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The Girlhood Double-Standard

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THE GIRLHOOD DOUBLE-STANDARD:
GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS OF GENDERED CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Social Sciences
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ABSTRACT

Due to the patriarchal and racial hierarchies that structure education, girls, and specifically girls of color, occupy a marginalized space within it. This is in contrast to boys, who are considered more intellectually gifted, yet held to lower academic and behavioral standards. This study explores the impacts of gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes perceived by 30 white, Black, and/or Latinx women (ages 18-22) during their experiences in U.S. public middle schools (grades 6-8). Participants were surveyed to ascertain general information about them and their middle school experiences, then invited to participate in focus groups to share their individual narratives. In total, seven focus groups were conducted with 17 women. Utilizing intersectional feminist and constructivist grounded theories as frameworks, this mixed methods research concentrates on the multiple, intersecting barriers, including complex expectations regarding their academic and social-emotional performance, that challenge girls in education compared to boys generally. The survey results suggested a positively correlated relationship between girls' socioeconomic status and perceived positivity of middle school experience. The coded data procured by the focus groups, once organized into categories and analyzed for themes and subthemes, indicated girls' propensity to monitor perceptions of themselves by eight mechanisms: limiting their self-expression, seeking to please others, trying to fit in, worrying about what others think, self-inflicting pressures, struggling with identity, avoiding getting in trouble, and seeking to appease their families. Advancing the representation of girls' internalization of these individually and institutionally conveyed stereotypes is a primary aim of this thesis.

DEDICATION

To the girls who dreamed of being everything.
You succeeded.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge the 30 women who participated in the study. Every one of your responses is seen and valued. My appreciation for the 17 women who also contributed their personal reflections to this work by participating in one or more focus groups is immense. You are worthy of every space you enter, and so are the stories of how you got there. Your emotional labor spent contributing to this research does not go unnoticed. I hope that the words you have boldly spoken reverberate across these pages and into the hallways, classrooms, and schools of the society we live in for the girls who will enter them after you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

U.S. education is a social institution constructed to benefit those in power. It upholds patriarchal and racial hierarchies that perpetuate systems of inequality and privilege (McNeill and Rowley 2019; Shaw and Lee 2020). By these hierarchies, masculinity is ranked above femininity, and white people are privileged in comparison to people of color (McNeill and Rowley; Shaw and Lee 2020). These social forces contributed to a history of racial and sex segregation, oppressive dress codes, and male-dominated subjects in public education (Lovell 2016). Curricula that are both Eurocentric and androcentric evolved from these perspectives (Lovell 2016; Shaw and Lee 2020; Wisdom, Leavitt and Bice 2019). Most crucially, though, are the gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes of learners that developed from this hierarchical structuring of U.S. education and the double-standard they created for girls in public schools.

Propagated both institutionally and by individuals like teachers, families, and peers, stereotypes suggest that boys are smarter and more gifted than girls, but that girls are more likely to work hard, behave, and achieve better results because of their cooperation and compliance (Clay 2011; Eliot 2010; Heyder and Kessels 2015; Legewie and DiPrete 2012; Riley 2014; Robinson and Lubienski 2011; Sadowski 2010). Such stereotypes are found to have negative impacts on academic success and personal growth (Riley 2014). These dominant, monolithic stereotypes, though, reflect dominant social groups. References to “girls” in the literature often translates to only the concerns of white girls (Carter Andrews et al. 2019). While white girls are afforded this “good girl” narrative, Black and Latinx girls are perceived as hypersexual, criminal, problematic, and low-achieving (Bondy 2016; Carter Andrews et al. 2019; Clonan-Roy 2016; Ricks 2014; Watson 2017; Wun 2016). White girls are presupposed as ideal learners, but girls of

color are perceived unfavorably. As a result, girls are not a homogenous category of learners, as some of the literature on gender stereotypes in education implies. Intersecting identities complicate the stereotypes that are ascribed to girls and their impacts.

Despite this important distinction, girls are not afforded the lenience for underperformance and attribution of intellect boys receive (Clay 2011; Eliot 2010; Heyder and Kessels 2015; Legewie and DiPrete 2012; Riley 2014; Sadowski 2010). Though the literature argues that gender stereotypes impact students of all genders, the pervasiveness of the aforementioned patriarchal and racial hierarchies positions girls, specifically girls of color, as a marginalized group in education. A meta-analysis by Voyer and Voyer (2014) posits that, on the whole, girls do better in all subjects compared to boys and do so most significantly in grades K-12. However, the knowledge that girls perform well academically does not negate girls' marginalized status in education. Instead, this knowledge is combined with inimical stereotypes to create a double bind. At the same time that girls are expected to score higher and do well in school compared to boys, they are seen as generally less competent, white girls as passive and amiable, and Black and Latinx girls as loud, transgressive, and paradoxically incapable of reaching the academic threshold demanded of girls (Bondy 2016; Carter Andrews et al. 2019; Eliot 2010; Ricks 2014; Sadowski 2010; Watson 2017; Wun 2016). Therefore, girls' participation in education is rigidly narrated by social expectations, gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes. Though stereotypes have impacts on performance and sense of self, whether and how gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes are perceived by girls is not detailed in the current literature. Thus, the way that girls have internalized the complex stereotypes regarding them in education is a platform for further research.

Informed by intersectional feminism and constructivist grounded theory, this research explores college girls' reflections of their public middle-school experiences to determine whether and how they perceived gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes in their education. Using a mixed methods approach, this study employs the use of an initial survey to assess participant demographics and baseline information about their middle school experience, as well as seven in-depth focus groups that comprise the main interest of the study. Collecting data in this integrated way ensures that a full and accurate picture of the participants' girlhood experiences was obtained. This work concentrates on a pivotal point in time for girls' identity development (i.e., middle school) in order to assess these stereotypes' impact on girls' relationship with education, gender, and self. Integrating the richly unique voices of girls and the pressures they endure as learners into the literature is a primary aim of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In education, a phenomenon known as the Pygmalion effect dictates that instructional expectations create self-fulfilling prophecies (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968). This effect is defined as a psychological phenomenon wherein setting high expectations for a given population yields better performance by that population (Timmermans, Boer, and van der Werf 2016). In the landmark study by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), teachers' prophecies of elementary students' intellectual abilities significantly impacted their academic achievement. The study peripherally considered the effect's impact by gender, race, and ethnicity. Yet, these factors were not proved significant until more recent research evolved. An analysis of the literature on self-fulfilling prophecies by Gentrup, Lorenz, Kristen, and Kogan (2020) unveiled that the Pygmalion effect indeed perpetuates systemic disadvantage for racial and ethnic minority students and learners who transgress binary expectations of gender performance. These groups are left vulnerable to consequences such as, "[damage] to a learner's self-worth or even educational opportunities" (Riley 2014:3). Thus, gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes regarding the behavioral and academic abilities of students are manifested by teachers' perceptions. As illustrated, these beliefs are potent and can shape a student's learning abilities and identity.

However, Legewie and DiPrete (2012) suggest that teacher expectations are not singularly responsible for reinforcing gender stereotypes, but that parenting, school context, and peer culture also contribute. This is supported by Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice's (2019) assertion that women suffer from math anxiety and challenges in STEM courses because of both academic and societal influences. They state, "Such bias is perpetrated during early childhood, reinforced through elementary and secondary education, and affects perceptions of learning ability..."

(Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice 2019:65), outlining how these influences work synchronously. Such pervasiveness of institutional and individual forces is true for racial and ethnic stereotypes leveraged against girls of color as well. As Letendre and Rozas stress in similarity to the perpetuation of gender biases, “Racial and ethnic identities are formed through a translational process wherein parents, family members, teachers, established institutions, and the media all play a central role” (2015:48). Therefore, gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes are not solely cultivated by inaccurate teacher expectations, but by larger institutional (e.g., education) and social (e.g., family and peers) structures as a whole. This broadened perspective indicates that cultural forces work cohesively to predict student performance and fortify gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes in the classroom.

Though gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes are pervasive at all educational stages (Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice 2019), middle school is a critical period for identity development (Letendre and Rozas 2015; Olga et al. 2016). This is supported by psychologist Erik Erikson’s developmental stages that recognize identity development as the primary goal of adolescence (Aanstoos 2019). Referring to ages 12-21, middle school girls are included in this important developmental stage and face the imperative task of identity vs. role confusion (Aanstoos 2019). During early adolescence, girls navigate larger school environments, further develop gender identity in relation to peers, identify role models, and girls at risk of failure (i.e., Black, Latinx, and low-SES girls) begin to fall behind (Letendre and Rozas 2015; Mims and Kaler-Jones 2020; Olga et al. 2016). Sixth to eighth-grade girls are subjected to this vast array of developments. These instances define the period’s importance and relevance to girlhood experiences for the context of this study.

Origins of Gender Stereotypes in Education

The research regarding the gender stereotypes threatening students is paradoxical. For instance, though Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice (2019) exemplified that gender stereotypes harm girls, this is contradicted by other literature that argues boys are most negatively impacted by the Pygmalion effect and cultural biases (Heyder and Kessels 2015; Timmermans, Boer, and van der Werf 2016). Ultimately, the split findings reflect that all students encounter deleterious gender stereotypes. However, while such stereotypes impact all students, the U.S. education system is an entity historically rife with privilege for wealthy, white, cisgender, and heterosexual men (Jacob 2013; Lovell 2016; McNeill and Rowley 2019; Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice 2019). Within such stratified academic environments, girls have long faced disadvantages and occupied a marginalized position in comparison to boys (Chapple 2016; Lovell 2016). As expressed by Chapple (2016), early U.S. schools were purposed with the task of socializing children to perform rigid sex roles. These practices perpetuated stereotypes of femininity as a path to wifedom and motherhood, discouraging girls from encroaching on men's perceived entitlement to high-paying careers or individuating themselves beyond the definition of heterosexual marriage (Chapple 2016; Lovell 2016). Ultimately, schools exhorted women to find fulfillment in forming households with men (Lovell 2016). This marginalization of girls and their educational pursuits persisted overtly into the 1990s via "sex bias in curriculum, to lack of attention paid by instructors, sexual harassment of girls, and classroom activities that appealed only to boys. The result... was a kind of "learned helplessness," or a lack of academic perseverance in girls" (Chapple 2016:544). Gender discrimination was therefore ingrained in

schools' curricula and instruction, relegating girls to expectations of subservience and compliance with standards of conventional femininity.

As a result, feminists advocated for single-sex schools at the turn of the century in order to provide girls the opportunities they had been denied coeducationally (Chapple 2016). Worthy to note is that these newly created spaces were private (Chapple 2016) and therefore largely inaccessible to students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds (many of whom were students of color). Therefore, this tentative "solution" was not necessarily mobilized to advance the needs of all girls. In response to this effort to cultivate spaces for and provide assistance to girl learners, critics claimed a supposed neglect of male students had caused a "Boy Crisis" in education (Chapple 2016). As boys performed worse academically overall, calls for education tailored specifically to boys' success garnered traction and single-sex private schools for boys were also created (Chapple 2016; Sadowski 2010). The growing academic achievement gap, specifically in terms of boys' lagging literacy skills, contributed to education's perceived "feminization" (Chapple 2016; Legewie and DiPrete 2012; Sadowski 2010). Learning was coded as feminine. This marked a shift in public perception of girls in education. Though expectations of compliance and docility remained, girls were now seen as achievers, particularly in reading and verbal subjects (Eliot 2010 and Sadowski 2010). Such proficiency gaps in reading, for instance, are largely evident by the time of third-grade assessments and consistently grow throughout middle and high school (Eliot 2010). In this way, despite education's construction as a social institution upholding patriarchal values, boys were deemed disparately disadvantaged. This history provides a context for how U.S. society has arrived at the current gender stereotypes affecting learners today. Boys are simultaneously considered naturally gifted, yet lazy and

disruptive; better in math, yet underachieving across all grade levels (Clay 2011; Eliot 2010; Heyder and Kessels 2015; Legewie and DiPrete 2012; Riley 2014; Sadowski 2010). Girls (primarily those who are white) are viewed as more amiable and hard-working, yet less innately talented; more cooperative and verbal, yet responsible for “feminizing” the curriculum and ousting boys (Clay 2011; Eliot 2010; Lovell 2016; Riley 2014; Robinson and Lubienski 2011; Sadowski 2010).

As exemplified by this brief history, much of the available literature reflecting on the dichotomous experiences between girls and boys in education is one-dimensional and intraracial. There is a dominant focus on the juxtaposition of the experiences of white boys to those of white girls (Ricks 2014). Consequently, educational disparities are often analyzed within the singular context of students’ gender identities and by using whiteness as a presupposed norm for the analysis (Carter Andrews et al. 2019). In opposition to this idea, the present study acknowledges that gender identities are not cordoned off from a person’s other identity markers. Instead, students’ true experiences of the world are a collective result of their unique mix of identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES) (Collins 1993 as cited in Shaw and Lee 2020). Operating from this perspective, it can be understood that such aforementioned stereotypical qualities of innocence (e.g., affableness, communicativeness, and eagerness to please) are specifically associated with white performances of femininity (Wun 2016).

Accordingly, girls of color face alternative stereotypes. Whereas white girls are provided the “good girl” label for their sexual restraint and perceived demureness in school, Black and Latinx girls are categorized as “bad girls” who are hypersexual and assertive (Bondy 2016; Charlton 2007; Clonan-Roy 2016; Froyum 2010). Due in part to these perceptions, Black girls

are also punished more frequently and severely than their white peers (Morris and Perry 2017; Watson 2017). Morris and Perry indicate that Black girls are significantly more likely to be reported for only minor infractions such as, “dress code violations, disobedience, and aggressive behavior” (2017:144). Watson (2017) reiterates the sentiment that Black girls are punished for simple dress code violations and tacks on their vulnerability to harassment, expulsion, and arrest. This over-disciplining of Black girls is reflective of the lack of acceptance of their particular embodiment of girlhood. Therefore, while the learning environment is considered conducive to white girls to the point of “ostracizing” boys (Chapple 2016; 2016; Sadowski 2010), it is not similarly structured for Black and Latinx girls. These examples of the realities faced by girls of color in K-12 education disrupt the false notion that all girls share uniform experiences of stereotyping at school as perpetuated by the literature surrounding the “Boy Crisis” may suggest.

The Problem with Boys

The academic gaps that underlie the “Boy Crisis” establish the basis of the stereotype that boys are generally underachieving. For example, boys score lower on reading assessments (Orr 2011). This is supported by Robinson and Lubienski (2011), who found that by eighth-grade, the composition of the lowest fifth percentile in reading is 67% boys. The gender gap in reading proficiency widens throughout elementary and middle school (Robinson and Lubienski 2011). However, Eliot (2010) confirms that this difference is not due to girls’ brains being hardwired for success in reading or verbal subjects. Instead, it is likely a result of marginal innate differences in skill being fostered by cultural influences over time to become more significant (Eliot 2010). For instance, “Thanks to their extra conversation with peers and parents, girls’ small verbal advantage balloons by kindergarten into a significant gap” (Eliot 2010:34). This indicates that

the activities encouraged for each gender, such as conversing with others for girls, leads to later achievement gaps. For math, Robinson and Lubienski (2011) argue that while girls do face math anxiety and an early lag in performance, they are viewed as more knowledgeable in the subject by teachers for using strategies learned in the classroom. Despite being more likely to take rigorous math courses, boys are interpreted as less academically successful (Heyder and Kessels 2015). Compared to girls, they also earn lower grades in all subjects (Romer et al. 2011). Thus, boys' domain-specific "advantage" in math does not spell greater academic achievement. Overall, boys underperform and are expected to do so relative to girls. An important caveat, though, is that regardless of their underachievement, boys maintain a higher self-concept in math throughout elementary school and continue to dominate classroom conversations (Vasalampi et al. 2020; Legewie and DiPrete 2012). Essentially, boys are not reduced to their low academic engagement. As a detached attitude from school is considered normative among many male peer groups, boys' underachievement does not appear to marginalize their confidence (Legewie and DiPrete 2012). This is starkly contrasted by girls, who experience greater internalizing distress despite performing higher academically (Romer et al. 2011).

Additionally, Legewie and DiPrete (2012) suggest the perception that education is feminine has led to a burgeoning antipathy for school among boys. U.S. society values what is masculine over what is feminine in a process known as gender ranking (Shaw and Lee 2020). As follows, the more that doing well in school is considered feminine, the less desirable it becomes to those performing masculinity. Thus, boys' underperformance pertains to both their academic and social-emotional proficiencies. Behaviorally, boys are generalized as problematic (Riley 2014). Descriptors like disruptive, immature, and inattentive or disengaged are frequently

applied to boy learners (Heyder and Kessels 2015; Riley 2014; Romer et al. 2011). As aforementioned, these behaviors may be an effort to separate themselves from femininity. Albeit, the stereotypes that have emerged from the close association of boys and these descriptors have contributed to their performance in the learning environment (Heyder and Kessels 2015; Romer et al. 2011). This supports that there are negative consequences to problematizing the relationship between boys and education. Even though cultural views assert they are more naturally intelligent and competent, less is actually expected of boys in school (Eliot 2010; Riley 2014).

The Double-Standard for Girls

While society typifies boys by their misbehavior and learning deficits, (mainly white) girls are seen as ideal learners. Their excellent performance, however, is attributed to hard work rather than natural ability (Riley 2014; Timmermans, de Boer, and van der Werf 2016). Robinson and Lubienski (2011) express that the “good girl” trope is often applied to girls in elementary and middle school. Externalizing behaviors that designate boys as troublesome, like aggression, are less common in girls (Romer et al. 2011). Instead, girls are regarded as eager to please, self-regulating, docile, mature, and focused (Legewie and DiPrete 2012; Orr 2011; Riley 2014; Romer et al. 2011). Teachers find that girls are better at remaining organized and cooperating with others, purportedly causing them to thrive in academic environments (Riley 2014). As a result, Eliot (2010) notes that even many extracurricular activities such as yearbook or student government are increasingly populated by girl learners. Their outperformance extends to these additional activities as well. All of this, though, is in spite of the fact that girls experience greater internalizing distress and thereby still have significant room for social-

emotional growth (Romer et al. 2011). The current literature concurs that these stereotypes may be grounded in early childhood socialization that encourages girls to engage in play activities that emphasize docility and tidiness (Eliot; 2010; Orr 2011). For example, girls are largely encouraged to play with dolls, miniature kitchens, or talk more with family members (Eliot 2010; Orr 2011). These activities focus greatly on self-regulation, verbal abilities, and compliance. Orr posits, “Feminine toys tend to promote nurturance, attractiveness, help-seeking, interpersonal relations, and the learning of rules (Martin and Dinella 2002; Renzetti and Curran 2003). Activities tend to be sedentary and highly structured (Eisenberg et al. 1996)” (2011:273). Later work by Chapman (2016) confirmed that girls’ pre-school play is focused on honing skills of passivity and cooperativeness through small-group activities and is encouraged by instructors. These forms of early play and exploration prepare students for later learning. Hence, these behaviors and procured affinity for structure are replicated in the academic environment. At school, girls are expected to work harder, score higher, and collaborate more than boys.

Again, these expectations vary by class, race, and ethnicity. Girls of SES and racial and ethnic minorities do not face the same positive stereotypes. This is because these identity markers work in conjunction with gender to further impact the academic opportunities afforded to students. Students of upper classes tend to outperform those of lower SES (Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice 2019). Learners from affluent backgrounds have access to higher quality early childhood education programs, enabling them to achieve more academically (Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice 2019). Teachers also contribute to this performance gap, as they may set lower expectations for students of correspondingly lower SES, disproportionately affecting their success (Timmermans, de Boer, and van der Werf 2016; Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice 2019). This

echoes the idea that teachers' perceptions of students based on identity markers like SES can influence students' performance. This again illustrates that perceptions in the academic environment matter.

These socioeconomic injustices intersect with race and ethnicity. For instance, the history of the U.S. as a proponent of slavery beginning in the 17th century established a racial hierarchy that positioned white people at the top and marginalized Black and Indigenous people (McNeill and Rowley 2019). The construction of this hierarchy also held consequences for the nation's wealth distribution, "White Americans, therefore, have a longer positive relationship with literacy, as well as wealth and social status... Enslaved Africans were denied education, access to wealth, and opportunity for improved life conditions" (Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice 2019:2). In this way, the history of slavery leveraged resources, in both education and wealth, towards the benefit of white individuals. Today, students of color are often subjected to the disadvantages of having a lower SES in education due to their heavy presence in high-poverty urban areas (William, Leavitt, and Bice 2019). According to the 2017-2018 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 21.7% of the Black population and 18.3% of Latinx individuals of any race were reported as people living in poverty. This comes in striking comparison to the 8.5% of non-Latinx white people considered to be below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Therefore, it is suggested students of color face disadvantages in the classroom that bear a relationship to their disproportionate representation in low-SES populations.

Albeit, racial and ethnic disparities in academic achievement are not reducible to overrepresentation in poverty alone. Education as an institution itself has been structured to exclude students of color (McNeill and Rowley 2019). Post-slavery, schools remained

segregated by race and ethnicity due to Jim Crow laws and the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) ruling that “separate but equal” schools for Black and dark-skinned students of color did not require integration (McNeill and Rowley 2019). This practice continued until *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) deemed it unconstitutional, though protests and violence ensued after the ruling and made the process of integration slow and difficult for Black children (McNeill and Rowley 2019). These historical disadvantages led to “...many types of school failure such as poor test scores, high dropout rates, achievement gap, low grades, [and] high suspension rates...” (Ricks 2014:10), for Black students of any gender. Black students were thereby marginalized by U.S. education from its conception and those impacts still reverberate today.

In particular, Black girls are impacted by negative stereotypes that contradict the “good girl” expectation (Charlton 2007; Froyum 2010; Morris and Perry 2017; Watson 2017). Analyses find that descriptors like loud and aggressive, hypersexual or promiscuous, and disobedient are used in relationship to Black girls in school (Carter Andrews et al. 2019; Ricks 2014; Watson 2017). The literature has concluded that Black girls are overdisciplined for these “traits” that are subjectively defined by teachers and administrators (Carter Andrews et al. 2019). Black girls are often punished for “talking back” when expressing themselves and are deprived of the innocence afforded to white students and their actions (Wun 2016). Congruent with these negative perceptions, Black girls experience policing of their femininity. This is referred to as gendered racism or misogynoir (Carter Andrews et al. 2019; Ricks 2014). They face punishments like being excluded from class, surveilled by teachers and peers, or incurring referrals, suspensions, or expulsions (Carter Andrews et al. 2019; Watson 2017; Wun 2016). By this system, Black girls

are excluded from the positive stereotypes afforded to white girls. They are not permitted to perform femininity in such an idealized way.

Latinx girls are also disparately impacted by biases against girls from racial and ethnic minorities. Like Black girls (though girls can be of both identities), they are disciplined at disproportionately higher rates than white girls (Wun 2016). Thus, they face similar threats of criminalization. Latinx girls are also hypersexualized in the classroom (Garcia 2009). They may be labeled as *sluts* or *whores* in middle school and are viewed as innately more sexual than their white peers (Bondy 2016; Garcia 2009). By defining Latinx girls by their sexualities, they are perceived as less academically competitive. Similar to the dominant idea that girls are more docile in school than boys, stereotypes pertaining to Latinx girls also assert ideas of their submissiveness to men (Clonan-Roy 2016; López and Chesney-Lind 2014). This creates an impossible dichotomy for Latinx girls. They are perceived as sexual and deviant, yet not in a way that threatens male dominance or notions of superiority. Clonan-Roy (2016) posits that even Latinx girls' expressions of emotionality are considered unfeminine and regulated within the classroom. To synthesize, the bodies and feelings of both Black and Latinx girls are sexualized as an inappropriate and provocative antithesis to standards of purity and docility expected of girl learners (Bondy 2016; Clonan-Roy 2016; Garcia 2009; López and Chesney-Lind 2014). In this way, girls of racial and ethnic minorities are objectified to a greater degree in schools. This point of tension in the literature emphasizes that gendered stereotypes in education are not attributed to learners homogenously. Socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic identities further complicate the meaning of these stereotypes for learner subgroups.

The Present Study

Girls are challenged by a complex array of academic and cultural expectations. In accordance with their greater success, white girls are believed to have a more positive orientation towards school and their potential is favored by teachers (Legewie and DiPrete 2012; Orr 2011). Girls of color are contrastingly classified as loud, troublesome, and aggressive disruptors in the classroom and deprived of such optimistic attitudes regarding their performance (Bondy 2016; Carter Andrews et al. 2019; Garcia 2009; Ricks 2014; Watson 2017; Wun 2016). On the whole, girls earn higher grades across subjects and grade levels, perform better on standardized testing, self-regulate, empathize, and problem-solve more proficiently than boys, and involve themselves more frequently in extracurricular activities (excluding sports) (Eliot 2010; Meier, Hartmann, and Larson 2018; Orr 2011; Romer et al. 2011). These broadly espoused statistics, however, do not always address the gaps between white girls and girls of color. Where white girls are portrayed as responsible “good girls” in the context of the learning environment, Black and Latinx girls are marginalized as “bad girls” and deviants (Charlton 2007; Froyum 2010; Robinson and Lubienski 2011). Girls’ success is attributed to hard work instead of intrinsic ability (Riley 2014). Consequently, white girls are generally held to a higher standard of behavioral compliance and academic engagement than boys while girls of color are expected to transgress behavioral norms and disrupt the learning environment altogether. Due to the multiple oppressions that shape their realities, performing femininity in school is more difficult for low-SES, Black, and Latinx girls. Additional economic and cultural barriers and expectations create an impossible standard of perfectionism for marginalized girls.

However, while the current literature analyzes what gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes exist in U.S. education, there is a dearth of information pertaining to how this is internalized by

students. Although it has been proven that teacher, parent, and peer perceptions have an impact on their performance in school, whether girls perceive these gendered expectations is unexplored. While some research has focused on Black and Latinx girls' perceptions of their learning environments (Clonan-Roy 2016; Garcia 2009; Watson 2017), the literature is nascent. It is centered on Black and Latinx girls' experiences as they deviate from white girls, rather than a comparative assessment of girls in juxtaposition to boys. Questions remain concerning girls' awareness of and responses to teacher, peer, and cultural expectations. How girls uphold, resist, or reject notions of being hard-working, compliant, socially-emotionally proficient, and less naturally intelligent than boys are topics of inquiry. To address this, girls' own reflections of their academic experiences and how they shaped their relationship with education, gender, and self are detailed here. Resultantly, the voices of girls and their interpretations of their formative experiences with gender, racial, and ethnic biases in education are the interest of this study.

Theory

This study utilizes intersectional feminism to assess pertinent girlhood experiences. Espoused by Black feminist leaders such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, intersectional feminism addresses the multiplicity of identities engendered by an individual (Shaw and Lee 2020). This theory accounts for the compounding advantage or disadvantage afforded to people based on the interaction of their multiple categorizations in society (Shaw and Lee 2020). This includes categorizations of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, SES, etc. As Collins (1993) asserts, "How do race, class, and gender function as parallel and interlocking systems that shape this basic relationship of domination and subordination?" (Shaw and Lee 2020:62). This poignant question identifies that the richness and multiplicity of a person's

identity defines their individualized experience with the hierarchical society under which they live. Due to its acknowledgment that womanhood, or girlhood (in the context of this study), varies by the multiple identity markers held by a person, an intersectional feminist framework allows for an integrated analysis of girls' experiences in education. It acknowledges and affirms the validity of the influence of girls' racial and ethnic identities and SES over their interaction with social, cultural, and institutional forces (i.e., family, teachers, peers, and education).

Intersectional feminism enables this research to proceed with the awareness that white, Black, and Latinx girls experience unique microcosms of gender in education because of their racial and ethnic identities. It also takes into account the possibility that other identity factors, like SES, could potentially impact the results of the study. An intersectional feminist lens contextualizes girlhood beyond gender identity. This theory centers gender while maintaining that it cannot be separated from other facets of one's identity (Collins 1993 as cited in Shaw and Lee 2020).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Methodology

This work is a mixed methods study that combines initial demographic and baseline survey data with in-depth focus groups to provide a more comprehensive analysis of girlhood experiences with educational stereotyping. As the present study concentrates primarily on examining the reflections and voices of girls in U.S. education, constructivist grounded theory offers a method for analyzing the work's collection of mainly qualitative data. However, this theory also works jointly with the survey data that is collected. This is because developing an original theory from the data is most effective when using several modalities and rounds of analysis (Charmaz 2006). Developed by Kathy Charmaz (2006), constructivist grounded theory is a methodological and reflexive approach to research that emphasizes the importance of critically assessing qualitative data. It is an extension of sociologists Glaser and Strauss's original proposition of grounded theory (1967). Constructivist grounded theory is based on critical inquiry in order to provide a more objective method for qualitative data analysis, relying on processes of methodological self-consciousness and pragmatism (2017). This theory encourages the researcher to assess the assumptions they possess while collecting and analyzing data (Charmaz 2017). This attention to self-consciousness has relevant applications to the present study, as "Methodological self-consciousness means detecting and dissecting our worldviews, language, and meanings and revealing how they enter our research in ways we had previously not realized" (Charmaz 2017:36). As evidenced by this statement, this theory requires that the researcher examine their own group memberships and privileges when collecting and assessing data. In such a way, intersectional feminist theory and constructivist grounded theory coalesce.

Both are concerned with social justice and the implications of identities in research and lived experience. Additionally, constructivist grounded theory involves traditional qualitative analysis tools such as coding that will be utilized to organize the reflections of the girls who contribute to this study (Charmaz 2017). And most importantly, this framework entails a constant reflexive process of investigation through inductive reasoning (Charmaz 2017). To highlight their perceptions, the anecdotes and expressions of the girls participating in this research will guide the development of categories to be used for analyzing the data. By applying constructivist grounded theory, as the research evolves, so too will relevant categories for analysis. Essentially, Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (2006) is compatible with the social justice aims, reflexive nature, and inductive reasoning approach of this study. Together, intersectional feminism and constructivist grounded theory guide this exploration of girls' perceptions of gender, racial, and ethnic stereotypes in U.S. education.

Demographics

This study combines demographic and baseline survey data and qualitative data procured from seven in-depth focus groups. To narrow the breadth of this study, both the initial survey and subsequent focus groups were concentrated on girls' middle school experiences (grades 6-8). The critical development of identity and broadening of performance gaps among white girls and girls of color during this period justify the selection of this educational level as the interest of this research (Aanstoos 2019; Letendre and Rozas 2015; Mims and Kaler-Jones 2020; Olga et al. 2016). As follows, subjects were required to have attended a public U.S. middle school for grades 6-8 to control for the geographic scope and duration of the middle school experiences in question. During the screening process, all participants self-identified with being a woman and

the term “girl” in describing their middle school self. Additionally, all participants self-identified as white, Black, Latinx, or some other mix of these racial and ethnic identities. As noted earlier, in conjunction with race, SES can be a contributing factor to one’s success in education (Timmermans, de Boer, and van der Werf 2016; Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice 2019). In light of this, participants also self-identified their class position in middle school to account for intersections of SES, though students of any class position were eligible to participate in the study.

Participants

The participants of this study are 30 white, Black, and Latinx college women (ages 18-22) who reflected on their middle school experiences in a public U.S. middle school (grades 6-8). Some participants self-identified as a mix of these racial and ethnic identities. Further, while all participants identified as a woman and associated with the term “girl” in describing their middle school selves during the participant screening stage, it is important to mention that some participants’ genders were more nuanced. One participant also self-identified as non-binary and another as a trans woman. These particular descriptors are important to the participants’ unique experiences of the world and how they personally describe their gender. Thus, these distinctions are noted here. Survey participants came from a variety of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In total, 16 women self-identified as white, eight as Latinx, two as Black, and four as some mix of these identities. Later in the study, some of the participants elaborated on their racial and ethnic identities in ways that were more layered than the initial survey permitted (e.g., P2 who initially self-identified as only white). At the time of their middle school experience, four

women identified as upper-middle class, 15 as middle class, eight as working class, and three as lower class.

Participants were also selected based on their ability to participate from a private space and access to a pair of headphones or earbuds to be used during the focus groups. All participants had to be willing to participate in and be recorded during the focus groups. From the initial sample, 17 participants elected to participate in at least one focus group (as listed in Table 1). Focus group participants ranged from college sophomores to seniors in a variety of disciplines. Participants included those studying animation, business, composition, computer engineering, criminal justice, digital media, education, health sciences, marketing, media designs, nursing, psychology, theater arts, veterinary medicine, and women's and gender studies. The vast range of fields of study within the sample suggests diversity in the experiences represented, as opposed to only garnering the perspectives of students with express interest in social science research. Additionally, focus group participants contributed from various institutions across the country and abroad (including Florida, California, Mexico, New York, and Tennessee). The variety in geographic location also indicates a heterogenous sample.

Considering restrictions such as the need for parental consent and limited access to recruiting minors, children under the age of 18 were excluded from the study. Rather, sampling women in college ensured that participants were able to reflect on their experiences after developing their early adulthood identities. As opposed to children, women of this age were able to articulate how gendered expectations in middle school shaped their future selves.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

ID	Gender	Pronouns	Class standing	Race/Ethnicity	Class position
<i>P1</i>	Woman	She/her	Junior	White	Middle
<i>P2</i>	Woman	She/her	Sophomore	White/Asian	Lower
<i>P3</i>	Woman	She/her	Sophomore	White/Latinx	Middle
<i>P4</i>	Woman	She/her	Sophomore	Latinx	Middle
<i>P5</i>	Woman	She/her	Senior	Latinx	Working
<i>P6</i>	Woman	She/her	Sophomore	White/Latinx	Middle
<i>P7</i>	Woman	She/her	Senior	White	Working
<i>P8</i>	Woman	She/her	Sophomore	White	Middle
<i>P9</i>	Woman	She/her	Junior	Latinx	Middle
<i>P10</i>	Non-binary	They/them	Senior	Latinx	Working
<i>P11</i>	Woman	She/her	Sophomore	Black	Middle
<i>P12</i>	Woman	She/her	Sophomore	Black	Middle
<i>P13</i>	Woman	She/her	Junior	Latinx	Lower
<i>P14</i>	Woman	She/her	Sophomore	White/Latinx	Middle
<i>P15</i>	Woman	She/her	Senior	Black/White	Upper-middle
<i>P16</i>	Woman	She/her	Sophomore	White	Middle
<i>P17</i>	Trans woman	She/her	Senior	White	Working

Recruitment

Social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and announcements made by registered student organizations on campus were used to recruit participants. Contact information for the study, including an e-mail address and secure Google Voice phone number, was provided on recruitment posts. Interested individuals were instructed to reach out by e-mail, phone call, or text for further information. Those who replied to the recruitment materials were sent a screening checklist to assess participants for aforementioned inclusion criteria. Participants confirmed that they self-identified as a white, Black, Latinx, or Afro-Latinx college woman 18-22 years of age, attended a public U.S. middle school for grades 6-8, and that they were willing to participate and be recorded during a focus group before being sent a link to complete the survey for the next part of the study. Guided by the checklist, participants also agreed that they would have access to a private space and headphones or earbuds to be worn during the focus groups to protect participant privacy. Additionally, snowball sampling through participants was utilized to extend beyond the immediate reach of undergraduate students with academic interest in the social sciences. These methods were applied to increase diverse students' awareness of the study, as women who were college students and thereby still impacted by gender, racial, and ethnic expectations in education were the population of interest.

Data Collection

Before conducting the reflective focus groups, a Qualtrics survey was administered to ascertain valuable data about participants' identities and middle school experiences. Participants responded to a total of 12 survey questions, seven related to demographics and three concerning middle school experience. The last two questions asked participants to describe their personal

pronouns to ensure their comfortability and safety (GLSEN 2019) if invited to later participate in a focus group. In keeping with constructivist grounded theory, information garnered by the survey was merely used to complement the richness and detail of later focus groups (Charmaz 2006). Students self-identified their age, class standing in college, gender, race and ethnicity, and class position in middle school. Then, using a five-point Likert scale, students ranked the overall quality of their middle school experiences. Each participant rated their level of agreement with three statements inquiring about the positivity of their middle school experience, the perceptions individuals had of them in middle school, and the social pressures they felt in middle school. The response options included five choices from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree.” These latter, reflective questions were posed to provide me with preliminary data concerning their experiences to review before conducting the focus groups. This is consistent with the constant comparative method of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). After completing the survey, all participants were contacted via the e-mail they provided and invited to participate in a virtual focus group. Students were asked to confirm their willingness to attend the upcoming focus group. To safeguard participant privacy, only those who again indicated their consent were e-mailed the meeting link and password to join the virtual focus group.

Following a repeated measures design, this research subsequently proceeded in two phases. In phase one, five monoracial focus groups (two white, one Black, and two Latinx) were created from the sample. In phase two, two randomized, interracial focus groups were drawn from the same original sample. The project moved in these two phases to assess the role of racial homogeneity as a factor for disclosure in a group setting. Focus groups themselves were selected as the primary medium for the study in order to assess group members’ feelings, agreements, or

disagreements about discussion topics (as opposed to merely assessing individual attitudes and beliefs). For both phases, in-depth focus groups were held via Zoom and audio-visually recorded. The average focus group lasted about 52 minutes in length with the shortest focus having a duration of 37 minutes and the longest focus group having a duration of one hour and 13 minutes. While not as ideal for assessing nonverbal cues and normal group dynamics, virtual focus groups were the safest option for conducting human subjects research during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Zoom meetings were password-protected and attendance ranged from two to six participants per group. All participants were required to wear a set of headphones or earbuds and sit in a private room with the door closed for the duration of the interview. Open-ended questions asked during focus groups were adapted from Charmaz's (2006) sample of constructivist grounded theory interview questions. Only a few guiding questions about middle school and identity, gender, race, and ethnicity, and the impact of stereotypes at school were asked to structure the conversation so that topics of importance could emerge naturally. Each focus group began with surface-level inquiries (e.g., Tell me a little bit about yourself. Who are you as a student in college?) before discussing deeper and more reflective topics such as identity, expectations, and stereotyping.

Data Analysis

Conceptual variables measured by the initial survey data were analyzed by running Pearson's chi-squared tests using SPSS. Pearson's chi-squared tests were included to assess whether the variation among participants' perceptions of their middle school experiences was due to chance or a relevant demographic factor such as participants' SES, race, or ethnicity. Incorporating such statistical analyses worked to further enrich the study's substantial collection

of both quantitative and qualitative data by pinpointing overarching interactions between independent variables on an abstracted level.

Substantiating the major focus of this work, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) was implemented for analyzing the study's collection of qualitative data procured from the focus groups. After manually transcribing each of the audio-visually recorded focus groups, line-by-line coding and then focused coding were used to further abstract and organize the data (Charmaz 2006). In order to stay close to the data, initial line-by-line codes relied on gerunds to preserve actions conveyed by the participants themselves (Charmaz 2006). After coding each line of data, codes were assessed for frequency and similarity during focused coding. During this process, 1,479 line-by-line codes were collapsed into 40 focused codes that represented categorical topics of discussion across the various focus groups. In keeping with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), line-by-line coding and focused coding occurred cyclically. In order to remain grounded in the data and develop a relevant analysis, it was sometimes necessary to move from focused coding back to line-by-line coding and vice versa in a reflective cycle (Charmaz 2006). The frequency of focused codes as they occurred within and across racial and ethnic groups were also recorded. This practice aligns with Charmaz's (2006) emphasis on comparing data to data.

Once the line-by-line and focused codes were developed, the resulting categories were analyzed for patterns using an intersectional feminist lens. Visible relationships among categories were condensed into major themes and prominent subthemes. From these, the frequency and salience of the given thematic elements contributed to the selection of those ripe for discussion within this manuscript. While constructivist grounded theory argues that literature

reviews and theoretical standpoints counteract letting the data speak richly and fully for itself (Charmaz 2006), using intersectional feminism as a theoretical framework for this study was a necessary acknowledgment of the participants' unique and complex positions within the matrix of oppression (Shaw and Lee 2020). Although the present research diverts from true adherence to constructivist grounded theory in this way (Charmaz 2006), integrations of intersectional feminist theory are intended to empower the voices of the women who contributed their narratives. In dealing with broader social institutions (i.e., U.S. public education) and constructs (i.e., race, ethnicity, and gender), meaningful understanding of the data could not occur without contextualizing the identities of the women who participated outside of the microcosm of the focus group environment. Intersectional feminism provides such a perspective for data analysis (Collins 1993 as cited in Shaw and Lee 2020).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Survey Results

Before participating in the focus groups, 30 women completed surveys reporting their demographics and reflecting on their middle school experiences. Their level of agreement with three key phrases was used to gain a summative snapshot of how they felt about the quality of their middle school experience, how people perceived them, and whether they felt pressured to meet ideals academically, behaviorally, or otherwise.

“Overall, I had a positive middle school experience.”

Of those surveyed, only one woman strongly agreed with the statement, “Overall, I had a positive middle school experience.” No participants strongly disagreed. Instead, participants self-identified with more mild values on the survey’s 5-point Likert scale, with 50% agreeing that they’d had a generally positive middle school experience ($n = 15$), 16.7% unsure about the positivity of their middle school experience ($n = 5$), and 30% disagreeing with the statement altogether ($n = 9$). Most importantly, the variation between girls’ self-identified class position in middle school and their perception of a positive middle school experience was found to be statistically significant ($X^2(9, N = 30) = 17.47, p < .05$). For example, all participants who self-identified as upper-middle class indicated they either strongly agreed or agreed with having a positive middle school experience ($n = 4$) while those who were lower class disagreed or were unsure ($n = 3$). These results suggest that SES may influence the perceived positivity of one’s middle school experience.

“My teachers, peers, and family perceived me positively in middle school.”

When reflecting on the statement, “My teachers, peers, and family perceived me positively in middle school,” a majority of the women surveyed agreed (53.3%, $n = 16$). An additional 20% strongly agreed with this sentiment ($n = 6$), 13.3% were unsure about their level of agreement ($n = 4$), and 13.3% disagreed with this statement ($n = 4$). None of the participants strongly disagreed. Generally, most women who participated felt they were viewed positively by others in their life during middle school. This perception’s relationships to demographic factors like SES, race, and/or ethnicity were not found to be statistically significant.

“I felt pressured to be a certain way in middle school” (e.g., earn certain grades and/or act, look, think, or behave a certain way).

While this perception also did not demonstrate a statistically significant relationship to participants’ SES, race, or ethnicity, 76.7% ($n = 23$) of all participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I felt pressured to be a certain way in middle school.” Two women (6.7%) were unsure of whether they experienced pressure to be a certain way. Moreover, only a minority of the women surveyed (16.6%, $n = 5$) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea of experiencing pressure to conform to some degree while navigating middle school. In sum, many of the women who participated in the study expressed a consciousness of self-related pressures in middle school. This awareness was consistent across a variety of socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic identities.

Focus Group Interactions

While the survey provided a preliminary gauge of how girls felt about their middle school experiences and how that may be connected to their various identities, it is impossible to have a nuanced view of their lived experiences without building interpersonal rapport and actively listening to their individual stories. Rather, the study's seven focus groups made this possible. From the transcripts, codes, and categories that eventually took shape from these interactions with participants, important patterns emerged around the concept of self. Most notably, while reflecting on their girlhood experiences and encounters with education, gender, race, and ethnicity, participants contributed to one most salient subtheme: monitoring perceptions of self (as described in Table 2). The following subsections detail the eight important categories that structure girls' internalization of perceived social pressures across all seven focus groups. In each category, girls' propensity to self-monitor the way they were being perceived by others as a response to the pressures they faced is evidenced.

Shrinking the self.

To mitigate the pressures they experienced, focus group participants most frequently expressed shrinking themselves and holding back their emotions, thoughts, opinions, or other forms of self-expression. This was represented in the data among various individual codes, such as: being quiet in class, being scared to express self in class, staying out of the spotlight, fearing asking for help, keeping feelings inside, holding in thoughts and passions at school, and not wanting to bother people. These codes were unified by girls' hesitancy to express themselves fully and honestly in the classroom. For example, in an interracial/ethnic focus group of white

Table 2. Final Codebook

Monitoring Perceptions of Self			
Category	No. of Times Mentioned (N = 311)	Exemplifying Codes	Illustrative Quotation
Shrinking self and holding back (emotions, thoughts, opinions, etc.)	76	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being quiet in class • Holding back in class • Limiting self-expression and disclosure 	<i>“But also, I just think some of the experiences I had in the middle school validated that concern for me that I shouldn’t take up space and I, should um, just keep things to myself and not bother anyone, um.” –P2</i>
Feeling obligated to please or put others first	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sacrificing own feelings for others • Being a people-pleaser 	<i>“...I always had to be nice to people. I always had to, uh, sacrifice my feelings for other people’s feelings, which [was a] horrible thing to do...” –P5</i>
Experiencing pressure to fit in and be well-liked	60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanting to be popular • Wanting to be like other girls 	<i>“It was like I wanted friends so badly and I wanted to fit in so badly, um, but I was unique, you know. I did whatever I could.” –P16</i>
Worrying about peoples’ perceptions of self	52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling sick about others’ perceptions of self • Becoming self-conscious 	<i>“...I had to like, keep like, checking myself to make sure I was like kind of changing who I was around them.” –P11</i>
Putting pressure on self or taking things personally	26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magnifying small comments • Judging self harshly 	<i>“...it was definitely small things externally that I like magnified by a million for myself.” –P1</i>
Lacking identity and being unsure of self	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not having a sense of self • Being unsure of self and interests 	<i>“...that specifically takes a sense of self to begin with where you feel like you are something to begin with and for a lot of the time I didn’t, necessarily feel that way...” –P17</i>
Avoiding getting in trouble	33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a goody two-shoes • Following the rules 	<i>“So like I never, I never really stepped out of line.” –P15</i>
Trying to please or repay family	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conforming to make parents happy • Not meeting ancestors’ expectations 	<i>“The second you feel that you’re not what your ancestors wanted you to be and that—that’s really where things kinda hit the fan.” –P13</i>

and Latinx women, P2 and P4 share a dialogue describing struggling with feeling undeserving of ‘taking up space’ in the classroom:

I definitely did not feel like I could [take up space], um, I sort of—if I would speak to a peer, I would sort of like internally cringe about, you know, bothering them or being annoying. Or, um, I would really struggle to ask for help in class if I didn’t understand something ‘cuz again I didn’t wanna bother instructors or, um, I just didn’t—I didn’t want to bother anyone or be obnoxious in any way. –P2 (she/her)

Um I kind of—I feel similarly to [P2], um, when she said that you know, “I didn’t want to bother people.” I felt like—this, I—you know, asking questions in class like— “Oh no, my question doesn’t matter, it’s not important, like, even though like I’m struggling I’m not going to disrupt class for this question. It’s a dumb question.” –P4 (she/her)

In this exchange, P2 describes feeling like a bother in situations of needing help and alludes to how she would be perceived if she were to express herself more fully (e.g., “annoying” or “obnoxious”). She specifically excludes herself from being deserving of feelings of worthiness and validity in the classroom. In a later statement, she clarifies that particularly those who fit into archetypical roles like athletes, popular kids, and class clowns are those who are deserving of visibility in the classroom. However, while P2 posits this as an isolating and idiosyncratic experience, P4 resonates with these feelings of unworthiness and guilt circumventing instances of drawing attention to herself (e.g., asking questions aloud in class). Here, both participants verbalize a hesitancy to overstep an invisible social boundary, worrying their contributions would more likely be interpreted as class disruptions. During the same focus group, similar instances and feelings were mentioned a total of 30 times.

In a monoracial focus group with Latinx girls, shrinking oneself to appease others was mentioned again on 17 distinct occasions. In this group, however, some women connected this behavior and associated feelings to cultural expectations. For instance, P13 comments on her immigrant status and its effect on her feelings within the classroom:

...I felt like I had to, you know, keep up this sort of idea of, “Oh, you have to, you know, you have to be intelligent, you can’t ask for help, you can’t do this, you can’t do that,” because it was kinda the sentiment that we had in my school in Venezuela, where it’s like don’t ask for help because you’re not gonna receive it so I felt that that was going to happen to here too. –P13 (she/her)

Believing patterns of being overlooked would continue, P13 iterates a reticence towards asking for help informed by her experiences in Venezuela. Instances like these within the data point to an important intersection between gender and ethnicity. Where the individual effects of the two can not be separated, the end result of feeling like it was better to be quiet than to ask for help that wouldn’t be provided speaks to P13’s specific experience as a Latinx woman from Venezuela. Elements of this nuanced experience are shared with others from the sample who may not have all of the same identity markers. However, they each share feelings of disempowerment in the classroom (e.g., P2 and P4). In the outlined cases, P2, P4, and P13 all believe that by avoiding asking for help, they were presenting themselves in a way that would be perceived more positively by others.

However, talking to peers or teachers and asking questions in class were not the only times girls felt like they had to minimize themselves to exert control over how they were perceived. On top of feeling less empowered to share their academic insights or request help in their learning, some girls felt generally reluctant to share personal interests with others. P5 comments on this effect, stating:

...in middle school, I just had so much energy and holding it in till the end of the day meant that at the end of the day I just had so much to say about everything that I saw. I wanted to talk about everything, I had so many passions that I didn’t share with people because I didn’t think it was cool. Um, so I held all that in until I got to my parents, pretty much. –P5 (she/her)

In this scenario, P5 addresses how true self-expression could damage how she was perceived among her peers. In response, P5 reflects on her withdrawal during the school day as a way to

safeguard against negative peer reactions (i.e., being seen as ‘uncool’). This direct quote adds an additional layer to girls’ decisions to limit what they express and how loudly they express it in the classroom. Not only did they indicate reluctance to contribute to academic discussions, but individuals like P5 also monitored disclosure of and enthusiasm for personal interests.

Summatively, in instances where these girls sensed the truest version of themselves would not be embraced by others, they minimized themselves or tucked away components of their self-expression as a mechanism of self-defense. Rather than be seen as annoying, obnoxious, uncool, or not receive the help they’d asked for, some of the girls obscured these ‘undesirable’ traits by limiting the amount of proverbial space they took up in the classroom.

Pleasing others.

Just as they discussed limiting self-expression to make themselves more palatable to others, girls mentioned feeling obligated to please or put others first. This category was mentioned 30 times across both white monoracial focus groups, one Latinx monoracial focus group, and one white/Latinx interracial/ethnic focus group. Uniquely, this sentiment was not expressed in the Black monoracial focus group. This category encapsulates poignant codes like: sacrificing feelings for others, being expected to help others, mediating for other kids, trying to lose weight to please others, and feeling obligated to say yes. The duality of both desiring and feeling obligated to please others is reflected by P8’s experience as a peer mediator:

Like we were trained to like help kids our age when they were going through like fights or something like that... it gave me a label of like—being like the “therapist friend” almost... so like branching off of labels and stuff like that, like I had the expectation of always being happy all the time, of always helping people, being selfless. And while I’m all those traits, like I do—I do like to help people. Um, it just, having to, put on I don’t wanna say like put on that face, but having to exceed in those expectations almost every single day could—was uh, very draining. –P8 (she/her)

In this brief anecdote, P8 identifies that helping others is a component of her individual personality. Yet, even with this propensity, she mentions that at times, her ambition to support her peers came from an obligation to live up to others' expectation of her being a helper. Rather than merely feeling driven to satisfy her own self-concept, P8 notes feelings of exhaustion (e.g., being drained) from performing emotional labor for her peers in a way that was generally and consistently expected. In a different, interracial focus group, P3 and P5 both mentioned experiencing a similar fatigue:

Like I said I was a people-pleaser. I think since I wanted to continue being liked, I kinda set the precedent for myself that I had to continue doing these things. I had to continue being positive, I had to continue saying yes, and I didn't break out of that until high school, even when, probably by my ninth-grade year I was like, "I'm tired of helping people with A, B, C, or D. I just wanna go home and sleep." You know? It definitely took its toll on me. –P5 (she/her)

Um, like [P5] was saying, it can be really exhausting to like always need to be liked and wanting to just constantly do good, it could be very exhausting. But I think it hopefully did affect me in a positive way. –P3 (she/her)

In this interaction, P3 and P5 also perceive an obligation to put others' feelings and needs first. As a tradeoff for being liked and accepted, they found themselves prioritizing others even when it impeded a need for personal rest. In P5's case, dealing with the pressure to do things for others grew gradually more burdensome over time. However, in these women's experiences (P3, P5, P8), feeling increasingly tired was a necessity to maintain their social identity as a likable person and helper.

The pressure to fit in.

Though the desire to be popular may seem trite, women expressed that 'fitting in' was a powerful tool for influencing the way they were received by their peers. This pressure was identified as relevant mainly by one white monoracial focus group ($n = 18$) and one Latinx

monoracial focus group in Phase I ($n = 19$), though the category appeared in several other discussions as well ($n = 60$). P16 references this pressure to be liked while also maintaining a sense of self in the statement:

And then also socially, I—I had to feel like I had to fit in. I was definitely putting pressure that I had to fit in but then I also was like in order to fit in, I wasn't really being myself so I was also like trying to make myself happy with being myself. Um, it would j—um, how do I phrase it? It just kinda—I had to like balance it out and it was just—it made it worse. –P16 (she/her)

Here, P16 details an important conflict between the pressure to conform and the desire to be her true self. She identifies that being well-liked and accepted by her peers would not necessarily equate to self-satisfaction. Instead, P16 is aware of the impossibility of balancing others' expectations with her own. Trying to find a solution to this dilemma, P16 later adds that she would purchase trendy clothing (e.g., Ugg boots) that had specific designs she liked to retain some sense of self. Similarly, P5 mentioned paying for branded clothing and school dress down days even when she couldn't afford them to project an image of fitting in. These experiences reference the complexity of the pressures perceived by middle school girls. While it was intrinsically valuable for P16 to be herself, it was socially imperative that she fit in. Consequently, both were impossible to achieve and P16 concluded that despite her efforts, "...you know, it was always, again, I was the weird girl out."

After P16 shared her insights about trying to fit in while preserving her true self, the other participants in the focus group joked about never really growing out of their childhood interests that set them apart in middle school (e.g., loving theme parks or RC cars). As P17 teased, "Wait, we're supposed to be becoming adults?" Such comments evoked cathartic laughter among the group as they reflected on overcoming the idea of conformity by simply resisting what it meant

to be adult-like. In this way, the focus group participants indicated a shared lived experience and insinuated associations between fitting in and perceived maturity.

However, the pressure to fit in was not limited to impacting girls' expression of their true selves or encouraging them to pursue more 'adult' interests. Rather, P4 clarifies that the pressure to fit in was also relevant because of the social capital that came with being likable. She mentions:

...I think the pressure was for me, like personally, was having a lot of friends. To have—you know, [friends] to go to dances with or—or have sleepovers and stuff, 'cause it was like the talk of the week, you know. Like, "Oh! I went to *her* sleepover," and stuff. So, I think that's... why... I was like pressured, in that sense. —P5 (she/her)

P4's words imply being popular acted as a safeguard against being left out of her school's peer culture and the events that signified one's participation in it (e.g., dances and sleepovers). This perspective was echoed among many of the girls who felt that fitting in was a method of avoiding ostracization. In such an effort, P3 felt compelled to earn 'likes' on Instagram during middle school in order to integrate herself with her school culture and avoid being dismissed. To also avoid exclusion, P1 participated in student leadership because "I wanted to keep up with these people." Whether it took the form of securing invites to social gatherings, receiving virtual validation, or participating in prestigious extracurricular groups, focus group participants expressed their awareness of an existing social hierarchy that valued popularity. As these examples indicate, many participants attempted to fit in and be popular simply in order to avoid being left behind.

Overall, participants emphasized that being social was a highly desirable trait in middle school. Yet, while they identified being social, popular, well-liked, and having a lot of friends as

traits they felt expected to possess or those that people they idolized exuded – no women in the study actively used these terms to describe themselves. While some would say were part of a particular friend group, generally liked by their peers, tried really hard to keep up with the popular kids, or tried to fit into places they didn't belong for the sake of fitting in, they never included themselves in descriptions of 'the popular kids.' Such distance they placed between themselves and this language poses questions about girls' perceived level of attainability of fitting in. Despite girls' fervent efforts to adapt themselves to be more likable or popular, P4 encapsulates the difficulty of striking the perfect balance: "[It] seemed like in middle school you had to have it all to be accepted." As the words of P4 succinctly suggest, in order to fit in, some girls merely felt they had to do everything.

Worrying about what others think.

Worrying about peoples' perceptions of self was the third-most frequent mechanism utilized by girls to monitor perceptions of self. In developing a vigilance concerning how they were interpreted by others, girls reported becoming hyper-aware of how they were perceived, seeking approval from teachers and peers, thinking about what others' opinions of them might be, and fearing judgment or being called-out if those perceptions were negative. Of the monoracial focus groups organized in Phase I, one white focus group ($n = 17$) and the Black focus group ($n = 9$) had the highest reported rates of worrying about others' perceptions of themselves. The code appeared in both Latinx monoracial focus groups as well, but to a much smaller extent ($n = 4$; $n = 6$). In both interracial/ethnic focus groups combining Latinx and white participants, the category was again a main point in the girls' conversations ($n = 9$; $n = 9$).

However, applications of this code in terms of what participants were worried about others perceiving were not uniform across the represented racial and ethnic groups. In the Black monoracial focus group, worrying about others' perceptions was also tied to discussions of performing Blackness in a way that was deemed acceptable. For example, P15 summarizes her experience as a person of mixed identity, her experiences with others' racial preconceptions, and how she internalized them by becoming self-aware by reflecting:

...I didn't know people had an idea of what like a Black person should be or what a white person would be or what a mixed person should be or whatever. And so, coming out of that, it kind of like made me a lot more like self-aware, um. And it also kinda made me self-conscious so I'm really, like now I'm like really self-aware and I get really nervous about how people see me and perceive me, um. I didn't have that before middle school and I don't think like I had like emotionally scarring experiences in middle school but it's stuff that like, I learned, um, just from like going to school and like interacting with people, that like, definitely changed how I see things in myself. For sure. –P15 (she/her)

In P15's experience, there were clear expectations tied to claiming a Black, white, or mixed racial identity. As a result, she became increasingly worried about how she was being perceived and the effects manifested as a self-consciousness that lasted beyond middle school. Her anecdote importantly conveys the impacts of rigidly defined racial categories and the expressions seen as typical within them. To navigate middle school, it was a necessity for P15 to monitor her self-expression as a mixed woman when claiming the various identities relevant to her because of others' ideas of what people of each category looked, acted, or sounded like. In effect, it became a pattern of self-surveillance that impacted her own self-concept. In the same focus group, P11 added to P15's comments with her own experiences of perceiving expectations of Blackness:

But, it definitely, like [P15] I think it was, yeah [P15], it definitely made me like, kind of like anxio—more anxious 'cause I had to like think about the way I was being perceived basically. –P11 (she/her)

In both participants' lived experiences, worrying about how they and their racial identities were being perceived by others lead to what became a consuming self-awareness. While P12 also participated in this group, she reconciled that being exposed to these notions of what it 'meant' to be Black, white, or mixed contributed to her becoming stronger and more resilient rather than more self-conscious. In this, she adds a unique perspective of how these pressures may manifest differently for girls. Albeit, the reflexivity of both P11 and P15 on their identities and how they resonated with them as adults indicated their own development of resilience as well. The data showed that all participants came to an eventual place of self-acceptance on their own timelines while engaging with varying degrees of self-surveillance in the process. In either case, though, racial expectations (e.g., having to look, talk, or simply be 'Black enough') were duly perceived by all participants and affected their self-concept in some manner.

However, in white monoracial focus groups, worrying about what others think pertained more to their personality traits or personal interests, rather than thinking about their performance of race as white women. For P2, her biggest concern was how people perceived her character, causing her to feel self-conscious. She recalled:

...and um, [I] worried that people's perceptions would change or that they would think that I was just doing something for some like—um, like selfish or egocentric purpose and things like that. So I guess I—I do still experience that, that started in middle school. —P2 (she/her)

In this quote, P2 establishes fears of being viewed as egocentric or selfish by her peers and how trying to decipher what others were thinking about her and her character acted as a defense mechanism against being labeled with these descriptors. She tried to adjust her self-expression accordingly, as she mentions in both Phase I and Phase II focus groups her reluctance to take up space to avoid demanding too much of anyone's time or energy. Similarly concerned with how

their character came across, P1 and P3 also commented on becoming hyper-aware of others' opinions during middle school and its imprint on how they presented themselves, even beyond eighth-grade.

Pertaining more to worrying about perceptions attached to one's interests rather than character, in a different white monoracial focus group, P7 remembers worrying most about how people perceived her enjoyment of horseback riding. Labeled as 'the weird horse girl' by her peers, P7 recalls, "...it made me sick to my stomach 'cause I wasn't necessarily like that..." In this sentiment, she conveys how she was concerned with others' opinions and the labels they attributed to her to the point of feeling ill. Later in the group, she also expresses trying to escape this label, reinventing herself, and changing how she viewed herself internally because of what others thought. As demonstrated by this instance and those of the other women included here, while Black girls and white girls both reported worrying about what others thought of them, they did so in regard to different aspects of their identities. For Black girls, worrying about others' perceptions was a mechanism for ensuring they were performing Blackness adequately by others' standards, while white girls used their worry as a defense against allowing others to associate them with negative character traits or being judged for their own unique interests.

Self-inflicted pressures.

While girls identified some external pressures, such as those from teachers, parents, or peers, they also commented on their own involvement in perpetuating expectations by putting pressure on themselves or taking things personally. It is important to note this effect was not reported in the Black monoracial focus group and was only identified by white and Latinx participants. Even when girls identified valid external pressures, like having to fit in or otherwise

face retribution from peers, girls felt they had caused them or worsened their intensity themselves. As P1, P2, and P3 concluded together during a white monoracial focus group in the following exchange:

It was definitely small things externally that I like magnified by a million for myself. Like I thought one small comment from somebody was like the biggest thing in the world and so it became such a big deal to me. And so, I think it was mainly myself and in my head..." –P1 (she/her)

...at the time I definitely thought it was all external, but looking back I think it was mostly internal and everyone else was probably feeling the same like, nonexistent pressures. –P2 (she/her)

Yeah, I think it's the same for me... now that I think about it and have been talking about it, I think it was definitely internal [pressures] and just something I was doing to myself. –P3 (she/her)

In this interaction, the women blame themselves for making a bigger deal out of the pressures they identified during the focus group than they thought was justified. However, significant discussion of experiencing retribution for being oneself, such as being labeled as attention-seeking, experiencing apathy or dismissiveness from administration and teachers, or being ostracized by peers, contradicts this argument. Real consequences were identified in tandem with the pressures they described (e.g., having to fit in, earn good grades, meet beauty standards, etc.), validating their perceptions. Yet, it seems that they held themselves responsible for what they endured in middle school, adding additional, self-inflicted pressure to meet imposed standards.

Akin to what P1 shared, in two separate monoracial Latinx focus groups, P5 and P13 also noted the weight that small, negative comments had on how pressured they felt overall. For P5, one teacher saying that not understanding geometry would impede her ability to have an adequate future career escalated the pressure she felt to perform well academically and increased her experience of math-related stress throughout middle school. Voicing her middle school self,

P5 summarized the distress she experienced as a result of her teacher's comments in the remark, "Oh, okay, my dream job is out the window because I can't do geometry." She added that this caused a lingering sense of anxiety over her future job prospects to fester, making clear the impact individual comments had on her relationship to both academics and self. P13 brought up similar points, insisting that small comments made by her immigrant mother about being responsible for earning good grades and helping her family members with their classes added undue academic pressure and stress. In fact, she worried, "Oh my god, we're gonna get deported because I—I got a C." As a result of her immigrant identity, she felt pressured by these types of comments in a uniquely difficult way. Both women's relationships to academics were altered by the way they internalized deleterious comments from others. These examples demonstrate their point that taking comments personally made the pressures they felt to live up to others' expectations more acute.

Who am I?

In other cases, while girls were aware they were being perceived by others, they also encountered a lack of identity or uncertainty within themselves. Rather than identifying with labels like those who struggled with an obligation to please others (i.e., the 'helpers'), these girls felt as though they lacked a sure sense of self to begin with. Though still an important topic of discussion, this particular code was the least frequently mentioned ($n = 14$) within participants' overall references to monitoring their perceptions of self ($N = 311$). In fact, 11 of these mentions came from a singular white monoracial focus group in Phase I. A majority of these codes were elicited from P17, who identified as a trans woman. In the focus group, she spoke of not

identifying with the gender she had been assigned to at birth, but also not necessarily identifying with femininity yet. Verbalizing this struggle, she recalled:

Um...I still didn't quite know who I wanted to be and like, for a long time, when you'd ask like, "What do you wanna be when you grow up?" and I'm just like, "I have no idea." I don't know why, like I don't know where I'm gonna go to college, I don't know what's gonna go on after like this week, it doesn't matter particularly and so there's... those sorts of I guess not pressures, but like the absence of them... and so it was more just trying to... I guess figure out what I—what I'm interested in and less, I guess conforming type of thing..." – P17 (she/her)

Her experiences importantly reflect the distinctiveness of her experience as a trans girl and how this intersecting identity adds another rich layer to her encounters with girlhood. Uncertainty concerning individual interests and what was going to happen during or after middle school, however, was also expressed by P1 and P4 in two other focus groups (a different white monoracial focus group in Phase I and an interracial/ethnic focus group in Phase II). P4 described this relationship with herself by reflecting, "Um, I think that my middle school self was, you know, was so unsure of what was going to happen and unsure of who I was and what I liked..." In this sense, like P17, P4 also lacked self-assuredness and confidence in the future. Thus, while cisgender girls are not necessarily immune to questioning their interests and/or identities, the code was more frequently applied to exploring gender identity and finding a will to live as a trans girl (as evidenced by P17).

While this finding can not and should not be generalized as representative of all trans girls, P17's experience is a valid expression of girls who find themselves deeply rooted in the matrix of oppression. As a result, these girls have a unique relationship between their gender and sense of self (or lack thereof). Of course, some degree of this ambivalence may also mirror the period of identity development faced by adolescents generally (Aanstoos 2019). However, the

feelings voiced by P1, P4, and P17 were not represented among the entire sample. Rather, they were tied to specific circumstances, such as P1's desire to do everything to prove herself but not knowing what she really enjoyed herself, P4's desire to rebel against whatever was the status-quo, and P17's transness. In effect, lacking a clear identity or sense of self seemed to be a particular expression of girlhood during middle school that allowed these women to resist expectations even if they had not yet fully developed an authentic, alternative self-expression.

Goody two-shoes.

In many of the focus groups, a topic of discussion was avoiding getting in trouble. Mentioned 33 times in the transcripts, girls expressed their intentional efforts to be a well-behaved student and avoid disciplinary action. This code appeared most frequently in one monoracial white focus group in Phase I ($n = 9$), the only Black monoracial focus group in Phase I ($n = 8$), and one interracial/ethnic focus group in Phase II ($n = 7$). Participants engaged in this behavior as a way to appease their parents, teachers, or to remain in accordance with schoolwide behavior policies. Some girls labeled themselves as active rule-followers, like P14:

So, some things that kinda identified me in middle school would be... I was definitely a rule-follower. I always listened to my parents. I literally would cry any time I was yelled at, the whole world was falling apart. Like, I—I had to follow the rules and do what I was told. —P14 (she/her)

By describing the implications of being a 'rule-follower' and sometimes falling short of such an identifier, P14 conveys how adhering to behavioral expectations was an integral component of her identity. Even more importantly, she felt compelled to meet those expectations. In the Black monoracial focus group, P15 also aligns her identity with being a rule-follower. She captures her encounters with behavioral expectations in middle school by sharing:

Um, I—I'm like a—I was like a goody two-shoes. I didn't get in trouble, hardly ever, um. I only got in trouble like one time for talking and I cried, and I felt so—and like, freaked out, um. So like I never, I never really stepped out of line. I never felt like, any type of way about that. But when I—if I did, it would've been bad. –P15 (she/her)

Just like P14, P15 recalls having a panicked reaction to rare instances of getting in trouble. She was motivated to adhere to the rules to avoid these negative experiences altogether. She summarizes the consequence of not following the rules in her simple concluding thought: "...it would've been bad." The ambiguity of this statement implies her hesitancy to trespass into the realm of misbehavior and violate her self-identified status as a goody two-shoes. Rather, from her perspective, deviating from the rules had uncertain, ominous consequences she was not willing to explore.

In other cases, girls discussed behaving as a pressure they felt was imposed on them rather than a self-identified aspect of their identity. During a Latinx monoracial focus group, when asked about what messages they received about their behavior during middle school, P9 replied, "...it was mostly just, be good and um, follow the rules... make sure that everything you're doing actually is right, and you're not just blindly following rules." Referring to her parents in this statement, P9 pinpoints an external force as a contributor to the behaviors she felt were expected of her. This differs from P14 and P15, who left the source of their behavioral messaging mostly undisclosed. Further, P9 ties her parents' behavioral expectations into a broader set of moral expectations, as this statement includes her mentioning of having to follow the rules but also be aware of whether they were ethical in practice. P11 also encountered imposed behavioral expectations. In the Black monoracial focus group, she described what it was like to monitor her behavior in an academic setting in order to avoid discipline. While discussing how some teachers would feel obligated to 'make her Black enough,' she mentioned:

I felt like I had to like—I felt like, I had to like, keep like, checking myself to make sure I was like kind of changing who I was around them. So that I wouldn't have to have like a conversation after class. –P11 (she/her)

While the feeling of having to 'check' herself relates primarily to worrying about others' perceptions of herself, the latter part of this quote (concerning being pulled aside for conversations with instructors after class) speaks largely to how that category coalesces with avoiding getting in trouble. In this regard, while P11 felt like she had to adhere to a system of rules and behavioral expectations imposed on her like P9 did, the pressure she perceived was more-so related to her performance of her Black racial identity than familial pressures.

Remittances.

In both phases of the study, girls' discussion of trying to please or repay their families only occurred in groups with Latinx participants (both monoracial focus groups in Phase I and one interracial/ethnic focus group with white and Latinx girls in Phase II). The subject was discussed 20 times among them. As with P13's aforementioned experience with feeling responsible for preventing the deportation of her family by earning good grades, other Latinx women reported similar feelings of responsibility, obligation, and/or gratitude to their families and parents, specifically. P10 references this particular phenomenon by reflecting on their dedication to academics, "Um, in middle school I was also a straight-A student. Um, [P13's] experience kinda resonates with me, like having immigrant parents, you kinda feel like obligated to be really good in school." As P10's comment clarifies, not only was there a pressure to succeed academically, there was a pressure to succeed academically in order to pay homage to the earlier sacrifices of their parents.

The relationship between academic performance and repaying one's Latinx parents was again discussed in one of the interracial/ethnic focus groups by three of the Latinx participants.

They all identified their parents' opinions as the most important to them, mentioning:

Um, I definitely think that my parents' opinion, uh, held the most weight in middle school just because, uh, I knew how hard they were working for me, so I wanted to work hard for them. Uh, and I think... that is still true today, you know, 'cause you grow up learning like your parents do a lot for you. So, when I got to middle school, I was like okay now—now, I need to study hard, I need to do good in order to make them proud. – P5 (she/her)

My parents' opinion mattered the most to me, just because like [P5] was saying, I know they worked hard to get me to where I am now, so in middle school I was just—really wanted to make them proud. Proud of me. –P3 (she/her)

...like, having immigrant parents and them expecting you to do good in school is like a fair assessment. Like yeah, I did good in school. Because like you already sacrificed so much for me to have a better life here. –P10 (they/them)

In these statements, P3, P5, and P10 again define earning good grades as their own way of expressing thankfulness for the opportunities their parents had afforded them. While not discussed as a factor they wished was non-existent, making their parents proud did impact how they experienced middle school and added an additional expectation that white and Black girls did not report dealing with. Adding to how the desire to repay her parents impacted how she navigated her self-expression, P3 revealed, "...so I really just would constantly push myself and I had this really big fear of failure or like disappointing them or something like that. So, I just—my-- my main goal was just never make them disappointed." Here, she summarizes the difficulty of expecting herself to make her parents proud without simultaneously encountering worry that her efforts would not be successful or adequate enough. Conclusively, in this sample, Latinx women expressed a unique expectation of themselves to perform well in school as a representation of their gratitude or dedication to their families' histories.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

At a Glance

At the onset, this thesis sought to identify whether and how girls perceived racial, ethnic, and racial stereotypes regarding them in their education. In the preliminary survey, before identifying specific pressures they experienced and their response to them, a majority of the sample confirmed they felt some kind of pressure to be a certain way during middle school (76.7%, $n = 23$). The eight different mechanisms that girls utilized to monitor their perceptions of self suggest that girls are indeed conscious of the perceptions that exist regarding their gender, race, and ethnicity. The study's seven in-depth focus groups revealed that limiting their self-expression, seeking to please others, trying to fit in, worrying about what others think, self-inflicting pressures, struggling with identity, avoiding getting in trouble, and seeking to appease their families were the most prevalent mechanisms girls utilized to exert control over how others perceived them during middle school. Resoundingly, girls possessed a defined consciousness of how society expected them to behave and present while in middle school.

In fact, girls were so aware of these expectations, such as earning good grades, fitting in, or being well-behaved, that focus group participants verbalized they altered their presentation of self to question, conform, or at a minimum: surveil how they were being perceived by others. Thus, alongside a generally important period of identity development (Aanstoos 2019), girls also developed an individual consciousness of how their self was being perceived by important forces in their lives (parents, teachers, and peers). Racial and ethnic diversity played a role in the findings, as Black girls discussed their racial identity as a factor in feeling like they had to avoid trouble and worrying about how they were being viewed by others. Latinx girls faced additional

familial pressures compared to the other groups, aiming to present themselves as good students to make their parents proud. While participants did not self-identify with having been stereotyped, they did express being labeled, treated differently, or facing retribution for being themselves.

Participation and Representation

On the whole, this project created much-needed space for college women to discuss whether and how they perceived gender, ethnic, and racial stereotyping in middle school. This need was expressed by the fact 30 women completed a survey, 17 participated in a focus group, and five returned to participate in a second focus group over the course of only a five-week period with no compensation. This was especially significant at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic already taxed participants, caused trauma for many, and reduced their energy for committing to other activities (Bassett and Taberski 2020). With that in mind, this research suggests that spaces for women to collaboratively reflect on their educational experiences and dissect the thoughts and feelings associated with them serve an important purpose. The eagerness of participants to share their stories and feel seen and heard in a diverse, protected environment evidences the lack of normativity surrounding the experience.

Further, all of the participants had something to say about their middle school experience that they felt had previously gone unheard. For example, participants referenced not wanting to bother others with their problems, struggling to establish an identity, and trying to present themselves in ways others would find acceptable. In these discussions, it was evidenced that holistic self-expression itself was a rebellious act during middle school. Instead, constant self-surveillance was encouraged in order for girls to project a palatable image to teachers, parents,

and peers. The identified sources of these pressures are consistent with Legewie and DiPrete's (2012) assertions that multiple forces exerted pressure upon students' gender performance, among them school context and peer culture. As a result of feeling pressured to mirror an unattainable portrayal of girlhood, women did not feel their experiences had been validated in the past and were willing to correct that. The participants' ardent rectifications of how existing pressures impacted their presentation of self in middle school suggests there is room for an emergence of their voices in the literature moving forward.

Diverting from Androcentrism

As previously noted, this work was necessitated by the androcentric perspective perpetuated by education as a powerful social institution (Lovell 2016; Shaw and Lee 2020; Wisdom, Leavitt and Bice 2019). For instance, Lovell (2016) discussed how mid-to-late 20th century dress code restrictions for girls in junior high emerged from a male gaze and still, the effects of objectification linger in schools today. Even in terms of academics, Wisdom, Leavitt, and Bice point to the exclusion of feminine perspectives, determining that learning difficulties can stem from ignoring "differences in learning styles and processing strategies" (2019, p. 66). However, as girls found themselves in focus groups among similar others, they departed from such persistent male-centered narratives. While they made occasional references to how they were impacted by patriarchal expectations and their interactions with boys, overall, girls were much more concerned with describing their experiences and feelings in relation to themselves. When asked whether they perceived opposing expectations of boys compared to those they were subjected to, individuals like P1 and P3 earnestly disclosed they did not really know what expectations existed for boys. Despite the fact it may seem pedestrian to point out that girls

spoke from their own point of view, this is significant because of the rarity of such an occurrence in other settings. As the findings indicated: shrinking the self and holding back (emotions, thoughts, opinions, etc.) was the most frequently occurring code within girls' accounts of monitoring their perceptions of self. This result of girls' feeling compelled to restrict their self-expression in academic spaces reflects the importance of girls voicing their own interpretations of expectations imposed upon them in a full and introspective manner, independent of male narratives.

Further to this point, one of the initial aims of this study was to observe how girls perceived expectations imposed upon them and how those differed in comparison to boys generally. Girls, however, did not often clarify their observations by differentiating their experiences in contrast to boys. Rather, they posited their experiences as their individual truth without using boys as a comparative measure. As the findings implied, girls were much more concerned with staying attuned to and finding various ways to cope with the unattainable expectations of them than developing a consciousness of boys' privileges. Again, this is not to say boys were not mentioned altogether, nor that some of their privileges were not identified (e.g., having a more relaxed dress code, not being expected to behave perfectly, etc.). It does indicate, though, that girls were much more concerned with teacher', parents', and peers' perceptions of them individually as opposed to how they were being compared to boys.

As follows, girls' reflections were not centered around the question: 'Why am I not treated equally to boys?' In fact, many girls pointed out the opinions of teachers, parents, and other girls they were friends with held the most weight. Thus, boys were not really part of the question at all. The findings suggest that the bigger inquiries girls held about their experiences

were: ‘Do others value my unique self? If not, how can I adapt my presentation to become valuable?’ Some girls tried to enhance value by taking on helping roles, trying to fit in, or making their families proud. Even though these questions are still asked in relationship to patriarchal standards of what expressions of girlhood are most valuable, they also incited inquisitiveness in girls during a crucial period of identity development (Aanstoos 2019). As a result, the women in this study questioned the systems they were impacted by and reflexive in how they recounted their experiences later on. Like P5 recalled, focusing on meeting others’ needs over her own during middle school was exhausting and caused her to question this maladaptive mechanism. After a period of monitoring perceptions of herself through the lens of others, the burgeoning line of questioning to follow was focused on her own identity and needs.

As a result of their exploration, women came to realizations about the validity of their own identities and needs over time. As young adults, P5 grew in her honesty about her feelings and how others impacted her, P2 expanded her communication skills, P3 strengthened her openness to establishing new interpersonal relationships, and P4 found value in self-love. P13 found ways to advocate for and celebrate Latinx folks and P15 accepted that her performance of Blackness was enough by her own standards. Participants like P10 and P17 developed self-acceptance for their true gender identities. P8 came to terms with her bisexuality and during focus groups, marveled at the asset that is individual differences. P16 held on to her childhood interests that shaped her identity, despite the criticism she received from her peers in middle school. P14 focused on her own relationship to her body rather than allowing others to dictate what it should be. In these ways, via their own resilience, girls redirected the way they learned to monitor how others perceived them during middle school into a strengthening self-awareness.

This does not negate the challenges faced by these participants. However, it does add an important layer to how they made sense of the hypervigilance they developed throughout middle school in order to feel as though their version of girlhood was satisfactory by others' standards. As these queries and personal growth experiences indicate, when provided the space, women distinguished themselves as protagonists of a story all their own, only mentioning boys in the footnotes.

Race and Ethnicity

As intersectional feminist theory would suggest (Collins 1993 as cited in Shaw and Lee 2020), participants' racial and ethnic identities impacted their individual reflections and the ways that they interacted with the study. While important data about Black girls' experiences was ascertained, it did not reach saturation. A greater number and variety of experiences of Black girls is required to fully represent the breadth of their experiences in the literature about their interactions with, perceptions of, and reactions to racial, ethnic, and gender stereotyping in U.S. public middle schools. Demonstrative of this disparity, at approximately 37 minutes, the shortest of all the focus groups was the Black monoracial focus group. Also, with three participants participating in the Black monoracial focus group, Black women were the most narrowly represented racial group in the study. While Black women attended the Phase I monoracial focus group, no Black women returned to participate in either of Phase II's interracial focus groups. Due to COVID-19, its especially negative impact on systemically disadvantaged communities of color (Molock and Parchem 2020), the trauma associated with the racialized murders of Black folks by police over the course of Summer 2020 (Benyshek 2020; Hill, et al. 2020), and society's general expectation that Black women are to provide non-Black folks with free emotional labor

(Kelly, et al. 2019), it is understandable that Black women may be hesitant to or uncomfortable with sharing their experiences in an interracial focus group.

In the categories: ‘Worrying about peoples’ perceptions of self’ and ‘avoiding getting in trouble,’ there were instances where racial identity shaped the type of experiences girls had. Just as Black women were more prone to worry about how their Blackness was being perceived when it came to being concerned about others’ opinions of them, they also had encounters where they had to be especially mindful of their behavior as Black women in order to maintain avoiding getting in trouble. These findings reinforce the pertinence of the literature concerning Black girls’ problematized identity in the U.S. educational system (Morris and Perry 2017; Watson 2017). As Morris and Perry (2017) evidence, Black girls are disproportionately punished in comparison to both their white and Latinx peers. Even more strikingly, they are most commonly disciplined for contradicting expectations of “appropriate femininity, which is coded as white” (Morris and Perry 2017, p. 144). Consistent with these points, the Black women represented in this study valued maintaining a steadfast vigilance of how those around them were perceiving them, their Blackness, and their interactions with others, as well as following the rules established by the school and their teachers. These maintenances of self acted as preventative measures against being disciplined or othered by a system of expectations that gatekeeps ‘innocent’ girlhood as an exclusively white experience.

White and Latinx women did not have similar experiences. Both worrying about others’ opinions and avoiding trouble were more closely related to protecting their individual self-concept, interests, or feelings rather than a particular identifier (e.g., race). It is worthy to note almost all of the Latinx women who participated in the study at some point added that they also

self-identified as white (though P10 identified themselves as Brown and thereby experienced a different relationship to race than the rest of the sample). P13 even made comments regarding experiencing white privilege when it came to having to fit in at school and how that eased some of the pressures she experienced as a Latinx immigrant. However, the Latinx women in the study were more likely to mention their families in the anecdotes they shared in the focus groups and include what it was like to navigate their expectations of them than either white or Black participants. This mirrors the work of López and Chesney-Lind (2014), who identified that Latinx girls in their sample also resonated with a strong sense of familism connected to their ethnic identity. Also like López and Chesney-Lind (2014), though, this work does not identify that familial pressure is merely a result of being Latinx and applicable to all Latinx folks. However, for these particular girls, trying to repay or please their families was a very real element of their existence in middle school. To this effect, these girls experienced pressure as both students and children – identities that posed individual responsibilities but additive expectations.

Collectively, the study's findings correlated to racial and ethnic identity were significant because Black and Latinx girls did not deny the presence of the pressures that white girls faced in their own lives, such as having to earn good grades, have friends, or follow the rules. Alternatively, they encountered additional pressures as a result of embodying a marginalized racial or ethnic identity. Resultantly, girls of color had to balance a greater variety of societal expectations with their own self-concept, only heightening the impossibility of ever actually meeting those standards.

Limitations and Future Work

Further regarding race and ethnicity, while the sample of girls was diverse, the depth of the data collected from women of varying racial, ethnic, and gender identities may have been limited because they had to interact with a white cisgender researcher. As Charmaz cautions, “In addition to the dynamics of power and professional status, gender, race, and age may affect the direction and content of interviews” (2006, p. 27). Constructivist grounded theorists must be reflexive and acknowledge their various identities and their potential to affect participants’ comfortability with disclosure. Further, while this study examines interracial differences, it does not take into account the vast range of diversity present within racial groups themselves. Of course, the current literature suggests the experiences of white girls and educational stereotyping are those that are normative (Carter Andrews et al. 2019). While this study bridges that gap by integrating a range of racially and ethnically diverse voices, it does not further delve into intraracial differences and their even more specific experiences with girlhood and its consequent educational stereotyping. Naturally, this leaves room for future research to explore these idiosyncrasies and broaden the amount of research available on this topic altogether.

However valuable the information here, it is important to remember it only verbalizes a fraction of the insights offered by these women. Continuing to analyze additional themes and subthemes emergent with the dataset will contribute to the development of an increasingly complex theory pertinent to girlhood experiences in middle school. Even with further research, though, girlhood is a nuanced and individualized experience that can not fully be described by the accounts of only some. In spite of this, rather than generalizing what it means to embody girlhood, this work hopes to increase the visibility of such specialized stories that girls are willing to share to convey the importance and abundance of distinctiveness of their lived

experiences, especially in education. This is consistent with one of the primary goals of qualitative research: to understand the depth and richness of individual experiences. Rather than assuming any one expression of girlhood is normative, contrasts within the data speak to “emergent processes that occur through interaction” (Charmaz 2006, p. 178). As a result, the findings encompass a myriad of ways in which girls navigate their race, ethnicity, and gender in systems not originally built for them. Most desirably, this research looked at how girls interacted with themselves, others, and such enormous social constructs as middle schoolers. Of course, this is done while highlighting shared experiences and commonalities among the sample, as girls describe common challenges and expectations they overcame in order to exist as themselves in academic spaces. As such, this thesis encapsulates the perspectives of the girls who elected to participate and urges further investigation of the experiences of others both alike and different to these narratives.

Summation and Implementation

Previous work indicates that girls are inundated with expectations of who they should be and how they should present themselves in academic spaces. As previously discussed, these studies identify descriptors commonly attributed to girls, such as: eager to please, self-regulating, docile, mature, and focused (Legewie and DiPrete 2012; Orr 2011; Riley 2014; Romer et al. 2011). This narrow definition of femininity in the classroom was largely applied to only white girls (Carter Andrews et al. 2019). Meanwhile, Black and Latinx girls’ performances of femininity have been overdisciplined, labeled, and hierarchically positioned beneath those of white girls (Bondy 2016; Carter Andrews et al. 2019; Ricks 2014; Watson 2017). Among these white, Black, and Latinx populations of learners, whether girls ascribed or reacted to these

descriptors themselves was not yet distinguished in a manner reflective of their nuanced lived experiences. Therefore, by questioning girls' perceptions of and reactions to such tropes regarding their existence in K-12 educational settings, this work aimed to understand their own embodiments of femininity at a developmental stage concentrated on their construction of self (Aanstoos 2019). Using intersectional feminism and constructivist grounded theories as a point of reference to allow girls to express themselves in a context that acknowledged their multifaceted identities and unique constructions of reality, the results of this study suggested depth and variation among what girlhood entails for girls of varying sexual orientations, SES, races, ethnicities, and gender expressions in middle school.

Among the findings, codes appeared that supported the notion that girls perceived others were expecting them to be compliant and cooperative students (Clay 2011; Eliot 2010; Riley 2014; Robinson and Lubienski 2011; Sadowski 2010), such as feeling pressured to please others and worrying about what they think. In fact, the resulting codes reflected a larger pattern of girls reacting to others' expectations of them through a process of self-monitoring and individual consciousness. Some participants identified themselves as helpers and worked hard to maintain this image. Others had to watch how much space they were taking up in the classroom to avoid negative labels. Still, others had to closely monitor their racial identities to prove they were 'enough' of something. Despite girls expressing that they believed smart, popular, people-pleasing goody two-shoes were what they ought to be – they never seemed to be any closer to such perceived perfection, no matter how hard they tried or how often they checked themselves to make sure they were measuring up to these invisible standards. Overarchingly, girls assessed

how their identities and interactions with others were perceived during middle school to manage how others reacted to them and adhere to expectations of girlhood to the extent possible.

As Audre Lorde wrote, “And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives” (1984, p. 43). It is with such respect to marginalized girls’ voices that this study aims to create space for them in the literature. However, creating space for them among these pages is not an adequate shift away from the pressures experienced by girls in U.S. public middle schools. Instead, it is essential that rather than expecting girls to perform femininity according to a limited set of rules established by archaic gender and racial hierarchies, they are encouraged to bring their whole and true selves to class. As the findings pointed to three external forces culpable for contributing to exerting pressure over girls and their presentations of self during middle school: teachers, parents, and peers, a large part of future change must occur at a point of intergenerational accountability. Teachers must recognize the biases perpetuated by the educational system they are deeply rooted in, create safe spaces for their learners that validate self-expression, and acknowledge that gendered attributions can deeply shape the self-concept of marginalized students, especially girls and, more precisely: girls of color. As some participants expressed feeling guilty for such expressions in the study’s focus groups, girls should be encouraged to keep their hand raised, to contribute to conversations, and to get answers wrong and still be affirmed in their intelligence. Similarly, parents must also acknowledge the pressures that are exerted on their girls within and outside of the home, understanding that societal forces may constrain how free their daughters feel to emulate themselves in both spheres.

Both teachers and parents, though, must collaboratively foster a culture among youth that is centered on story-telling, feelings-sharing, and identity development outside of the construct of gender in order to voice girls' narratives early on without the pressure of a preconceived ideal lingering over them. However, most importantly, these important adults in girls' lives must work cohesively to advocate for systemic change. Beyond the need for individual accountability, girls have not been valued equally in their public education from the start (McNeill and Rowley 2019; Shaw and Lee 2020). It is crucial that social hierarchies are dismantled so that girls will be provided with equal room to flourish in their learning of academic subjects and what it means to be unapologetically themselves.

So what is perfection?

Rather than having to have it all to be accepted, like P4 supposed, girls shouldn't have to have anything other than the hopes, dreams, and interests they started middle school with. Girls like P2 should be encouraged to write the fictional stories they want to write. Girls like P4 should be empowered by those around them to try the extracurriculars they were afraid they would not succeed in. Girls like P13 should be reminded that immigrants like them belong. Girls like P17 questioning their gender identity and struggling to find their sense of self early on should be seen and allowed to explore without judgment. Girls like P7 should be championed for their love for horses. Girls like P11 and P15 should be validated for the multitude they possess as individuals of mixed race. As these examples repeatedly suggest: girlhood may only be perfectly expressed when girls do not have to closely monitor themselves as the women here did in order to navigate an institution that did not embrace them. Instead, this is more likely to be achieved when they can simply and freely be.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board
FWA00000351
IRB00001138, IRB00012110
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3248

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

December 3, 2020

Dear Anne Bubrski:

On 12/3/2020, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	The Girlhood Double-Standard: Girls' Perceptions of Gendered Classroom Expectations
Investigator:	Anne Bubrski
IRB ID:	STUDY00002443
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juliet Cahow - E-mails.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Juliet Cahow - HRP-254-FORM, Category: Consent Form; • Juliet Cahow - HRP-255-FORM, Category: IRB Protocol; • Juliet Cahow - Interview Guides.docx, Category: Interview / Focus Questions; • Juliet Cahow - Recruitment Flyer.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Juliet Cahow - RSO Announcement & Social Media Caption.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Juliet Cahow - Social Media Post.png, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Juliet Cahow - Survey.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Gillian Bernal
Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER

*The Girlhood Double-Standard:
Girls' Perceptions of Gendered Classroom Expectations*

**Girls' education is important.
So are your stories.**

ARE YOU...

- White, Black, Latinx, or Afro-Latinx
- A woman in college (18-22 years-old)
- An alum of a public U.S. middle school (grades 6-8)
- Willing to participate in a brief survey and 2 recorded focus groups via Zoom?

TO PARTICIPATE...

Contact Juliet Cahow

- Email: julietcahow@Knights.ucf.edu
- Text or call: (407) 490-2749



This ad is for a research project that reflects on girlhood educational experiences to understand how students' identities are impacted by stereotypes.

APPENDIX C: SURVEY

Before continuing on to the survey, please find a private space where you can answer these questions confidentially. Ensure that others cannot view your screen. An empty room with a closed door is encouraged. Once you are alone, you may proceed to the next page.

In order to be contacted to participate in virtual focus groups for the next portion of the study, please provide your first name and e-mail address.

First name: _____

E-mail Address: _____

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your class standing?
 - Freshman
 - Sophomore
 - Junior
 - Senior
 - Fifth-year
3. What is your gender? _____
4. Do you comfortably identify with the term “girl” when thinking of your school-age self?
 - Yes, this term describes me and my childhood experiences well.
 - No, this label contradicts my gender identity and/or I am uncomfortable with using it to describe my childhood experiences.
5. What is your race and/or ethnicity?
 - White
 - Black or African-American
 - Latinx
 - Afro-Latinx
 - Some other mix of these identities
 - Some other race or ethnicity
6. Did you attend a public middle school in the U.S. for grades 6-8?
 - Yes

- No

For the following questions, please think about what things were like when you were in middle school. Rank your level of agreement with the following statements from the perspective of your middle school-self and the state of your family, class, and education then.

7. Please select the class position you feel best reflects your family or living situation when you were in middle school.
 - Upper-class
 - Upper-middle class.
 - Middle-class.
 - Working-class.
 - Lower-class.

 8. Overall, I had a positive middle school experience.
 - Strongly agree.
 - Agree.
 - Not sure.
 - Disagree.
 - Strongly disagree.

 9. My teachers, peers, and family perceived me positively in middle school.
 - Strongly agree.
 - Agree.
 - Not sure.
 - Disagree.
 - Strongly disagree.

 10. I felt pressured to be a certain way in middle school (e.g., earn certain grades and/or act, look, think, or behave a certain way).
 - Strongly agree.
 - Agree.
 - Not sure.
 - Disagree.
 - Strongly disagree.
-

11. If you were to participate in a virtual focus group for this study, what personal pronouns would you feel comfortable using in a setting with other college students and an undergraduate researcher?

- She/her/hers
- He/him/his
- They/them/theirs
- Ze/hir/hirs
- Any pronouns
- No pronouns (just your name)
- Some other pronoun set

12. If you indicated some other pronoun set, please describe. _____

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Phase I

Introduction

Tell me a little bit about yourself. Who are you as a student in college?

Middle School & Identity

How would you describe the student you were in middle school?

What were the biggest aspects of your identity in middle school?

What kind of pressures did you feel in middle school, if any?

Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Expectations

What were some messages you received at school about race or ethnicity?

What were some messages you received at school about gender?

What were some messages you received at school about your academic performance?

What were some messages you received at school about your behavior?

Stereotypes and Pressures

What expectations do you think people or society had of you in middle school? What pressure, if any, did you feel to live up to or reject these expectations?

Have you ever been incorrectly stereotyped? Describe the situation and why you think you were stereotyped.

How do you think these experiences have influenced the person you have become today?

Conclusion

Is there anything else you think I should know to understand your middle school experience better?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Phase II

Introduction

I'd like to start by having everyone think back to their middle school self. Try to remember what you were like. Once you have that image in your mind, please share what you think was your best quality then and what your best quality is now.

Middle School Perceptions & Environment

If you had to describe someone who was accepted in middle school by their parents, peers, teachers, and society... what would that person be like?

What makes that kind of person come to mind?

How would you describe your classroom environments?

How would you describe your school environment?

Stereotypes and Pressures

What do you think others thought of who you were in middle school?

How did those perceptions of you affect the kind of student you were or strived to be?

Whose opinions mattered the most to you in middle school? Why?

In your mind, were others' assessments of you fair? Why or why not?

Conclusion

Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?

Do you think I've gained a full and accurate picture of your middle school experience?

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