educated in predominantly white spaces in which, for them, this external gaze

is fundamentally unachievable and devaluing of their Black female bodies. Whereas, for

White women, self-objectification may come with a body monitoring that includes ideals

involving their weight, body shape, breast size, hair length etc. Black women find

themselves additionally self-objectifying within a frame that names the White phenotype

as ideal, in addition to the aforementioned physical characteristics.

Shuttlesworth & Zotter (2011) and Imarogbe (2003) speak to self-objectification

within Black populations, with both articles citing the unique tension that exists when

Black men and women are charged with internalizing the external gaze of the dominant

White ideal. Imarogbe (2003) speaks to this racialized piece of the self-objectification

experienced by Black women, by introducing a discussion of the historical positioning of

Black bodies as inferior to White bodies. Imarogbe (2003) reminds us that in the time of

American slavery, "Blacks were conditioned to believe that their skin was ugly, and their

lips and noses were unaesthetic and malformed" (p. 2). Imarogbe (2003) asserts that this

cultural and systematic devaluing of the Black body, coupled with the simultaneous

assertion of white as beautiful, is central to the continued perpetuation of a ubiquitous

White beauty ideal. Imarogbe states, "through the popular institutions in the American

society, especially television, many Blacks internalize the notion that Black is not

beautiful" (p. 3). With a mind to the effects of the dominant White beauty ideal in the

subsequent self-objectification process, the sample population in Imarogbe's (2003)

research is questioned, not only about general body dissatisfaction, but particularly on

participants' judgments of their own "ethnicity –specific attributes" (i.e. "hair texture,

skin complexion, lip size and nose shape") (p. 33, 39). Imarogbe (2003) notes that this attention to body satisfaction specifically regarding "ethnicity-specific attributes" is essentially absent in most of the relevant literature, instead with most research focusing on a more general assessment of "body satisfaction" (p. 33). Through intentionally addressing these racialized attributes by Imarogbe (2003) is to individualize the research by assessing how the process of internalizing an external and inherently White gaze results in a particular form of self-objectification when that gaze is applied to a Black body.

Importantly, in research by Imarogbe (2003), Shuttlesworth & Zotter (2011) and Covington (2010) it is suggested that a sense of Black identity, an experience of Black socialization and access to Black "communal spaces" may act as a buffer against the internalization of the external White beauty idealizing gaze, and limit the persistence of a self-objectification that holds this gaze as its primary measurement (Covington, 2010, p. 14). In their research on African American women and disordered eating, Shuttlesworth & Zotter's (2011) propose that, "for African American women, strongly identifying with African American cultural beauty ideals may protect against disordered eating to lose weight" and that, conversely, "low levels of ethnic identity represent a risk factor" (p. 906). They offer that a "strong ethnic identity may protect against internalizing the dominant Caucasian thinness ideal," defining "strength of ethnic identity" as a "degree of ethnic pride, positive feelings concerning one's background, degree of contentment with one's background, and feelings of belongingness or attachment to one's ethnic group" (Shuttlesworth & Zotter, 2011, p. 908). In the end, Shuttlesworth and Zotter (2011) found that "stronger ethnic identity equates lower likelihood of all forms of disordered eating"

and one can deduce then, also lower levels of internalization of the dominant White beauty ideal (p. 916).

Imarogbe (2003) also looks to a sense of Black identity as a potential buffer to the internalization of the externally imposed White beauty ideal and the resulting self-objectification. Imarogbe cites Makkar & Strube's (1995) research, which suggests, "Black women who do not embrace their culture may be more susceptible to comparison to European beauty standards, which result in lower self-acceptance" (p. 18). Ultimately, Imarogbe's (2003) own research shows that "those who adhere to an Eurocentric world-view report increased feelings of ethnicity-specific body dissatisfaction whereas those who are secure with their racial identity are more satisfied with their ethnicity-specific attributes" (p. 51). Additionally, Imarogbe's (2003) research suggests, "the more participants perceived being discriminated against, the more they were dissatisfied with their bodies" (p. 59).

Overall, Shuttlesworth & Zotter (2011) and Imarogbe (2003) suggest that a salience of a racial and ethnic identity allows for greater rejection of the dominant White beauty ideal and a decreased level of self-objectification of oneself through the lens of that ideal. Covington (2010) supports this notion in her own research, stating that "racial socialization is a conduit for resistance and allows one to look at the world in a critical manner" (p. 19). For the population of Black adolescent girls who are both educated and raised in predominantly white spaces, however, this buffer of a salient Black identity is dangerously lacking. As discussed in Chapter IV, the racial isolation experienced by this population significantly affects one's ability to develop a positive and self-affirming racial identity. Rather, this population is overly saturated by and is highly at risk of

internalizing a White beauty standard. Furthermore, the experience of consistently being 'one of few' Black bodies in a space may lead to increased experiences of perceived and actual discrimination, which Imarogbe (2003) noted is additionally and particularly detrimental to one's body satisfaction and the level to which one may engage in self-objectification through the lens of the dominant White beauty ideal.

I use Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) to emphasize the psychological ramifications for regular experiences of sexual objectification and particularly, of adopting the outside sexually objectifying gaze through the process of self-objectification. There are side effects of sexual objectification and self-objectification. According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), there are "psychological and experiential consequences of sexual objectification for (a) the emotion of shame, (b) the emotion of anxiety, (c) peak motivational states, and (d) the awareness of internal bodily states" (p. 181).

Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) define shame as an emotion, which "occurs when people evaluate themselves relative to some internalized or cultural ideal and come up short" (p. 181). With a heavy focus on the relational aspect of the experience of shame, Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) add it "results from a fusion of negative self evaluation with the potential for social exposure" (p. 181). They argue that as a result of regular body monitoring and self-objectification, women are at risk for heightened levels of shame, that "the continual comparison that a woman may make between her actual body and the mythic ideal is a recipe for shame" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 181). With this, Objectification theory both asserts that women are at increased risks for experiencing shame and that the clash between their own physical selves and self-

perception with the expected ideals imposed from the outside is a direct predecessor to those experiences of shame. This concept of increased levels of shame is particularly concerning given the developmental challenges faced by Black adolescent girls in predominantly white spaces, whose self-objectification is measured both by gendered body ideals as well as ideals of Whiteness as beauty. Speaking to this double self-objectification, Esposito (2011) discusses non-White women's bodies as being fundamentally "marked as feminine" *and* marked by race" (p. 152). The compounded nature of these two "mythic ideals," (those of femininity and whiteness) threatens to lead to further increased levels of shame for Black adolescent girls.

When discussing increased anxiety as a potential psychological effect of consistent experiences of sexual objectification and self-objectification, Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) offer multiple examples of ways in which this anxiety might manifest. For the purposes of this research I specifically focus on what they refer to as "appearance anxiety," which they describe as being marked by a feeling of "not knowing exactly when and how one's body will be looked at and evaluated" (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997, p. 182). Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) additionally note, "appearance anxiety is often manifested by concerns for checking and adjusting one's appearance" (p. 182). This research highlights the interplay of race and gender for Black adolescent girls who are both educated and raised in predominantly white spaces and the ways in which that interplay affects the potential manifestation of "appearance anxiety," such that it may additionally include anxiety about and attempts to alter facial features, hair texture, and skin tone.

Objectification theory posits "peak motivational states" as an additional site of potential psychological ramification for women who are both regularly sexually objectified as well subjecting themselves to their own self-objectification Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 183). Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) describe, "peak motivational state" as periods in which an individual is "fully absorbed in challenging mental or physical activity," noting it as a state that can be both "immensely rewarding and enjoyable" (p. 183). They theorize, however, that consistent body monitoring and self-objectification can significantly decrease a woman's ability to engage in "peak motivational states," negatively impacting both overall "quality of life" as well as performance and achievement levels (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 183). This concept is particularly relevant when considering the experiences of Black adolescent girls who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces as well as the potential affect of their racially isolated socialization and the correlated sexual and racial objectification and self-objectification. Resulting disruption to this population's "peak motivation states" may stand to have particularly negative effects on one's ability to maintain and advancing one's social, academic and extracurricular performance and achievement.

Fredrickson & Roberts (1997), lastly, offer the concept of the numbing of bodily awareness as a potential ramification of existing within a sexually objectifying culture and becoming burdened with the resulting practice of self-objectification. Towards this end, they argue that increased levels of focus specifically aimed at one's physical appearance to the outside world, rather than attention towards their body's functionality, or on realms outside of the body entirely, may lead women to experience "fewer perceptual resources available for attending to inner body experience" (Fredrickson &

Roberts 1997, p. 185). Or, in other words, Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) argue that, "by internalizing an observer's perspective as a primary view of the physical self, women may lose access to their own inner physical experiences" (p. 185). For Black adolescent girls living and being educated in predominantly white spaces, this may manifest itself in a notable preoccupation with one's physical self and a deficit of attention and focus available for one's internal physical experience and internal-awareness.

Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) assert that women exist within patriarchal and male dominated societies in which they are both objectified and defined on the basis of their corporal presentation. Consistent sexual-objectification then leads to an internalization of this objectifying external gaze and a subsequent and painful process of self-objectification. As demonstrated in this chapter, for Black adolescent girls who are both raised and educated in predominately white settings, this external gaze includes a specific devaluing and denigration of their "ethnicity-specific attributes," leading to a process of self-objectification through the unattainable lens of a White beauty ideal. This process of internalization and self-objectification is further aided by the unique challenge that this population faces in developing a buffering and affirming sense of racial identity within the limits of their predominantly white home community and academic spaces.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the phenomenon of Black adolescent girls being raised and educated in predominantly white spaces and the particular challenges that the corresponding experience of racial isolation has on the development of identity and self-esteem, particularly regarding one's self-image of their body and physical characteristics. Chapter VI also includes an overview of my use of Erikson's developmental model and Objectification theory that illuminates these challenges. Lastly,

I close this chapter with ways in which my research can guide future work in this area,

embracing the sensitivity that it demands with this specific population.

CHAPTER VI

Discussion

This chapter summarizes the phenomenon of the racial isolation experienced by Black adolescent girls who both live in and are educated in predominantly white spaces, and how this inescapable racial isolation poses unique challenges to Black adolescent girls' ability to develop a healthy sense of self and a positive self-image of the Black female body. Erik Erikson's (1968) theory for adolescent development and identity formation and Objectification theory have served as primary theoretical frameworks for critically examining the racial isolation and marginalization experienced by this population and its effects on Black adolescent girls. I identify and offer resources that Black adolescent girls and clinicians might find useful to reduce feelings of isolation and rejection and to build healthy standards of beauty and self-evaluation, and highlight implications for social work practice.

Mowatt et al. (2013) encourage "studying Black women within themselves, as opposed to contrasting Black women with White women, Black men, or other Women of Color" (p. 652). Mowatt et al. (2013) serve as an important point of growth in the storytelling of Black women and girls "by solely exploring the lived realities of Black women and girls and the complexities of intersecting identities within Black women," which prevents the continued production of essentializing material about Black women and girls, and the environments in which they live (p. 652). The decision to focus this research on the experiences of Black adolescent girls being raised and educated in

predominantly white spaces, comes directly from a desire to add a specific and nuanced

narrative to the limited and essentializing material available in the dominant academic

discourse on Black adolescent girls. As previously noted in this study, much of the

research focusing on Black adolescent girls and Black women, specifically regarding

body satisfaction and identity development, predominantly focuses on the experiences of

Black girls and women living their lives in predominantly Black spaces. By focusing my

research on those raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, my goal is to

broaden the existing narrative by looking closely at the unique challenges inherent to this

experience.

Adams-Bass et al. (2014) assert that healthy identity development is inherently

more difficult for Black adolescents stating that "youth are frequently tasked with

developing healthy, positive emergent identities as part of adolescence by navigating

around conflicting messages received from media, family, friends, and teachers, along

with interpreting racialized experiences, and developing necessary coping skills" (p.

370). Because today's adolescent population is particularly attuned to media portrayals

throughout the day, sexual objectification and internalization of the external gaze is a

constant. This is compounded by the racial isolation experienced by Black adolescent

girls who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, which complicates

their social and psychological well being and hinders their access to coping strategies and

overall identity development.

Living in and being educated in white spaces comes with an expectation to learn

specific rules, behaviors and conventional lifestyles that project being "well-behaved"

and a possession of status. Yet, living and being educated in a racially isolating

environment is marked by negative racialized impressions, experiences and interactions. These racialized themes that occur daily, can be seen in the form of micro-aggressions, and can be confusing for Black adolescent girls and can cause various emotions from rejection and sadness to anger and self-hatred. These experiences have the potential to cause harm to fragile adolescent identities. Not 'fitting in' has serious consequences for Black adolescents' mental and emotional wellbeing, or physical health. The constant gaze, whether sexually or racially objectifying, experienced in these white spaces too often instills grief and self-doubt in Black adolescent girls.

Erik Erikson's (1968) theory of adolescent development is particularly helpful in considering this phenomenon because of its demarcation of identity development through navigation of the developmentally appropriate identity crisis as the main task of adolescence. In his theory, Erikson (1968) notes that finding and shaping one's identity is the goal of the adolescent stage. He delineates that this navigation of self-identifying is notably influenced by psychosocial relativity. Erikson's (1968) theory is particularly relevant to research on the experience of Black adolescent girls who are both raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, as his theory emphasizes the importance of identity development for the life stage of development considered in my research. Erikson's (1968) theory additionally points to the significant impact of one's environment, socialization and possibility for in-group joining on the process of identity development. This notion of psychosocial relativity, when applied to this population, serves to further illustrate the challenging and arguably detrimental impact that experiences of racial isolation have on their identity development. Erikson's (1968) developmental model of adolescence sheds light on the developmental identity crisis that

is in place and the ways in which it manifests for Black adolescent girls experiencing racial isolation in their predominantly white living and educational spaces. Objectification theory, on the other hand, speaks to the particular challenges that are posed for a woman's body in a patriarchal and sexually objectifying society.

Objectification theory asserts that women and girls are constantly being sexually objectified, which involves having one's meaning and value reduced to the sum of one's physical and gendered parts. I have specifically focused my use of this theory on the notion that constant sexual objectification leads to a process of self-objectification. While Objectification theory, itself, neglects significant impacts of race and other intersecting identities on this process, I have posited, in Chapter V, that Black adolescent girls raised and educated in predominantly white spaces come to self-objectify along patriarchally and racially established female body ideals.

The struggle to develop a solid sense of identity while experiencing racial isolation, coupled with the bombardment of a male driven and White idealizing beauty ideal, results in both a hindered and more challenging process of identity development; as well as the potential for a self-objectification process that inherently and systematically devalues Black women and girls' bodies. These experiences implicate, for Black adolescent girls raised and educated in predominantly white spaces, a consistent assault against their sense of self and comfort in their Black bodies. These added challenges, during this pivotal developmental stage of adolescence, can negatively affect school performance, mental and emotional wellbeing and successful interaction and joining with peers.

It is of the utmost importance that educators and mental health workers acknowledge the reality of these challenges and actively respond to and support Black adolescent girls attempting to navigate these difficulties while existing in a state of consistent racial isolation. Unfortunately, many predominantly white spaces, often in an effort to create an environment of racial acceptance, operate from an ideology of colorblindness. Particularly with regards to academic settings, Lewis (2001) noted that schools are sites of creating racial meaning and that a stance of colorblindness holds a specific and potentially harmful implicit lesson on race (p. 782). Lewis (2001) defines a colorblind ideology as one that "presumes or asserts a race-neutral social context (e.g. race does not matter here)" (p. 800). Lewis (2001) goes on to state that "Color-blindness enables all members of the community to avoid confronting the racial realities that surround them, to avoid facing their own racist presumptions and understandings, and to avoid dealing with racist events by "deracializing them" (p. 801). Marx & Larson (2012) offer their own indictment of the use of a colorblind lens in an academic setting, stating that it "contributes to racial inequality by preventing useful conversation about race and racism from taking place" (p. 4).

Both in educational and clinical settings, it is paramount to intentionally turn away from the lulling but stagnant and ineffective ideology of colorblindness, recognizing that to assert that we are all equal, is to assert that the experience of Black adolescent girls raised and educated in predominantly white spaces is not unique and is not heavily influenced by their intersecting identities. To insist on the fallacy of equality, through colorblindness we, as educators, and mental health professionals, effectively silence these girls' experiences and stymie their efforts to seek support in navigating the

social, racial, and gendered pressures that mark their adolescence. Rather than maintaining a stance of colorblindness, Carter (2007) argues that, particularly for Black students isolated in predominantly white educational spaces, the establishment and availability of same-race peer networks can function as "identity-affirming counter-spaces [and] serve as a positive resistance strategy" (p. 542).

This theoretical research study highlights the importance of understanding the need to create spaces that effectively support Black adolescent girls living in and being educated in white spaces, and why such spaces should reflect gender and cultural responsiveness. This research brings attention to: (1) the racial isolation that Black adolescent girls in white spaces face; (2) an omission and inattention to this population's unique experiences within these predominantly white spaces; (3) the consequences of a lack of shared lived experiences; (4) the impact of sexual objectification and resulting self-objectification; and (5) the state of defensive 'othering'.

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