

December 2023

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Recommended Citation

Mosley, Miranda (2023) "Teaching and Teachings of Black Mixed Girls as Unveiling Femme-Centered Anti-Blackness in US Education," *Culture, Society, and Praxis*: Vol. 15: No. 2, Article 1.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/csp/vol15/iss2/1>

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Teaching and Teachings of Black Mixed Girls as Unveiling Femme-Centered Anti-Blackness in US Education

Miranda Mosley

INTRODUCTION

“You’re the prettiest Black girl I know,” my eighth grade table mate smiled, sitting across from me in our science classroom. She, like most of the people in our middle school, was not Black. Unprompted, she delivered this double-edged compliment to me; and though she meant well, I felt awkward and sick. Even as—and especially as—a growing, self-conscious middle schooler, I felt that my whiteness complicated my so-called “beauty.” Being called “pretty for a Black girl” was a comment based on an assumption of Blackness as othered, as not beautiful, of proximity to whiteness as a goal in my Black-white mixedness. I needed to be “prettier” and “smarter” to escalate in a social hierarchy; I needed a distance from Blackness and a proximity to whiteness to be seen.

(Anti-)Blackness, mixedness, femininity all converged for me in middle school as I and those around me constructed our identities. Studying gender, race, and mixedness together crystallizes often overlooked, yet important, devices to unravel threads of anti-Blackness that constrict institutions of schooling. More importantly, a heightened influence of skin color and lightness/whiteness for Black and Black mixed girls stands as a largely concealed pillar in understanding formations of Blackness in male-centric views of identity development.

I turn to current middle school girls, those who live in this developmental stage currently, and investigate questions of identity development. As an ally of a Black affinity group at a middle school in the San Francisco Bay Area, I leveraged my connection with the program to recruit girls from the program for interviews. With the two girls who participated in the project, I searched for answers to my research questions: How do Black mixed girls in this middle school’s Black affinity program understand their racial identities through schooling? Subsequently how might national hauntings, or intergenerational traumas, arise and manifest? Thus, this study inspected how the girls’ identities are formed and understood through their schooling in the context of schooling’s intergenerational harm toward Black students and in the context of the Black affinity program’s message of Black empowerment.

THE BLACK, THE WHITE, AND THE FEMININE

Slavery reverberating into the lives and bodies of Black students, educators, and people echoes throughout scholar Michael Dumas’ writings, and such reverberation constitutes his idea of national haunting, or the past, present, and future suffering of Black people, specifically in education.¹ This suffering transcends time, and movements in education reproduce this national

¹ Michael Dumas, “Against the Dark: Anti-Blackness in Education Policy and Discourse.” *Theory into Practice* 55, no. 1 (December 2015): 12.

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haunting – this intergenerational trauma – for Black people who live in cycles of slavery’s afterlives.² For Dumas, along with scholars like Janelle Scott, H. Richard Milner, Tyrone Howard, and Michael Omi and Howard Winant, schooling policies and practices find roots in structural racism and anti-Blackness (“understanding of the Black condition within a context of utter contempt for, and acceptance of violence against the Black,”³ or, more simply, racism specifically acted against Black folks and Blackness). Moreso, scholar Connie Wun⁴ demonstrates the importance of critical race theory and illustrates the ways in which the histories of racism within the United States merge into the modern day as a “post-racial” invisibilization of Black women, and as an *afterlife of slavery*.⁵ The afterlife of slavery to which the author speaks includes the ways that colorism affects how Black and non-Black people view those who possess Anglicized, or white, features, including Black-white girls and women.

To better understand colorism within Blackness, we must look to the construction of Blackness. Language (e.g. African American Vernacular English),⁶ skin color, hair color, hair texture, “facial features as well as education and income [may] affect perceptions of who is considered dark or light skinned.”⁷ Appearing “lighter” makes one seem more beautiful, more intellectual, and more worthy of social escalation.⁸ For women especially, beauty is tied to social status

– beauty, which is based on lightness and Anglicized features, is key for women in gaining status since beauty “acts as a form of symbolic capital.”⁹ Therefore, performances of femininity and “lightness” can allow for betterment in social and disciplinary stratifications for girls and women when compared to others deemed “darker,” or, by proximity, more Black.

The root of this colorism bases itself in anti-Blackness. For Dumas,¹⁰ anti-Blackness points to the Black being anachronistic, as the Black being on a paradigm from human to inhuman (with the Black as incapable of humanity and the “other,” non-Black as capable of humanity), and proves important the consideration of interpersonal factors, structural features, and critical theory that mold and help define (Black, Black mixed, and feminine) identities. Black mixed racial identities are formed through individual factors (physical appearance of people), structural factors (socioeconomic status, family status/structure, socialization processes), and contextual factors (geographic location, surrounding community, the composition of their social network¹¹), which all emphasize the importance of interactions between those inside and outside of the individual. Thus, contextual factors and colorism also becomes key in theorizing (anti-)Blackness for Black mixed girls.

² Dumas, “Against the Dark,” 12.

³ Michael Dumas, “‘Losing an Arm:’ Schooling as a Site of Black Suffering.” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 17, no. 1 (December 2013): 13.

⁴ Connie Wun, “Angered: Black and Non-Black Girls of Color at the Intersections of Violence and School Discipline in the United States.” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 21, no. 4 (November 2016): 423.

⁵ Wun, “Angered,” 425.

⁶ Savannah Shange, *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiracism, and Schooling in San Francisco* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 77.

⁷ Linda M. Burton et al., “Critical Race Theories, Colorism, and the Decade’s Research on Families of Color,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 3 (June 2010): 440.

⁸ Margaret Hunter, “Colorism in the Classroom: How Skin Tone Stratifies African American and Latina/o Students,” *Theory into Practice* 55, no. 1 (December 2015): 54.

⁹ Hunter, “Colorism in the Classroom,” 57.

¹⁰ Dumas, “Against the Dark,” 11, 12, 15.

¹¹ Kerry Ann Rockquemore & David L. Brunson, *Beyond Black: Biracial Identity in America* (2nd ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008), 19-23.

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SEEING THE UNSEEN IN SCHOOLS

In the context of a San Francisco high school, Savannah Shange speaks to the ways that Black girls and Black women are harmed in all places of entry within the school system. Shange's 2019 book *Progressive Dystopia* finds that Black girls, even in a self-described racially conscious and justice-oriented school, face ostracization. Black girls were silenced¹², found themselves kicked out of the school without question or acknowledgement by the school¹³, and forced out of the school¹⁴. This builds upon Dumas's Black-other paradigm¹⁵—of the Black as the perpetual other—with the Black girl as a perpetual and *unseen* other.

Unlike the hyper-policed, hyper-surveilled Black masculine, the Black feminine is shushed, is erased, is made to disappear. Institutions, and those working for them, actively remove the Black girl – and by extension, Black femininity – from their lines of sight, as if burying her eradicates the histories of labor that she carries in her blood or absolves systems that reproduce labor from their misdoings to Blackness.

As the structures of schools reproduce the unseeing of the Black feminine, the people who teach within these structures can reproduce unseeing as well. Through the means of discipline, grading, and parent interaction, teachers engage in actions that shape the Black girls' (un-)seeing of themselves and understanding of themselves – the teacher holds a grip on how the girl will reaffirm or transform her notions of colorism, her notions of self-confidence and self-importance, her notions of her standing in social strata, her notions of her being. In the context of Hunter's study in her article

“Colorism in the Classroom,” lighter-skinned girls more likely benefit from racialized beauty norms—their lighter skin making the Black girl more palatable, more present, more in-time—teachers more likely give these girls more leniency and flexibility within their studies and classroom discipline¹⁶. Similarly, what is feminine and what is necessary for praise via appearance, accessories, clothing, and language¹⁷ determines how the girl will express herself as she tries to rebel against, subscribe to, or move in between the notions of (white) femininity. Such forms of capital and praise can play a factor into the ways that the Black mixed girl identifies due to the individual, interpersonal, and institutional contexts that the child will then experience or be placed into.¹⁸

Identities exist as both ever-changing and solidified, with each reverberation changing the meaning of self, of femininity, of Blackness. Black femininity passing down Blackness and Black femininity being unseen by US institutions like schooling change who and how the Black girl can be. Therefore, how the Black mixed girl may carry (anti-)Blackness is shaped by her classroom experiences of being either distanced from or placed within Blackness and femininity by her teachers, curriculum, and peers. Her experience of (anti-)Blackness and colorism, then, hold greater implications for her sense of national haunting and how these systems perceive and (un)see Black femininity and how she uses her narratives and senses of self to create futures.

METHODS

I obtained student and guardian consent to interview two middle-school student par-

¹² Shange, *Progressive Dystopia*, 138.

¹³ Shange, *Progressive Dystopia*, 118.

¹⁴ Shange, *Progressive Dystopia*, 128.

¹⁵ Dumas, “Against the Dark,” 13.

¹⁶ Hunter, “Colorism in the Classroom,” 56.

¹⁷ Stephanie Jones, “Identities of Race, Class, and Gender Inside and Outside the Math Classroom: A Fall 2023, Vol. 15, Issue 2

Girls' Math Club as a Hybrid Possibility,” *Feminist Teacher* 14, no. 3 (2003): 220-233.

¹⁸ Na'ilah Suad Nasir & Geoffrey B. Saxe, “Ethnic and Academic Identities: A Cultural Practice Perspective on Emerging Tensions and Their Management in the Lives of Minority Students,” *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 5 (June 2003): 14-18.

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participants in the school's Afro-centric program for Black students, Kuumba (a pseudonym for the program). The program consists of a classroom portion where students spend one period of their six period school days in a setting that discusses race, history, identity, and literature through an Afro-centric lens. In the 2021 Spring semester, Kuumba students conversed about African folktales, washing of African and Black folks from history, Alicia Keys and Amanda Gorman performing at the Super Bowl, the January 6 insurrection on the Capitol, the murder of Jacob Blake, and the genius of Black historical figures. Aiming to amplify Black voices and Black thoughts in the classroom and in the community, Kuumba serves as an environment unique to most schooling spaces – an aspect that both I and the reader must keep in mind considering that I recruited Black mixed student interviewees from this program.

This study consisted of two semi-structured one-on-one interviews with two sixth grade Black mixed race girls in Kuumba. Using Professor Karen Staller's methods on deconstructing interview data through *in vivo* codes and multiple rounds of coding analysis,¹⁹ my methodology was kindred with newly burgeoning Black girlhood studies: I intentionally center the experiences of Black mixed race girls, a group of understudied folks, through their own words to uplift their voices. As scholar Samy Alim explains that teachers must “begin helping

their students envision the way things can be,”²⁰ my interview questions ask how girls feel, what girls think, and how girls learn in Kuumba and at their middle school. The questions intended to find how the girls perform their identities (what they do), how girls participate in their identities (who/what communities the girls interact with), and how girls see their Blackness, mixedness, and femininity in schools through their narratives.²¹

Sims & Njaka²² state that Black mixed race people find themselves more constrained in identity categorization due to histories of enslavement and enslavement's reverberations through interpersonal action policies pertaining to race. Therefore, due to muddled histories between Blackness and femininity, every Black mixed girl may experience Blackness and forms of national haunting differently. The sample of these two Black mixed girls, Alecia and Georgia (both pseudonyms), means to examine this phenomenon among those who otherwise live in the same geographic space (the San Francisco Bay Area) and experience the same current educational context (Kuumba and their school).

After transcribing each interview, I went through initial line-by-line and *in vivo* coding, coding important parts of each line and noting the “implicit meanings [of commonly used terms and phrases] and attend to how [the participants] construct and act upon these meanings.”²³ With this initial

¹⁹ Karen Staller, “Epistemological Boot Camp: The Politics of Science and What Every Qualitative Researcher Needs to Know to Survive in the Academy,” *Qualitative Social Work* 12, no. 4 (June 2012): 395-413.

²⁰ Samy Alim, “Critical Hip-Hop Language Pedagogies: Combat, Consciousness, and the Cultural Politics of Communication,” *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education* 6, no. 2 (December 2007): 161-176.

²¹ Maisie E. Gholson & Charles E. Wilkes, “(Mis) Taken Identities: Reclaiming Identities of the ‘Collective Black’ in Mathematics Education Research *Fall 2023, Vol. 15, Issue 2*

through an Exercise in Black Specificity,” *Review of Research in Education* 4, no. 1 (June 2017): 233-247.

²² Jennifer Patrice Sims & Chinelo L. Njaka, *Mixed-Race in the US and UK: Comparing the Past, Present, and Future* (United Kingdom: Emerald Press, 2020), 123.

²³ Kathy Charmaz, (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 55.

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coding of interviews conducted, I then engaged in focused coding of the interviews, comparing incidents and codes to each other and highlighting connections and overarching themes that arose in singular interviews and in both the girls' interviews. In this way, I surfaced three themes that weaved throughout the words and stories shared by Alecia and Georgia.

FINDINGS

Alecia, 11, and Georgia, 12, are both sixth graders enrolled in the Kuumba class. For Osborne (a pseudonym), director of Kuumba, the program gives students a space to learn about histories traditionally overlooked in schooling and “to build [their] own identity.”²⁴ Alecia, who identifies as Black, Chinese, and Iranian, and Georgia, who identifies as mixed race, both express building positive understandings of their Black histories through Kuumba. Though both girls only know of Kuumba and their middle school through the COVID-19 context of online schooling, Alecia and Georgia both appreciate Osborne's purposely “co-gendered” elective in their school schedule. Our discussions revolved around the fluid, yet stark separation, between past and present. Past and present intertwined with each other – the girls' ideas on their racial backgrounds evolved into their sense of self, and those senses of self spurred their thoughts on looking toward futures with lessened (but not eradicated) racism.

ALECIA: SCIENTIST, TECHNOLOGIST, ENGINEER, MATHEMATICIAN

One of the first statements that Alecia said in our interview was that power, privilege, and racism were like math: “if you never learn math, you won't understand.” Similarly, if we never learn about power, privilege, and racism, we will never

understand our status on the social hierarchy. Without always sporting the words to explain her examinations on her positioning in social systems, she recognized the necessity of schools in developing this vocabulary. When talking about an article I provided for our interview in which a mother intentionally educated her daughters on race, Alecia smiled and related the mother's teaching on race to her own schooling experiences.

ALECIA: I think that's good and the kids will learn a lot. And I think the mom is really great because she's teaching her kids early so that they'll learn a lot.

AUTHOR: And learn a lot about what do you think?

ALECIA: Learn a lot about their history and stuff, like if they say—if you're in a class and the teacher says, “In history—this black person was a famous singer,” they wouldn't really ment[ion] – like during unfair times – they wouldn't really mention anything more about it. They wouldn't say—explain the unfair times more, and I think this mom is explaining it really well.²⁵

Alecia realizes that schools, including her own, emphasize an individual much more than that person's history, that person's present, and that person's struggles. More poignantly, school seems to do so for people who lived in “unfair” times. Alecia puts “unfair times” – namely segregation and slavery – as something of the past; she states later that unfairness still occurs today, but this *time of “unfairness”* lives behind her. Putting words to this unfairness and this past arose because of her enrollment in Kuumba. Kuumba provides a classroom space for Alecia to speak and learn about Blackness, power, privilege, and racism in an honest and empowering manner. She says: “I feel like

²⁴ Osborne [pseud.], recorded conversation with author, March 16, 2021.

²⁵ Alecia [pseud.], interview by author, March 31, 2021.

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we're understanding why white people would want to bury our history. And since they did already bury our history so well, a lot of those people that we're learning in Kuumba, I don't think I would've ever learned without being in Kuumba."²⁶ Without Kuumba, the names of Black historical figures, and specifically Black women in history, would never be known.

"Her" (Black) history is not educated in the home, so she serves as a teacher for her family: "I get to educate my family, too, because they also don't know much about Black people in history."²⁷ Like she verbalized earlier, her past has been buried by white systems and shielded from even her parents. Without the intervention of an intentionally Afro-centric program, neither she nor her family would build upon this knowledge of themselves. This knowledge (or as she says, not being "clueless") builds confidence.

While she learns about her (Black) history in school, students have also "bothered"²⁸ her because her Iranian heritage—a reason why she may look to family for her main sources of confidence. She learned (or had to learn) to stand up for herself and believe in herself despite what (people at) school said about her racial and gender identities. Through her family, she can "believe whatever they say" and through them she cements her sense of self, even when she serves as the teacher.²⁹ Further, Alecia had to learn how to perform herself as uniquely her, even when classmates questioned her racial identity or "bothered" her for being Iranian or speaking Farsi. Because of this, she finds community in those who accept her for "who she is" and in learning new things. Learning about her identities delivers confidence and power, and confidence and

power brings her to understanding her identities.

Kuumba, the class where she learns about Blackness wholly and positively, the class where she openly analyzes current events (opposed to her family that "does not let her read the news"), the class where she "learns something new every day," anchors her confidence and bolsters her intelligence about the world and about "who she is" — about her Black racial history.³⁰

GEORGIA: AERIAL ARTIST, DANCER, PERFORMER

Like Alecia, Georgia pinpoints her education about Blackness to Kuumba. Because of being mixed race, she "never really actually talked about a lot of those things [i.e., what it means to be Black in the US] with [her] family."³¹ Her (Black, white, and Mexican) mixedness contributes to her lack of knowledge surrounding "part of" her history, but school also played a heavy hand in a hindrance to learning her racial pasts: "When [schooling, specifically elementary school,] talked about African Americans they only really taught about the slavery part, and it was like—I guess, sort of painted the image that was—that's all that African Americans did and went through."³² School, before Kuumba, taught about Blackness within a lens of deficit, as a racial category and as a people who offered no historical contribution. Blackness served as a trait that was synonymous with inhumanity. This resulted in Georgia feeling at a deficit in knowing about "part of" herself. Her understanding of Black histories and Black folks changed through Kuumba. Georgia states: "When you think of African Americans, [slavery is] not all you should think about. They made some

²⁶ Alecia [pseud.], interview by author, March 31, 2021.

²⁷ Alecia [pseud.], March 31, 2021.

²⁸ Alecia [pseud.], March 31, 2021.

²⁹ Alecia [pseud.], March 31, 2021.

³⁰ Alecia [pseud.], March 31, 2021.

³¹ Georgia [pseud.], interview by author, April 8, 2021.

³² Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

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of the first things that we use in our everyday lives. So it's just—it's not just slavery. And now I know that because in elementary school [slavery is] mostly all they talk when they talked about African Americans.”³³ Kuumba taught Georgia about the Harlem Renaissance and about people like Madam CJ Walker. Black success, Black artistry, and Black contributions to the present stand out as a relearning of Blackness and a new understanding of part of her racial identity. Learning about Blackness and anti-Blackness through Kuumba also teaches her how to spot “unfairness” and distinguish “fairness” from “unfairness.” Georgia defines fairness and unfairness, in this context, as overt racism, as she explained that “there's still racism, but it's better now because they don't separate Black people and white people anymore.”³⁴ As we conversed more about how schools teach history, she references an “every” history.

AUTHOR: What kind of stories about history does your middle school tell you?

GEORGIA: Well, about, every—what do you mean? Every history?

AUTHOR: Yeah, I guess like every history or specific history, if you feel like you talk more about a specific history?

GEORGIA: Well in history we talk about—right now where we left off, we were talking about ... Ancient Egyptians and stuff. And then, in Kuumba, we're talking about how Madam CJ Walker, she's like, the queen of hair products – she made hair products, stuff like that.³⁵

Though I did not intend to invoke a separation of an “every” and a “specific” history, Georgia and I understood each other. “Specific” histories are like those taught in Kuumba, histories that fail to land in a traditional history class. “Specific” histories, like Black histories, are othered from

normative teachings of “every” history, and without programs to teach “specific” histories, those stories are lost. As a mixed race person, Georgia views her place in both “specific” and “every” histories, seeing her family's past in “everything” – in “both sides” of curriculum, of history. Though she can see versions of her pasts in school, schools do not necessarily see herself in history. Her (Black) mixedness invites being only partially seen, being unseen as who she is, and being mis-seen by others. This leads her to question others' racial perceptions: “I'm three different races. But does that mean I have to act a certain way? Because I'm Black, white, and Mexican? Because what if I'm around certain people, and they expect me to act some type of way because of my race?”³⁶ Despite these fears, she explains that she has not experienced people imparting racial characterizations onto her, and her participation in communities that accept her for “the way she is” shines as most important for her selfhood.

Dancing allows Georgia to feel good about herself, and like dance, aerial arts require her to learn “cool” stunts. Both sports budget time with friends into her schedule, both sports allow her to perform as an artist and within her identity all while being “pretty” – expressing femininity. Feeling pretty is a source of confidence for her, and this feeling is sourced outside of herself. When she does stunts in aerial, when she gets to perform, when she spends time with her friends, she feels more confident. Having a command on current events and informing her friends on issues also contribute to her feeling proud and powerful. Kuumba teaches these issues of race and privilege with honesty for her, and the connection of the past, the current moment, and even the future salience due to Kuumba.

³³ Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

³⁴ Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

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³⁵ Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

³⁶ Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

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AUTHOR: Do you think your relationship with [your] teachers or even with your relationship with the school itself would affect your future?

GEORGIA: Yeah. Because of my Kuumba class, I think that I learned a lot more. I think in the future, maybe I can like try making a difference about that. And now that I know more, I can really, say more about it – about racism and just everything Black people have contributed, too.³⁷

Georgia wants to make a change for the better because of Kuumba, because of her knowing more about her Blackness, because of her re-/un-learning of all histories, because (albeit imperfect) she sees parts of herself reflected positively in school. She feels pride in herself, in “where she comes from,” in who she is.³⁸ When asked how she feels about being mixed, without skipping a beat, she said, “It makes me feel good knowing that I’m a part of something big. It’s not just bad things it’s really good things being Black – half Black.”³⁹ Her Blackness illuminates a hope for a future where (her) Blackness continues to contribute to a wealth of greatness.

EMERGING THEMES

Based on these two preliminary interviews, several themes arise: 1) thoughts of self are supported and understood through teachings on race and racism, 2) communities that build confidence can be developed in school but are not specific to school, and 3) learning about Black history facilitates wanting to “change the world.” These themes integrate a connectivity of time, linking pasts, presents, and future.

Pasts: Teaching Race and Racism

Knowing Black people, Black creations, and structures/organizations that inhibited Black invention—bringing these reverberations of the past into their present—allowed both Alecia and Georgia to “feel good”⁴⁰ (about their Blackness and their selves) even in the midst of what they call “what’s going on”⁴¹ (i.e., police brutality and televised violence against Black folks). Their learning histories both good and bad drives them in the present to create a better future. Black historical figures may not live to this day, but both girls using the possessive “(part of) my”⁴² and “our”⁴³ when describing Black histories illustrates their taking an ownership of the legac(ies) that Black figures contribute.

Further, the figures who stuck out to both Alecia and Georgia were Black women (Annie Turnbo Malone and Madam CJ Walker), almost as if they implicitly felt an *unseeing* of Black femininity and marked the Black women taught in Kuumba as important. As Osborne also noticed when teaching about Black women during Women’s History Month, he saw “female students—asking more questions” and participating much more in class when learning about Black femmes.⁴⁴ Pointing out Black women implies the girls *seeing* parts of themselves that they may not have seen before, as if they saw not just Black contribution, but also otherwise unseen Black feminine contribution as part of their legacy.

The Present: Confidence and Community in COVID

Seeing modern representations of themselves may have been important to both girls, but they also acknowledge that racism is bigger than representation. When talking about representation, Georgia and I talked

³⁷ Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

³⁸ Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

³⁹ Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

⁴⁰ Alecia [pseud.], March 31, 2021.

⁴¹ Alecia [pseud.], March 31, 2021.

⁴² Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

⁴³ Alecia [pseud.], March 31, 2021.

⁴⁴ Osborne [pseud.], March 16, 2021.

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about the media, and Disney princesses became an example of small actions toward representation not effectively demolishing the larger beast.

GEORGIA: I guess it's helpful to see some Black princesses, but it'll still happen either way.

AUTHOR: And by it—what do you mean “it” would happen?

GEORGIA: Racism.⁴⁵

Georgia insinuates that racism is a larger system of oppression. Georgia also notes how her skin tone – how colorism – plays into this racism when talking about harm exacted onto darker-skinned Black folks more often than lighter-skinned folks. Alecia adds to this idea by determining that some people “don't really support Black people” while also using “shootings” and “violence” as evidence to her point.⁴⁶ Performance and others' understandings of their identities come into play for their immediate safety, though others' understandings may not always affect their self-worth.

For Georgia, performance of “prettiness” and “coolness” that aligns with femininity bolsters her sense of self. Alecia informs her performance of self through her parents, her sister, and her family—a community in which she participates. (Lack of) depictions of self lead both girls to participate closely with those who make them feel whole: family members, friends, teachers. Teachers who teach Blackness emphasize to both girls that they, presently, are part of “something bigger,” and that they construct and re-/deconstruct the systems and structures around them.

Alecia relates struggle of dismantling systems to events she knows from her lifetime: “That'd be kind of like voting for the president. It'd be kind of like that except for

the whole world voting.” She harkens upon her knowledge of the 2016 US presidential election to her point of the difficulty of unifying peoples, but by stating this, she also raises her own temporally contextual understandings of history, politics, and self. Her schooling, Georgia's schooling, and their communities are growing up in a time of visible division after the 2016 US presidential election, 2020 revolutionary actions, and by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The contexts of election cycles, COVID-19, uprisings in the names of Black lives all find a way into their Kuumba classroom, and they can talk about these issues and the “unfairness” they witness. Kuumba supports them in developing that handle on current events that heightens their confidence and fuels them to envision more “fair” futures.

Future(s): Applying History to Changing the World

Although a Black person does not live forever, they leave a legacy within Blackness. Both girls saw Black historical figures as “them,” as others, as different from their selves, even when talking about Black women they learned about. The “them” of Black folks from the past was distinguished from their talking about “(part of) my”⁴⁷ or “our”⁴⁸ history. Blackness is a constant for both girls as it lives in the present and the bodies we inhabit. Black is natural and justified and makes up (parts of) their beings. In this way Alecia and Georgia chip away at an idea of the Black as anachronistic. For these Black mixed girls, the Black exists in all times, propels past to future, and therefore may even transcend space-times.

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

These two interviews serve as preliminary research for a much larger study and discussion. Alecia and Georgia both saw

⁴⁵ Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

⁴⁶ Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

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⁴⁷ Georgia [pseud.], April 8, 2021.

⁴⁸ Alecia [pseud.], March 31, 2021.

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school as a space that could bolster their confidence, even if they did not see representations of themselves, and even if schools did not see them. Carved into the school day, Kuumba provided an education that expanded the girls' vocabularies to talk about Black pasts, Black present, and ideas of Black futures. Their understanding of Blackness through Kuumba led them to think that schools should teach about race. With a level voice, Georgia uttered that change "has to start somewhere,"⁴⁹ and schools would be a good starting point. Nonetheless, she knows that schools are not the end-all-be-all.

Just as there are spaces much closer to her heart that inform her identities and paint feminine ("pretty"), paint mixed race, paint Black, there are spaces outside of the school that serve as more important for people to critically think about race and racism. Georgia being only partially seen and her noticing Black femmes being unseen exhibits an inability to fully rely on schools for identity development. Her and Alecia's Black mixedness unveils the imperfections of standard education on teaching race and gender, but they still believe that schools can be a place to begin a creation of "fairness" for everyone in the world.

For Future Study

Due to COVID-19, recruitment for interviews grew difficult. Even after being paired with the Kuumba program, recruitment remained trying due to the small number of Black mixed girls in the program and because of challenges and pressures faced by families in the midst of the pandemic. Future research, hopefully, will not be compounded by these factors and can include a much larger pool of girls. Further, two one hour and thirty minute interviews were not nearly long enough to touch upon all

aspects of who they conceptualize themselves to be. Higher frequency of interviews with a pool of about five participants, a more ethnographic study of one or two girls, or more directed questions with girls a few years older can all contribute to the depth of this research.

The complication of mixedness lends itself to further questions: Georgia saw pasts in two different "sides" of curriculum, she saw in binaries that she lived within and outside, she saw histories she was part of portrayed differently depending on the class environment. Does her whiteness, and her "looking white," lead her to question how people may perceive her? May this lead her to identifying as mixed race whereas Alecia's mixedness within three racial/ethnic minority groups may contribute to her more protean view⁵⁰ of racial identity?

Alecia's Blackness, Chineseness, and Italianness all worked independently and cohesively – she saw how each aspect of her racial identity experienced discrimination, and she felt power through each of those identities and through all of those identities as one. Is this because of her tight bonds with her family members? Georgia saw her histories opposed in curriculum. Could their varying family structures play a part in their racial identification? How much more specifically does girlhood develop within them or get developed for them? More research must be conducted to make claims to these speculations. Though this research sought to find implications for Blackness through Black mixed experiences, many more questions arise during this short – and unfinished – project.

CONCLUSION

Alecia and Georgia take pride in their femininity and their Black mixedness. Their

⁴⁹ Alecia [pseud.], March 31, 2021.

⁵⁰ Kerry Ann Rockquemore & David L. Brunson, *Beyond Black: Biracial Identity in America* (2nd ed.) (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008), 46.

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identities bring them confidence and power, and confidence and power bring them to understanding their identities. They recognize that they are here, in the present, but also part of something bigger, part of something that is continuing to be constructed and re-/de-constructed. They create communities that empower them despite their racial identities, that see them, and those communities build their confidence which fuels them to make more “fair” futures. Without learning their Black history, though, this fuel

may not have found a spark. As both girls noted, Kuumba provides a new perspective on Blackness that has not been taught to them before in schools. Further, both girls agree that schools should teach about race, racism, and privilege in their curricula. Both for their own thoughts on self and for their larger school communities, programs like Kuumba could serve as not only educational spaces, but affinity spaces, allowing people to find pride in all facets of their identities.

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