

**THE ATTAINMENT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL WITH ADOLESCENT GIRLS LIVING AT  
THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND POVERTY IN A COMMUNITY-BASED  
PEDAGOGICAL SPACE KNOWN AS AUNTIE'S PLACE**

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of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation  
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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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### **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this body of work to my mother, Verna Laboy, whose constant belief in me facilitated this great accomplishment. Mom, thanks for believing that I could have the world. It is important to highlight my husband. Collectively we have achieved this great accomplishment. Thank you Herman for being my rock. To my brother and sisters: Nicole McGruder, LaShai Hamilton, Shawn Harris, who have been pillars of support during this process. To my son, Herman Clifton IV, and daughters, Amari, Serenity and Adrian, whose patience and unwavering support of their mother has been stoic. To my friend Kia King, who passed a way the day I defended my comprehensive exam. You were not able to see this process through to the finish, but you were one of my biggest cheerleaders in this effort. To Pam Ingram and the G.I.R.L.S Group movement. This piece would not have life without your breath, your time, and commitment to the struggle. Thank you for trusting me in your space with your girls. To God, for your wisdom and your direction throughout my life. Thank you for giving me the courage to live, pray and write.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Rationale

“We live in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world where so many girls find themselves in the middle of a blistering civil war. And where Black and Brown girls find themselves battling the same violence Black and Brown boys’ battle, but so far off screen of humanity that nobody ever reports all the kinds of harm being done to them quietly in the home sometimes, publically in the school system sometimes, loudly in the streets sometimes. Black girls are living and fighting in a modern-day civil war with our America the Beautiful.”

–Dr. Nikky Finney, Vanderbilt Divinity School 2015 Cole Lecture

Poverty in America is overwhelmingly misunderstood, with little distinction between temporary or relative poverty and absolute poverty that is not only long term, but persistent. (Partee, 2012). The poverty rate in the United States is at 23%, one of the highest rates of poverty in the developed world according to the 2012 U.S. Census Bureau. Many of the U.S. poor do not have enough income to afford basic necessities needed to maintain a healthy lifestyle. With income below the poverty line, households lack necessary income to maintain a nutritious diet, or afford decent housing, or adequate medical care (Partee, 2012). Absolute poverty can be characterized as areas of high unemployment, or low wages, high rates of crime, high rates of drug abuse, and low high school graduation rates. According to Partee (2012), “absolute poverty is concentrated geographically and racially in the United States. In Appalachia and the Dakotas it is White, in the western part of the country it is Hispanic, and in the eastern urban areas it is Black” (p.62). The United States also has one of the highest percentages of

poverty. What is more shameful, is that according to the Center for Children in Poverty, Black children tend to live in poverty more than any other group. 38% of Black children and 37% of Black females ages 15 to 24 live in poverty. This means that almost 40% of adolescent Black females live in households where basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter cannot be met. Black females, like other groups living in absolute poverty, are not visible to most Americans that experience temporary, relative poverty. This issue was at the center of Dr. Nikky Finney's (2015) lecture, Black girls are "so far off the screen of humanity" for anyone to hear their cries for help.

In academia, there is continuous literature addressing the existence of relative poverty. It has been researched, written, discussed in politics and in the general public, and has been picked up by social scientists (Partee, 2012). However, when it comes to Black females in absolute poverty and her state of mind-her voice, literature is limited. This dissertation will magnify the voices and lived experiences of Black girls, revealing the social capital and social networks behind their resilience. In order to gain an understanding of the vitality of this research, I will first highlight the risk of living at the intersection of race and poverty. I will then present a dialogue on empirical literature that supports the work done in community-based pedagogical spaces which serve families and youth at this intersection. Despite poverty and its negative effects on our Black girls, there are exceptions to the statistics that report Black girls fail and fall through the cracks of this intersection. There are Black girls refusing to fall victim to the risk factors. This study will highlight such Black adolescent girls who are thriving with determination and rising above the isms society puts on them, succeeded in and out of school with greatness as their destiny. Thanks to the dedication of Auntie's Place, a community-based pedagogical space that supports these Black girls through love and the social resources they need to succeed.

Collins (2015) describes the intersection of race and poverty as the most dangerous place for a Black girl in America to live. One such reality is the negative messages which come from various places conflicting with the positive influences in some Black girls' lives. Negative messaging comes through various loop holes including social media, the entertainment industry and even the very textbooks Black, Brown and poor girls read. Each source telling Black girls they are not white enough, smart enough, or skinny enough to matter. I raise the same question as Partee (2012):

How is a young poor Black girl to reconcile her reality to that of the visible consumption-lavishing lifestyle the media portrays?... Where are they to turn when a generation of unemployment or underemployment has been the characteristic of their households throughout their young lives? When they have not in large measure seen personal success by education and employment, how are they to understand the value of schooling? When American society values material goods to determine people's worth and achievements, why are young Black girls criticized for desiring external possessions? (p. 70).

It is at this intersection where health and mental health care are also limited. This intersection denies and/or delays access to high quality early childcare, including home visitations, Head Start learning, preschool, and kindergarten (Collins, 2015). The welfare system at this intersection is overburdened while the schools are failing more poor Black girls academically, yet exceeding in their harsh, zero tolerance discipline policies which too often push poor Black girls out of school and into juvenile detention and adult prison institutions (Collins, 2015). In her work Richardson (2002) studies females growing up in these less insulated environments. She questions what it means for the future of Black girls if America's focus is not on empowering

Black lives but perpetuating the status quo. Collins (2015) too illustrates why now is the time to act and create viable ways to save our poor Black girls:

When nearly two in five Black children are poor; when Black babies are more than twice as likely as White babies to die before their first birthdays and Black children are twice as likely as White children to die before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays; when more than 80 percent of fourth and eighth grade Black public school students cannot read or compute at grade level; when a Black public school student is suspended every four seconds of the school day and a Black child is arrested every 68 seconds; and when gun violence is the leading cause of death among Black children ages 1– 19 (p. xxi), then you know now is the time to take action.

We are in a state of emergency, because these are our children, not theirs. It is critical that we push back and make our Black, Brown and poor girls' lives our top priority.

There is no arguing the fact that Black boys and Black men are an endangered species in America, but Black girls are at risk of endangerment as well. The suspension rate of Black females is one example. "Black girls are suspended from school at higher rates than girls of any other race or ethnicity and at higher rates than most boys" (Collins, 2015, p. xii). Black girls, or Black seeds, cannot grow into leaders without the watering of a rich education. When it comes to the juvenile system, girls are populating the system faster than boys (Collins, 2015). What is worse is almost three quarters of girls in the juvenile system have been sexually or physically abused (Harris, 2012). Many are arrested for nonviolent offenses which are usually linked to abuse and neglect. Truancy, running away, alcohol or substance use is at the top. This is alarming given that adolescent Black girls' risk of HIV infection is more than quadruple that of White teens (Wesley, 2015). Once these girls are arrested they are often even more at risk

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because they are often placed in detention facilities without proper health, mental health, or educational support. This becomes the reality for far too many poor Black girls, but there are exceptions to this vicious cycle of poor Black girls failing and falling in the cracks of the intersection of race and poverty. There are Black girls thriving at this intersection. Like a rose out of concrete they are surviving through the trenches of a broken society and finding success in and out of school. It is because of this reality that I am inspired to reveal the Black adolescent girls living in central Missouri who are living beyond their circumstances and living out their God-given purpose in spite of the intersection they live in. Through the participation in a community-based pedagogical space known as “Auntie’s Place” which fosters loving relationships, there are Black girls from poverty who are climbing out of absolute poverty and moving forward toward a brighter future, equipped with the faith and social capital needed to survive.

### **Intention**

The purpose of this inquiry is to test the assumptions I have made based on my life growing up at the race and poverty intersection. Through my life circumstances I sought to understand the circumstances of five adolescent Black girls. I had a particular interest in their resilience, leadership and success. In this case study I introduce you to five adolescent girls living at the intersection of race and poverty who are thriving in spite of their situations. By studying their literacy practices and the life choices that have led to their success, or their ability to rise above a society who does not favor their existence, and make a new name for themselves and their future, we gain a better understanding of how to help students living in struggle succeed. The Black adolescent girls in this study are linked to a community-based pedagogical space, Auntie’s Place, led by” Auntie” and her beloved husband “Poppi.” They are responsible

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for the stability and social capital driving the participants' success. By studying what Auntie and Poppi do and how they do it, the field of teacher education and community-based-pedagogical teaching practices will be enhanced so that all students, regardless of race, class, ethnicity, and gender have opportunities to live out their God-given purpose. It is important to note that Auntie's Place builds its' foundation on Biblical principles. With love as the universal language, all children from all backgrounds, identities and religions are welcome to attend. For example, I observed several Muslim children participating in the tutoring and games at Auntie's Place as well as eating the meals served there. Though they may not attend the biblical study groups, such as G.I.R.L.S. Group, they find that Auntie's Place is an inclusive space where they feel welcome to partake in the love, the play, the food, and particular learning experiences that take place there. Through my findings I will show a) the practices of these Black girls that cause them to be successful, and b) the practices of a community-based space, known as Auntie's Place, which is the root of the participants' success. Through this community-based pedagogical space I will examine on what takes place in the space and how Black girls' inner worth, purpose and academic achievements are nourished. Drawing from qualitative semi-structured interviews, field notes, documents, and participatory observation, I illustrate how faith, literacy and social capital are keys to the success of Black girls at the race and poverty intersection. Thus, using social capital theory, as described by Lin (1999, 2000), to analyze and organize this study's findings and discussion, I seek to answer the following question regarding the relationships between the participants' practices and their success:

*How do Black adolescent girls find success at the intersection of race and poverty?*

*a) What structures and strategies are in place at Auntie's Place that allow Black adolescent girls to develop positive social capital?*

*b) What types of social networks did the participants develop through their participation in Auntie's House?*

*c) What outcomes were evident as a result of these networks?*

Success for Black adolescent girls can be defined as Black girls seeing themselves the way God sees them and knowing their worth. It means living out one's true purpose without being bound by the restrictions made by the White supremacist mindset. Success means gaining access to positions of influence and power. The questions above will be answered first highlighting the problems Black girls face living at the intersection of race and poverty. These risks include, but are not limited to, a lack of early head start, limited health care and an increased suspension and drop-out rate. What follows in chapter two is an introduction of the study's theoretical foundation. Both social capital theory (Lin, 1999, 2000,2001) and community-based pedagogy (Douglas and Peck, 2013) ground this work. The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value. Black girls with positive and resourceful social networks gain access to advantageous experiences and opportunities that they otherwise would not be exposed to. Community-based pedagogical spaces are learning spaces in the community. In these spaces Black girls gain access to funds of information and knowledge. Social capital can be attained in community-based pedagogical spaces. This correlation will be elaborated on further in the chapter that come. This theory provides a window into capturing the story behind the success of five Black girls living at the intersection of race and poverty. Woven into the tapestry of the theoretical framework is a literature review in chapter two highlighting community spaces that serve underprivileged populations, providing them with the social capital they need to survive.

My goal through the literature review is for readers to learn from community-based pedagogical spaces who serve youth who are often seen through the window of deficits and statistics. These community based-spaces are important to highlight because they provide youth with certain social capital vital to their success. Following the literature review will be an introduction of the methods and procedures of the case study beginning in chapter three. Auntie's Place is an after school ministry that locates itself as an out-of-school, out-of-church space spreading the love of God to children in unconventional ways. These ways of loving will be examined further in chapters four and five where descriptions of the data findings are composed.

### **The Risk Associated with Trauma**

Black adolescent girls who reside at the intersection of race and poverty have limited access to the world beyond the four corners of their neighborhood. Strategically so, many Black girls do not see leaders within the four corners of their world or in the four walls of their schools that look like them. Because of this fact, community-based pedagogical spaces are vital in these disserted areas because Black girls at this intersection are significantly exposed to traumatic stressors than children of other groups. Not every Black girl is a victim of poverty, has limited access, poor academic proficiency, few employment opportunities or a life with few successes. Yet, Frazier (2011) suggests:

Most Black girls live with some kind of trauma every day. Divorced parents, single parents, missing- in-action fathers, death and loss, gender victimization, unreported molestation, witness to domestic and street violence, relational aggression, mental and emotional abuse, "living while Black", alcoholism, drugs, gangs, guns, or chronic

sickness of a loved one. Lack of control over the adults and situations in a young girl's life can be traumatic (p. 5).

When trauma goes unresolved it can produce the negative and aggressive behavior. Adolescents in particular have three developmental phases, for an adolescent girl experiencing trauma, these stages can become distorted or prolonged. Researchers define the three phases with different age categories: ages 9 to 12 as phase one, ages 13 to 16 as phase two, and ages 17 to 22 years as late adolescence. There are tasks in an adolescent's development that need to be accomplished successfully in order to be healthy (Harris, 2015). These include:

- i) Acceptance of and comfort with one's body image
- ii) Internalization of sexual identity and role
- iii) Personal value system Sense of productivity
- iv.) Sense of independence (Harris, 2015, p. 5).

In the early phase of development, the adolescent is a concrete thinker who does not have an understanding of consequence. At this phase, teenagers make careless decisions and are easily influenced by people around them. The middle phase comes with adolescents who are prone to experiment. Teenagers at this phase seek the opinion of their peers and have the ability to think abstractly. Embarking on new adventures is not uncommon for this group. With a greater understanding of consequences, teens at this stage are mainly concerned with fitting in with a group. Gaining a sense of individuality comes with the last phase of adolescents. These teens are capable of anticipating the consequences of his or her behavior, and problem solve. For an adolescent living at the intersection of race and poverty these phases are complicated by other risk factors, making life difficult to balance alone, hence the need of community-spaces that can fill in the gaps and support adolescents during this difficult and trying time.

## **HIV/AIDS**

Black adolescent girls at the intersection of race and poverty in the United States are in a state of emergency. There are many risk factors to living in such an environment. Because of the strategic exclusion of positive resources and information, adolescents fall into the trap brought on by miseducation and misguidance that leads to ignorance. Because of this fact, society, not the youth, are to blame for the issues that arise in such intersections. According to U.S. statistics, African Americans have a greater expectancy of HIV than any other racial groups, so that puts Black adolescent girls at higher risk of infection. The rate of HIV/AIDS diagnosis for Black women was more than 19 times that of White women in 2011 (Harris, 2015). HIV is an illness that completely changes a person's life, especially that of an adolescent. For a teenager, life is already challenging, dealing with an illness such as HIV on top of the everyday stress is heartbreaking. For an adolescent with HIV, balancing the phases described above on top of keeping their condition a secret and/or dealing with the side effects of the medication, is overwhelming. Because there is no real cure for HIV at this time, prevention and awareness initiatives are critical for adolescents. The benefits of initiatives toward prevention far outweigh the cost, especially since "HIV prevention programs have the ability to build self-esteem, foster maturity, and nurture responsibility among adolescent Black girls" (Wesley, 2015, p. 3). It is overwhelming to think about the risk adolescent Black girls face when they become sexually active, but their risks do not stop there.

## **Physical Health**

Physical and mental health issues are also prevalent among Black girls at the intersection of race and poverty. Nationally, obesity is a major concern. The rise in the number of adolescents who are overweight is becoming a growing concern for health care professionals. Current

research found that 15.2% of U.S. adolescents are overweight (YRBS, 2012). Unfortunately, the percentage is much higher with African American adolescent females (19.6%) than with Hispanic females (18.0%) or White females (13.8%). When it comes to the cause of such disproportionality, health care professionals and other researchers argue that it may be the complex relationship between genetic and environmental factors (Adkins, Sherwood, Story & Davis, 2004). Most research has focused on exploring environmental factors that may contribute to obesity. For example, Hess-Biber, Howling, Leavy & Lovejoy (2004) examined cultural attitudes toward body weight and body image. They concluded that African American adolescent females express more positive attitudes about having a heavier body weight as compared to their White female counterparts.

**Table 2.1.**  
**Prevalence of obesity among girls age 12– 19 years, by race and ethnicity, United States 1988– 1994 and 2009– 2010**

	1988– 1994	2009– 2010
<b>White</b>	8.9%	14.7 %
<b>Black</b>	16.3 %	24.8%
<b>Latina</b>	13.4%	18.6%

**Source: Centers for Disease Control National Center for Health Statistics/National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey III.**

Furthermore, in comparison to White adolescent females, African American adolescent females are less likely to describe themselves as being overweight (YRBS, 2012). Both African American and White adolescent females express a desire to be thinner, yet African American adolescent females are more likely to see their bodies in a positive light regardless of how heavy

they are. Others have explored physical activity levels and found that African American adolescent females are less likely to take part in physical activity than adolescents from other racial and ethnic groups. Data from the YRBS (2012) indicate that 26% of African American adolescent females do not participate in 60 minutes of daily physical activity, while 13% of White females and 21% of Hispanic females do not. McNutt et al. (1997) focused on healthy eating habits and observed that African American adolescent females in comparison to White adolescent females and Hispanic adolescent females are less likely to engage in healthy eating and less likely to make healthy eating choices. Because of this reality, health care professionals and researchers have developed intervention programs specifically targeting African American adolescent females. These unique programs have different goals and target different behaviors. For example, there are programs that target adolescents and focus on encouraging healthy eating and encouraging exercise. One such program is Butterfly Girls (see Thompson et al., 2013 for a description of the program). Black Girls Run is a grassroots program similar to Butterfly girls designed to promote physical activity for African American adolescent females. There are also programs that are inclusive of the adolescent and their families. They provide the family with information on healthy eating, physical activity, and ways to incorporate the changes into the family lifestyle. Participation in programs like these result in short-term weight loss for the adolescents (Harris in Collins, 2015). Lastly, there are programs that are connected to ongoing community support programs for adolescents. One such program, Lively Ladies, is a ten-week after-school program with a specific focus on increasing the physical activity of African American females through mentoring, modeling, and reinforcement. About 45% of African American adolescent females participate in structured programs like those described above, but 55% of African American adolescent females attempt to lose weight on their own. Most African

American adolescent females skip meals and refraining from eating instead of taking diet pills, laxatives, or vomiting to lose weight (Harris in Collins, 2015).

### **Teenage Pregnancy**

In the United States material possessions matter more than Black girls' lives matter. Material possessions in the U.S. reflects one's economic status and successes. When people are poor they cannot compete with mass material consumption so they have babies. Partee (2012) suggests that:

The birthrate for young Black girls in poverty is a very rational choice given their realities. The young Black girl who does not graduate from high school is making a rational choice when graduating does not provide any tangible rewards. The young Black girl that does not hope for a different life from poverty is rational if that life seems unattainable (p. 71).

There are several reasons/stories behind the veil of teenage pregnancy. Being a Black girl at the intersection of race and poverty myself, the absence of my father caused me to look for love in all the wrong places. I was broken and insecure. Not knowing my worth caused me to feel I needed someone to complete me. This is the case for many Black girls at this intersection. Many come from broken homes or are the victims of false messaging thrown at them through the media. Therefore these hurting and confused Black girls lack the skills, resources and overall social capital to break the generational curse of teenage pregnancy. Again, I go back to the importance of community-based pedagogical spaces. If community learning spaces are placed at these intersections Black girls have a better chance to rise above their circumstances to see themselves as valuable assets to be used to better their communities. Table 2.2 gives information on the pregnancy rates for all U.S. adolescent females including information on pregnancy

outcomes from 2011. In general, the pregnancy rate for U.S. adolescent females has went down and the rate for African American adolescent females specifically has decreased by 51% from 1991 to 2009.

**Table 2.2. Pregnancy Outcomes by Ethnicity (2011)**

	<b>Pregnancy</b>	<b>Live Birth</b>	<b>Abortion</b>	<b>Fetal Lost</b>
<b>White, Non-Hispanic</b>	40	30	10	5
<b>Black, Non-Hispanic</b>	115	60	50	15
<b>Hispanic</b>	100	70	12	15

**Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**

The table also makes it clear that though African American adolescent females have the highest pregnancy rates, they do not have the highest live birth rates. Hispanic adolescent females have the highest live birth rates, while African American adolescent females have the highest abortion rates. This could be related to the lack of support and opportunity for Black girls living at this intersection.

### **Mental Health**

The mental health of adolescents has received mass attention in the media. This is partly due to the recent school shootings, mall shootings, and theater shootings and partly due to the realization and the acknowledgment that many families do not seek treatment because of the stigma around reporting mental health issues. There has been a recent push for a collective effort of politicians, researchers, and health care professionals to find ways to increase access to mental health care for adolescents and their families. Recent findings released by YRBS (2012) suggest

that African American females experience more episodes of sadness and depression in comparison to African American male adolescents. These mental health problems tend to co-exist with low self-esteem, sexual assault, experiences with community violence, and physical illnesses such as sickle-cell anemia and HIV/AIDS. While Black girls have some opportunities to keep them strong, the trauma they experience results in risky behaviors and the emotional functioning we see. Evidence suggests that the suicide rate among African American preteens and teens ages 10–14 has increased by 233% over the past fifteen years. African American adolescent females, in particular, expressed more suicidal thoughts than White adolescent females and African American adolescent males. Therefore, African American adolescent females are more likely than White adolescent females and African American adolescent males to make a suicide plan and more likely to have seriously considered a suicide attempt. Girls need more support emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. In addition to building on their strengths and increasing their resilience, Black adolescent girls' trauma needs to be addressed. It's the only way to fully place girls at promise instead of at-risk. More community-based spaces are needed where community women dialogue with adolescent Black girls and provide them with social capital that fosters their leadership in their communities.

### **Blaming the Victim**

Blaming the victim of these risk factors is not the solution. Many think that poor people are irrational thinkers, however, due to the factors that contribute to this social instability, such as disproportionate family income, the lack of quality schools, increased incidence of crime, and exposure to destructive media images, their choices are fairly reasonable. Black families in absolute poverty are among the most disadvantaged of the Black community. Many are forced to live as welfare dependents, lacking the skills to be employed, or become individuals that engage

in criminal activity. Americans most often believe that absolute persistent poverty is an “urban problem of poor Blacks and blame the poor Blacks for being poor” (Partee, 2012, p. 62).

Stereotypes about young Black females as welfare queens are espoused. In turn there is a lack of demand for public policy to address absolute poverty, economic inequality, or educational reform. Partee (2012) suggest that “the issues of poverty must be revisited by considering the structural forces that have perpetuated and exacerbated urban poverty over time” (p. 62). A formulation of strategies and policies need to be adopted so that households are uplifted out of poverty, not gravitationally pulled into poverty. Without the proper strategies and policies to uplift impoverished households, research will continue to suggest that obesity is the number one health concern for African American adolescent females, instead of racism and poverty.

Therefore intervention programs must be designed to take into account the cognitive and social development of adolescents and their attitudes toward weight based on their culture. Programs must also consider the barriers and challenges within particular environments (Collins, 2012). African American adolescent females are the fastest growing group of adolescents diagnosed with STIs and HIV/AIDS. This too will continue if research is not devoted to facing the factors and roots of the issues Black girls face. There are also few comprehensive studies devoted to providing rich information on the mental health challenges of African American adolescent females. Suicide is one major area lacking in research that identifies the precise factors that influence suicidal thoughts in African American adolescent females. Improving training for clinicians to identify suicidal behavior in African American adolescent females for example, could be one possible solution to counter this risk factor.

While the risk and barriers Black girls face at the intersection of race and poverty are great and overwhelming, they do not have to determine the outcome of their lives. This study

will reveal a well-kept secret Auntie's Place has and the key she uses to unlock doors no barrier or statistic can lock. This key is used to lock out the epidemics of poverty and racism, and unlock access to hope, knowledge, resources and a way out of poverty for Black girls. This key is one Auntie holds close to her heart. This key is spirituality and faith.

### **What is Spirituality Doing in a Place like Education?**

What is Spirituality in Education? Spirituality in education is education with purpose, education that is liberatory work, education that is emancipation... What is spirituality in education? Spirituality in education is spirituality that connects, education that is about building relationships between and across teachers and students, males and females, Others and Ourselves... (Dillard, Abdur-Rashad and Tyson, 2000, p. 447).

This quote encompasses everything Auntie's Place is. A place to liberate marginalized youth who stand in the shadows of adversity towering over them. Auntie's Place shares the word of God with children, opens their eyes to a bigger world through trips to universities, museums, restaurants. Children enter broken and leave emancipated. Auntie and her mentors build connections with the children that last forever. Children never forget the feeling that Auntie's Place provides them. Nothing compares to the warm meals, warm hugs, games and laughter that exist in Auntie's Place. There is nothing like the debates, disagreements and fights that end in a lesson of love. Auntie's Place is about relationship building and that is what spirituality rest on. A relationship first with the Divine, with God. Second a relationship with one self, knowing that they have a divine purpose and calling that no one else on earth can fulfill. They learn not to limit God and to accept the transformation he can make in their lives. Lastly, a relationship with life, from nature, to animals and humanity. Being a vessel of love in each area. It is really quite

simple. At Auntie's Place the aim is to filter out the dark things in Black girls' lives by replacing them with the light of lessons and experiences that break their unhealthy ways of knowing, or unknowing. One way light is brought to the girls is when Poppi brings in a cap and gown throughout the year for them to try on to see what they will look like *when* they graduate from college. Not *if* they graduate, but *when* they graduate from college. Spirituality is about breathing life into children who have experienced death, literally and metaphorically. Speaking into children's lives and making them feel like they matter and need to be here on this earth, is powerful. Because of its significance to the success of the Black girls participants, spirituality and social capital build the foundation of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Spending time as a mentor at Auntie's Place and building relationships with the adolescent girls opened my eyes to the role Auntie's Place plays in the girls' lives. The girls' entire existences are wrapped around the events of Auntie's Place. One Friday the girls were preparing to carpool to Auntie's church. They were going to participate in a bon fire, hayrides, and music. One participant, Amy, would be performing with the praise team. As they were loading, up there was mention of needing rides to "Science Club" hosted by Poppi and other doctors at the local University. That Sunday involved horseback riding at Auntie's friends' ranch, and the rest of the week would be spent preparing for a mission trip to Jamaica. This community-based pedagogical space exudes with opportunities and experiences for Black girls. Because of this I was led to seek answers to the following questions: a) What structures and strategies are in place at Auntie's Place that allow Black adolescent girls to develop positive social capital? b) What types of social networks did the participants develop through their participation in Auntie's House? And c) What outcomes were evident as a result of these networks?

Through the multiplex relations (Coleman, 1988) of Auntie and Poppi, Black adolescent girls have had experiences that broaden their horizons and increase the likelihood of them recognizing their worth and value. It is only fitting then, that I place the ideas of community-based pedagogy and social capital theory at the center of this study. I draw on both because I believe they go hand and hand. The root of the participants' success stems from their involvement in Auntie's Place, a community-based pedagogical space and the social capital attained there. Historically, people of African descent have found creative ways to educate

themselves and stimulate knowledge for themselves by any means necessary (Douglas and Peck, 2013). Community-based pedagogical spaces are learning spaces in the community which have been a safe haven for the growth and development of marginalized communities, providing resources and social capital for youth and families who would not otherwise have access to it. In the Black community, community-based pedagogical spaces include churches, hair salons, barber shops, community centers, and in this case study, "Auntie's Place," an after school program designed to spread the love of God to underprivileged youth and to open doors of opportunity that would otherwise be closed to them. Within these learning spaces, social capital is attained. I stress social capital because I believe that in order for marginalized people to get ahead and into places of privilege, power, and influence, there must be a level of social capital attainment to get there.

If it had not been for the social capital attained throughout my life I would not be where I am today. Mr. Roe, my drill team instructor, Dr. Wanda Brown, my middle and high school principal, Pastor William, and several other influential people over the years have helped pave my path to success through the skills or networks attained. Mr. Roe was my accountability partner. He showed up at my school weekly to check in with my teachers about my progress. Dr. Wanda Brown, my middle and high school principal, was a Black woman who through her walk, gave me the agency to be an influential woman in charge. She wrote recommendation letters for me to become a teacher and to enter the doctoral program. Pastor William had been a gang banger in his past. Because of his past, he was able to persuade me to listen to and to follow God's word. He showered me with wisdom and knowledge that I carry with me through my journey. In this world, building relationships with people who can open doors and in some cases close others is very important. Recently the superintendent of the school district invited me to a

meeting with the president of a local private college. The topic of discussion was piloting a program that would provide scholarships to students from marginalized backgrounds to enter the field of teaching or computer science with a guaranteed position in the city upon graduation. Because I was at the meeting, I was invited to be a part of the entire implementation of the program. Had it not been for my relationship with the superintendent, I would not be a part of the decision making for such an effort.

### **Social Capital**

Phillis Wheatley is historic figure who, because of the highly ranked (Lin, 2001) social capital she attained, became a literate prodigy. Her literary accomplishments opened doors for other slaves to be validated as literate beings. She was the first Black female to publish a book of poetry in the United States. Born in Senegal around 1753, Phillis Wheatley was kidnapped at the age of seven or eight and brought to Boston on a slave ship. John Wheatley bought her for his wife, Susanna. Phillis was known for being bright and intelligent. Instead of Susanna training her as a slave, she trained her in theology, English, Latin and Greek. At a time when African Americans were forbidden to learn how to read and write, Wheatley learned ancient history and theology. Though her mother tongue was torn from her lips and her past identity erased, Wheatley managed to survive and displayed the literate genius that was planted inside her from her ancestors, code switching so gracefully in her new world. Though forbidden to read and write in her mother tongue, she mastered the literacy of the master and perfected their craft. There was such disbelief of her accomplishments that Wheatley was put on trial to gain proof that she was actually a poet and capable of performing literacy in such a way. Phillis Wheatley stands as an iconic symbol of how, through the attainment of social capital, literacy can be acquired, mastered and reimaged by Black females. Her legacy will live forever.

Social capital allows for social mobility. With roots in sociological theory, social capital has been used in education to examine students' and families' environments, expectations, opportunities and achievements (e.g., Coleman, 1988; Goddard, 2003; Greely, 1997; Lee & Croninger, 1994, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Beginning with the writings of Bourdieu (1986, 1990) and Coleman (1988), social capital theory has been explored and applied widely. Generally speaking, social capital theory "describes certain outcomes, advantages, and/or disadvantages that are derived from relationship networks" (Miller, 2011 p. 38). This research study suggests that certain kinds of social capital allow for rich educational experiences for students, families, and/or communities. These include social capital activities, events, and programs, social capital trait training and preparation, social capital through the arts, and social capital spaces, or community-based pedagogical spaces. Auntie's Place provides participants with academic college-preparation, spiritual guidance and positive mentors that look like them; to name a few of the social capital resources attained there. The correlation between community-based pedagogical spaces and social capital is a strong one that should be highlighted in more studies.

Social capital has been largely studied and applied since the writings of Bourdieu (1986, 1990) and Coleman (1988). Bourdieu discusses social capital through a critical lens. He considers how relationships feed the cycle of power and privilege. Coleman takes on a more structural functional perspective, attributing academic and other life destinies to certain types of relationship networks. Others (Lin, 1999, 2000; Loury, 1977; Portes, 2000; Putnam, 1995) frame social capital in relation to the ways described, yet in ways unique to their perspectives. Not only is there a wide range of thought on social capital theory, it has also been applied at the individual (micro) level (Coleman, 1988), the collective (macro) level (Putnam, 1995), and the meso level

(Lin, 1999). In these and other works, social capital theory has been applied in important, intellectual ways in several education-related studies. Croninger and Lee (2001) for example, found drop-out rates among marginalized youth were reduced by youth having access to supportive social networks. Goddard (2003) found that students overall achievement rates improved through social capital. Miller (2009) discovered that the social capital of community-based leaders influenced the capacity in which they could serve homeless students. Overall, social capital theory can be described and applied in many ways. Specifically for this study, I looked closely at social capital tenets of Coleman (1988), Lin (1999, 2000, 2001), and Wellman & Frank (2001). Each author brings a new perspective of social capital that will bring clarity to the ways in which Auntie's Place supports their Black adolescent girls.

### **Social Capital-A Closer Look**

James Coleman's (1988) seminal article titled, "Social Capital and the Creation of Human Capital" laid the foundation for the discussion on social capital in education. In this and later works, he highlights the centrality of social capital in individuals' social, educational, and corporate lives. He examined how diverse structures in organization and culture build on and/or create social capital within and among different actors. Contrasting social capital with the obvious and identifiable notion of physical and human capital, Coleman asserts:

If physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material form, and human capital is less tangible, social capital is less tangible yet, for it exists in the *relations* among persons. Just as physical capital and human capital facilitate productive activity, social capital does as well. For example, a group within which there is extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust is able to accomplish more than a comparable group without the trustworthiness and trust. (p. 100).

## SOCIAL CAPITAL ATTAINMENT WITH ADOLESCENTS AT THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND POVERTY

Coleman and others (Greely, 1997; Putman, 1995; Warren, 2005) have suggested that a large amount of mobile social capital is necessary in order to attain social, educational, and professional desires. Coleman illustrates how, when manifested, social capital can provide a) obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness; b) information channels; and c) norms and effective sanctions. What is more is that he illustrated that certain kinds of social structures are valuable in the facilitation of these characteristics. Highlighting how social capital is acquired from relationships where obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness are maintained, Coleman (1988) wrote:

If A does something for B and trusts B to reciprocate in the future, this establishes an expectation in A and an obligation on the part of B. This obligation can be conceived as a credit slip held by A for performance by B... This form of social capital depends on two elements: trustworthiness of the social environment, which, means that obligations will be repaid, and the actual extent of obligations held. (p. 102).

Trust, as highlighted here, many times is created through family, religious, cultural, and/or bonds made in the community. Auntie's Place is built on trustworthiness. The adolescent girls trust Auntie with their deepest, darkest secrets. As "members" of Auntie's social network, the girls can operate freely and openly without fear of being deceived. The girls and Auntie hold mutually understood obligations to be truthful with each other and to help each other in times of need.

Like other theorist of social capital, Lin describes the usefulness of social capital for individuals. He describes how it provides certain social, professional, and psychological, and/or educational resources and benefits. These resources and benefits are accessible through direct and indirect relationships. Lin's work is useful in this study of a community-based pedagogical spaces serving Black girls at the intersection of race and poverty because he explains how some

people—mainly women, people of color and poor people—experience certain “inequalities in social capital” (Lin, 2001a, p. 181). People from marginalized (nondominant) backgrounds tend to have relationships with people who are most like them, limiting their knowing of “highly ranked” people. Furthermore, they do not have roles or affiliations with groups/organizations that are meaningful and resourceful (Lin, 2000). Lin (2000) goes on to describe social capital inequality:

Inequality of social capital occurs when a certain group clusters at relatively disadvantaged socioeconomic positions, and the general tendency is for individuals to associate with those of similar group or socioeconomic characteristics...Members of a certain group, clustering around relatively inferior socioeconomic standings and interacting with others in the similar social groupings, would be embedded in social networks poorer in resources as well—poorer social capital. Resource-rich networks are characterized by relative richness not only in quantity but also in kind—resources heterogeneity. Members of such networks enjoy access to information from and influence in diverse socioeconomic strata and positions. In contrast, members in resources-poor networks share a relatively restricted variety of information and influence. (pp. 786-787).

Spaces like Auntie’s Place fills this gap by filling the adolescent girls’ lives with opportunities and connecting them with resource-rich networks, including people and experiences in which they otherwise would not have access to. A suggestion of Lin’s (2000) is that relationship networks are most effective if they a) are heterogeneous b) have an extensive range, and c) are attached to institutions. As I assess the relationships and outcomes that emerged from Auntie’s Place, I examine composition of the relationship, range of relationships, the attachment of relationships to institutions, and the types of outcomes affiliated with the relationship networks. Due to the fact that there is relatively little empirical or theoretical work around this concept, a

deeper understanding of social capital theory can contribute greatly to our understanding of relationships within community-based learning spaces.

Wellman & Frank (2001) introduce the idea of network capital, a form of social capital that people use when in need. These “personal community networks” are made up of “supportive ties with friends, relatives, neighbors and workmates. Such ties supply “network capital,” the form of “social capital” that makes resources available through interpersonal ties” (p. 233). Personal community networks may strengthen bonds while providing needed resources (Fischer 1982; Wellman et al. 2001; Schweizer et al. 1998). Members in a network provide emotional and material support, information, companionship, and an overall sense of belonging. One of the main ways the adolescent girl participants in this study obtain resources to deal with their daily lives, or to seize opportunities and reduce any uncertainties in their circumstances is through the interpersonal ties and “social support” provided by Auntie, Poppi and the dedicated volunteers. This network conveys resources for the girls, confirms their identity through various discussions and forums, influences their behavior through positive peers and experiences, and reinforces integrative links between them as individuals, their households, and groups. When the adolescent girls need assistance, they often go to Auntie or Poppi because their bases of support is built on the structure of Auntie’s Place. Auntie’s Place is made up of densely knit networks that communicate with each other about the needs of the children who come into their space. These networks enforce norms of supportiveness and coordinate deliveries of support (Burt, 1997; Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992; Lin, 2001).

According to Wellman & Frank (2001), network capital operates through many aspects of interpersonal life that make resources available. These include:

## SOCIAL CAPITAL ATTAINMENT WITH ADOLESCENTS AT THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND POVERTY

1. Ego's Social Characteristics: the needs and resources that a person already possesses, including his/her ability to attract social support.
2. Network Size: The number of ties that a person ("ego") has in his/her personal network.
3. Resource Possessions: The resources that these network members ("alters") possess.
4. Ego-Alter Similarity: The similarity of ego's and alters' social characteristics.
5. Resource Availability: The willingness of alters to provide these resources to ego.
6. Resource Delivery: The ability of alters to deliver these resources to ego.
7. Support History: The support that alters have already given to egos, short-term and long-term.
8. Reciprocity: The history of support the egos have given to alters.
9. Network Composition: The characteristics of all alters in a network, both
  - a. Similarity: The tendency of similar alters to facilitate each other's delivery resources
  - b. Dissimilarity: The diversity of alters in a network.
10. Network Structure: the structure of interpersonal relations that:
  - a. Information Flows: Disseminate knowledge about ego's needs and resources.
  - b. Social Control: Facilitate or constrain the provision of resources.
11. Indirect Ties: Ties to people outside the network that provide access to additional resources.

The participants in this study negotiate the aspects listed above when finding ways to meet their needs. For example, when Amy, a senior in high school, needed support preparing for college, she utilized the social capital in Auntie's network. In addition, Auntie Place's network,

the information about Amy's need for help in preparing for college went throughout Auntie's highly ranked network members. Auntie was able to connect Amy with a friend of hers who runs a non-profit which had a support group specifically designed to assist first year college students with the transition from high school to independence. This program provided Amy with a tutor, mentoring and life planning skills. Auntie has a long history with Amy. Because of this Amy has benefitted from Auntie's vast resources and fast, dedicated delivery. Because of this community-based pedagogical space, Amy is able to experience a quality of life many girls at the intersection of poverty and race do not. Her network will continue to provide her with the resources to reach, live up to and fulfill her full potential. Community-based pedagogical spaces like these are golden nuggets in communities like Amy's. That is why studies like this are vital to showing the connection between learning spaces in the community and the social capital attained there. Spaces such as Auntie's Place can be duplicated in neighborhoods nationwide. We live in a nation where community-based pedagogical spaces exist, sometime in the most unlikely of places in in unlikely forms. What follows is a brief history of community-based pedagogical spaces which provide a wide range of social capital for adolescent youth.

### **Community-Based Pedagogy**

Community-based pedagogy refers to learning spaces in the community that provide support and facilitate opportunities that are often unavailable elsewhere. Community-based pedagogical spaces are community-based organizations that play a significant role in establishing opportunities for marginalized communities. When our children are encouraged, helped along the way, and supported by the adults around them, it empowers them to successfully meet life's challenges with a sense of self-determination and confidence to handle what comes their way. They gain hope for the future and a feeling of well-being. Community-based learning spaces

promotes an inner power of resilience. Like Douglas' (2012) work on how Black Bermudian men utilized community-based pedagogical spaces highlights the history of such learning spaces, the girls at Auntie's Place are provided a heritage of education through its design as a community-based pedagogical space. This heritage must be maintained on passed on to the next generation. One cannot wait for the government to maintain and support access to community-based spaces in marginalized communities.

America's White Supremacy mindset saw literate Black people as a threat and tried to put a stop to the growth of community-based pedagogical spaces. This could be because of Africa's rich history of kings and queens whose literacy brought them great power and fortune. Dating back to 1550 BC with Queen Nefertiti, one of the most powerful Black women in our ancestry, Black girls and women were valuable, literate beings used to make a difference in their communities. Queen Nefertiti made important decisions alongside her husband King, Akhenaten. She ran her country and her family. Women like Nefertiti were highly honored as a child's first teacher. Nefertiti passed down her teachings and her "mother tongue" to her children. "Mother tongue" refers to the language mothers transmit to their children. It conditions them and is partly how they know what they know and how they read the world. The various ideas and literacies are passed down to reflect a past and help mold a future. The Black woman's contribution of literacy and knowledge must be recognized by our Black girls in order for them to gain a fuller understanding of their own power (Richardson, 2003).

In their work with Black youth in community-spaces, Baldrige, Hill and Davis (2011) remind us that the fight for social capital and access to literacy continues. Nearly a century and a half after Wheatley's death, a center was birthed in her name, the first of its kind. The center was named the Phillis Wheatley Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) established in 1905

in Washington, D.C. Though the establishment of this community-based pedagogical space is something to be celebrated and not forgotten, the accomplishments of Queen Nefertiti, Phillis Wheatley and countless others may be considered a threat to American society.

During the period of 1700-1799, African Americans sought emancipation and liberation through literacy. Leaders like Richard Allen founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church and led a movement for African Americans to become free minds and bodies. He and others created libraries and schools for African American children. Because of the tireless commitment of leaders such as Allen and the work of Black churches and community organizations, by 1800 it was estimated that 15-20 percent of African Americans could read despite their oppression (Harris, 1992). By the mid-1800s, “high profile slave revolts led by literate slaves cemented, in slave owners’ minds, a clear correlation: a slave’s quest for knowledge was a quest for liberty” (Douglas and Peck, 2013 p. 72). Many states adopted harsh laws and punishments in order to intimidate and discourage the quest for slaves to become literate. In 1960, education policies rooted from the New Deal and the Great Society played a huge role in the establishment of opportunities for youth and adults at the intersection of race and poverty (Baldrige, Hill, and Davis, 2011). Many of these opportunities came in the form of employment programs that provided opportunities to earn money while continuing their education. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, many centers in urban areas were devastated by unexpected rates of unemployment, substance abuse, and crime. The non-profit sector increased following this period. This included an increase in mentoring, employment and after-school academic enrichment programs in areas like New York City, Oakland, and Los Angeles (Ginwright, 2009). The early 1990s brought national attention to youth development and community programs and the importance of community-based work for youth thanks to the efforts of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent

Development's Task Force (McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman, 1994). The task force highlighted the convexity of the networks that community-based organizations provided for young people. As a result of this task force, many organizations received widespread recognition and funding to carry out their missions.

### **Social Capital Spaces**

Boys & Girls Club of America, Inc. specifically, was highlighted as a successful example of a program that received national attention and federal funding to support their endeavors (McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman, 1994). The social capital attained at the Boys and Girls Club has the potential to introduce children from low-income communities to a better quality of life (McLaughlin, Irby, and Langman, 1994). The field trips, partnerships with businesses, and mentorships, for example, cause children to excel and reach higher potential. Children at the Boys and Girls Club are exposed to opportunities and experiences that they would not otherwise have access to. Many famous actors, athletes and leaders of today can say they were a member of their local Boys and Girls Club. Similar outcomes are realized by youth involved in the Empower Youth program. In their qualitative case study, Baldrige, Hill and Davis (2011) investigated data emerging from 24 cases of Black men, ages 18-30 who graduated from the Empower Youth program; a federally funded non-profit youth leadership and community program serving social capital to Black boys from low-income families. Coleman (1988) emphasized the importance of trustworthy relationships within the attainment of social capital. Trustworthiness between the mentors and youth at the Empower Youth program is of utmost importance. Through the use of interviews, youth expressed how the mentors at Empower Youth were "not like regular teachers" (p. 130). Kareem, a participant of Empower Youth explains:

The teachers, that's one thing about it. The teachers was good, man. They, sit down with you, they want to know about your personal life and everything. They just, they was cool.

The teachers was cool, man. (p. 130).

Baldrige, Hill and Davis (2011) highlighted the fact that “Empower Youth teachers were regularly described as patient, committed to students’ success, and eager to build positive relationships with them” (p. 130). Through trustworthiness created at Empower Youth, many Black youth were able to avoid undesirable outcomes, graduate high school and go on to live productive lives. When youth have adult allies whom they can trust, they are more motivated to perform to the best of their abilities because they have someone who provides the appropriate care and support.

Coleman (1988) further described social capital as the “potential for information that adheres in social relations” (p. 104). “Information” is depicted as important in that it provides a basis for action. Community-based pedagogical spaces hold fountains of information for Black girls and boys to consume. For many Black girls the beauty shop was not only a time to bond with their mother and/or grandmother, but to also learn what it means to be a woman. A time to hear stories of struggle and stories of praise. For Black boys, the barbershop can play a significant role in their passage to manhood. The barbershop can be a place for Black boys with no fathers to learn how to be a man. It can serve as a safe haven, like it did for Kevin, a participant in Douglas and Peck’s (2013) study on Black Bermudian men, enthusiastically describes the wealth of information he attained at a local barbershop:

The Black barbershop...ha, ha, ha! That is the Black hub... You would go, and you would sit down, and there was no, every topic is meant for discussion in a barbershop. There is no taboo; there is nothing off limits...It was literally, if you were a Black man, that is

where you were taught how to debate. And how to maintain, how to give passion, without turning to violence. And that is something our young people could use a bit more of. You know, to sit down, you talk about religious stuff if you wanted to. Political stuff if you wanted to. And you could get as passionate and heated as you wanted. But when you left the barbershop, you and whomever you were discussing it with, would be like, ‘Yeah, I check you next week Friday’...[The Barber] Mr. Clark, he always taught us guys when we were younger that when you go out, you represent more than yourself. So while you may look tore up from the floor up and think you’re only representing yourself, dude, when you go out, you’re representing your family, you are representing your bloodline in certain ways and so for that, you need to shave, and you know, look a little bit tighter on a day to day basis. (p. 82).

Because of the flow of information at the barbershop featured in Douglas and Peck’s study, Black men’s lives were saved, minds were enlightened, and literacy skills, such as debating, were strengthened. Kevin’s, and countless others’ social capital was expanded in a community-based pedagogical space many do not consider, the barbershop.

### **Social Capital Activities**

Social capital is gained through a number of community-based pedagogical spaces. Although not always recognized as learning spaces. One example can be found at street corners. Rachel Grant’s (2011) work identifies the power of literature focused around Double-dutch, a game familiar to many Black girls. Double-dutch can be used as a way to draw Black girls into literate work and activities; promoting high levels of social capital and literacy. Double-dutch is a jump roping game played with two ropes interchangeably turning while a jumper manages jumping through both ropes. Black girls have remixed the game of double-dutch by adding

rhymes and chants while jumping: “Banana, banana, banana split! Mama bought a newborn chick! Chickie died, Mama cried, banana, banana, banana split!” Double-dutch has a long history in African American communities. African American girls particularly perform and endure jumping styles that require a lot of practice, focus and skill. “There is a whole world of insight about racial and gender socialization and ethnic identification within African American culture that is hidden within the seemingly trivial maneuvers of games like double-dutch” (Gaunt, 2006, p.14). Double-dutch is cultural capital in the African American community, giving high esteem and honor to ones able to perform such talent. “Such capital is not simply something one has, but something that has different value in different contexts” (Grant & Wong, 2008, p. 176). Double-dutch is highly valued in the African American community, so much so that in 1975, two African American police detectives founded the American Double Dutch League (ADDL). Since then tournaments and competitions are held around the world. Double-Dutch continues to have a strong influence in the lives and communities of Black girls. It offers “insight into the *learned* ways of being that foster and reflect individual and group identity within African American communities” (Gaunt, 2006, p. 13). Not only does double-dutch require a lot of physical ability but also ties into “kinetic orality” or metacommunication as described by Cornel West (1989). These terms can be described as “dynamic repetitive and energetic rhetorical styles that form communities, e.g., antiphonal styles and linguistic innovations that accent fluid, improvisational identities...” (p. 93).

Because of the deep, invested influence Double-dutch can have on Black girls’ lives, identities, and communities, it makes perfect sense for schools to build a literature canon around such a theme. *Double Dutch*, by Sharon Draper (2002) is one place to start. This story is set in an inner city school similar to the type of school a young Black adolescent girl might attend. The

author takes the reader through the lives of young girls and boys who have different family structures and circumstances but are united by one commonality, double-dutch. Teachers will be delighted to find that both Grant (2011) and Draper (2002) provide literacy activities that coincide with double-dutch literature to produce high levels of literary competence and meaning making. Schools can also use double-dutch as a tool to channel Black girls' interests as an after school club or competitive sport. The opportunities are endless if teachers are open to being creative in finding ways to connect to the social capital attained by Black girls in community-based learning spaces.

### **Social Capital Events**

Spoken word events are another community-based pedagogical space that typically consists of a high-energy open mic or competition setting. Much like the game of double-dutch, people gather and participate openly and freely. For young adolescent girls who use music as a soundtrack to their lives, spoken word events are the perfect mechanism for them to critically push back against the isms of society. Furthermore, spoken word events connect young girls with self-reflection and harmony building among people from different walks of life causing the formation of trustworthy relationships, as highlighted by Coleman, to be built (Jocson, 2008). At spoken word events, much honor and praise are given to the ones who possess the skills to "spit" or "slam." Spoken word events are also a way for people to come together on common issues. Jocson (2008), in her ethnography, describes seven students and their involvement with spoken word events as "a way to connect with histories, cultures, and issues relevant to African, African American, and West Indian populations" (p. 24). The experiences brought the marginalized youth motivation and drive to write and outdo both their peers and themselves. Carol Lee (2008), describes the young people's loyalty to poetry saying:

We are today in the midst of a comparable movement with the advent of what is called Spoken Word. Besides a huge audience of young and old alike, there is an explosion of young writers-high school and college aged, highly educated and struggling academically-who love poetry and perform poetry in neighborhood venues (p. x).

Using a sociocultural and critical framework, connections between the production of poetry and marginalized youths' academic and critical literacies are made. Not only does this research support the use of spoken word events as community spaces for social capital attainment, but it demonstrates the ways in which poetry can lead to the transformation of young diverse minds.

### **Social Capital Programs**

Before Black girls can be heard, mentors and teachers have to learn how to listen to them (Brown, 2006). Ruth Nicole Brown's (2006) work focuses on relationship building and trustworthiness through the use of ideas around Black girlhood. She goes beyond the hierarchy of the teacher-student relationship, to build connections with girls while simultaneously creating bridges of understanding, trust and open communication. Through the context of a three year study participating in an afterschool program, Celebrating All Girls (CAG), Brown captures the essence of relationship building and girls' empowerment through narratives of volunteer mentors' daily experiences, struggles, frustrations, questions and breakthroughs with creating positive relationships with the sixth grade girls. In this space Brown and her mentors validate for the girls what it means to be a free Black girl and the possibilities in creating a strong relationship with an adult mentor who can value, love and hold them accountable. In her study, Brown (2006) brings to life effective relationship building practices and mentoring from the perspective of 16 mentor volunteers who are adult scholars, activists, and community leaders in

their own rights. The goal of CAG is girl empowerment for sixth grade girls through group mentoring. By using a methodology of narrative analysis based on semiotics and rhetoric (Feldman and Sköldberg, 2002), Brown analyzed how girls and women create empowering connections in celebrating girls of all backgrounds. Brown shares her enlightenment of the study saying:

I explore the process of creating empowering connections between girls and women in mentoring relationships that requires negotiating, mediating, and dissolving borders between girls and women. Empowering connections pose a direct challenge to dichotomous relationships between young women and girls, socializee and socializer, empowerer and someone in need of empowerment. In this context, mentoring on the borderlands give meaning to a female empowerment strategy based on the creation of shared power (p. 107).

In this vein, Brown and her mentors created shared power between themselves and the adolescent girls, making connections between them that broke down barriers of difference or distance. When the volunteers actively recognized and mediated the borders between themselves and those with whom they served, they demonstrated shared power. With shared power comes shared information. The girls and mentors learned valuable lessons from one another, each an expert in her own right. An information flow was created.

Peter Miller's (2011) work with homeless youth addresses how youth survive with the social capital attained in shelters. The data gathered through this study indicated that the homeless youth "gained key advocates and information channels" (p. 1086). Tommie Shelby, a case worker at a homeless shelter explained how she helped her clients navigate the complex school system by educating them on their rights:

If they have a concern or if there's a policy issue and they say, "Well I won't be able to do this." I say. "Oh yes you can [stay in your school of origin]! Legislation provides for your child to be enrolled in school and for transportation to be provided on an expedited basis." (p. 1086).

Through this relationship (which is admittedly limited in depth and duration) Tommie was able to provide a degree of educationally relevant social capital to a family in transition. Meaningful and resourceful social capital can increase stability in a person's life. It can go even further if the person has a social capital network, as described by Wellman & Franks (2001). These "personal community networks," composed of supportive friends, relatives, neighbors and workmates is like a village. We all need a village, or network of support to keep us afloat. Families at the intersection of race and poverty simply need a village of supporters to help them, love them, and direct them in a non-judgmental way. Going back to the African proverb, "it takes a village to raise a child," we must take time to be a part of a Black girls' village by connecting with them directly, or connecting to a community space that serves their community.

### **Social Capital through the Arts**

Within a trustworthy relationship, Lin (2000) believes relationship networks are most effective if they a) are heterogeneous b) have an extensive range, and c) are attached to institutions. Ruth Nicole Brown (2009) accomplishes these three goals through her work in community-based pedagogical spaces. In an after school program, Brown and other "Homegirls" dedicate their life's work to disrupting stereotypes of Black girls and women while painting a new picture of Black females' through literacy. In her autoethnography Brown celebrates the being of Black girlhood through SOLHOT (Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths). In her literary work of Black girls, Brown (2009) challenges the idea of Black girls as "at-risk and suffering

from societal pressures instrumental in the development of low self-esteem, loss of voice, and self-inflicted harmful behaviors” (p. xii). Her dedication to SOLHOT is invested in celebrating Black girlhood through hip-hop culture and a feminist methodology as a way to “transform oppressive institutions, policies, relationships, and beliefs” (p. xiv) of young Black women. SOLHOT is the vehicle for the creation of narratives of Black girls. They are “not relying on what has been said before as a definitive “last word” (p.1). Through hip-hop literacies and a feminism framework, SOLHOT celebrates the minds, bodies and spirits of Black Girls. For Brown, her work is political:

...in the past we have created publicly performed role-plays, scenes, poetry, photography projects, videos, presentations, newspaper editorials, and the like. We have also met regularly and consistently, refusing to broadcast our publicly private parties. While not product-oriented; there is something created of value that cannot necessarily be packaged, sold, or commodified. Yes, love, friendship, trust, creativity, “mentors,” fictive kin relationships, passion, and fun are some of the “intangible” products of doing this kind of work and, while enough, that is not all (p. 141).

Brown’s social capital comes in many art forms. She infuses her program with African American female literacies through the creation of art, poetry, rapping, reading, writing, singing, and acting. The heterogeneous mentors in SOLHOT are another form of social capital made up of “Homeboys” and “Homegirls” who possess privilege as graduate students of various majors and relatability as they too came from Black, Brown, poor and oppressed backgrounds. Their extensive resources provide a bridge for the Black girls they serve to walk across as they realize and live out their full potential. Many of the girls in the program go on to graduate high school and enter higher education or employment.

Mahiri and Sablo's (1996) research on African American youths' experiences with non-school literacy found that writing poems and raps play an important role in the voluntary literacy engagement of young people. Poetry is not something youth are forced to do outside of school; it is something they run to for support, love, answers and survival. Surprisingly, this outside literacy is not acknowledged broadly in schools. Mahiri and Sablo point out the benefits of poetry in the classroom. One benefit is that "student writings can act as pretexts to dialogue inside the classroom and add to the conversations that often only take place among friends and family" (p. 29). McCormick (2000) notes another benefit of poetry from her study on youths' use of poetry in urban high schools where surveillance cameras are used. In these situations poetry is used as a safe haven or "aesthetic safety zone" (p. 29). Marginalized youth can express themselves in this space without being threatened or seen as a threat. In this space, their words and voices matter. McCormick describes it as a "sanctuary within, a place to play out conflict and imagine multiple possibilities for identity" (p. 194).

In this way poetry plays a therapeutic role. For young women of color in her study, McCormick explains how poetry was a space where they could "shape their own representation of self based on what they experience every day-both physically (in the classroom) and aesthetically (through writing)" (p. 29). Poetry is a way for Black girls' to clearly and accurately express themselves in light of the daily challenges that they face. Spoken word and poetry events are catalysts for activism. The intellectually stimulating performers express knowledge and truth while educating the audience on issues in their community and nation.

### **Tensions at the Intersection**

Communities at the intersection of race and poverty can be a source of social capital. With a wealth of knowledge and resources attained by youth they are able to expand their minds

and build a life of quality and education. But the lessons learned in such communities are not always promising or positive. In many communities at the intersection of poverty and race, rap music can be heard blasting from apartment windows while rap battles are being performed on the street corner. Tension lies within this intersection. In her autoethnography titled, "Don't Judge a Book by its Cover: An Ethnography About achievement, rap Music, Sexuality & Race, Bettina Love (2008), discusses the love/hate relationship scholars have with hip-hop as well as the effects hip-hop has on youth's ideologies. Love (2008) addresses both sides of the argument, balancing scholars who see rap as a mechanism to "retard Black people" by perpetuating the stereotypes made about them (Crouch 2006; Ford 2002; and McWhorter, 2001) to those who see rap as a vehicle for youth to discuss and to engage in critical thinking and politics (Ginwright, 2004; Leard & Lashua, 2006; Stovall, 2006). For me rap produced both outcomes-perpetuating monolithic stereotypes of Black women while igniting critical awareness through the unpacking of social justice issues in the streets. Love (2008) takes these ideas into consideration as she conducts an ethnography to capture the point of view of youth and how they make meaning of rap music. The study focused on a group of nine Black middle class students, three boys and six girls ranging in age from 13-17. The purpose of the study was to find out how hip-hop influenced the adolescents' ideologies about gender, race, sex, and education. From the data, students showed they had the ability to think critically about rap music and negotiate the contradictions and confusion the analysis of rap music caused them. From the study, four distinct themes emerged: (a) youths engagement with rap music fostered essentialized notions of Blackness; (b) teens believed that Blacks were intellectually inferior; (c) youth perceived their classroom teachers as racists; and (d) youth responded to their teacher's perceived racism by disassociating

themselves from youth they believed to be academically inferior. The students' feelings and experiences with rap music aligned with Bynoe's (2004) assumptions. According to Bynoe:

The Hip Hop industry's decision to intentionally target white rap consumers means that overtly socially conscious and/or pro-Black messages have been substantially sacrificed in rap music to accommodate a 'we-are-the-world' ethos based on hedonistic consumerism and general youth rebellion. . . . Whereas in the past there was a wide array of rap music styles and messages, today the Hip Hop industry markets ghetto-centric lascivious rap content globally as the singular Black experience. (pp. 230-231).

The findings from Love's study supports Bynoe's position that rap music teaches Black youth there is a singular Black experience, a one-sided notion of Black womanhood, and that whiteness is superior. Connecting with these notions, Love revealed her life as a young girl and her relationship with hip-hop. She grew up poor with a hunger for rap music as a way to find her appetite and find answers to the questions she pondered. Hip-hop music brought her the news from the streets, fashion, and how to identify as Black. Hip Hop could be a powerful tool for social change (Kelley, 1996 and Rose, 1994) given that "For black youth, hip-hop culture is a vehicle for expressing pain, anger, and the frustration of oppression, which is expressed through rap music, style of dress, language, and poetry" (Ginwright, 2004 p.133). These scholars show that hip hop culture is a balancing act. Black girls must be taught to experience the culture with an awareness and critical eye toward the message and intended purpose. Seeing the streets, where music is heard and even digested by Black girls as a community-based pedagogical spaces is vital in the movement to help youth become more analytical on the mixed messages embedded in music with a critical lens.

The streets, cars and homes where rap music blares can be both a space of tension and a space where learning occurs. Similarly, prisons and detention centers are other spaces where tension and/or learning can occur. Many Black youth at the intersection of race and poverty find themselves incarcerated at least once in their lifetime. In these highly controlled communities where tensions run high, meaningful learning of vital information still has the ability to shine through. Maisha Winn (2011), in her book *Girl Time: Literacy and Justice and the School to Prison Pipeline*, takes the reader to the urban southeast to a Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC) and introduces a theater program. Winn, along with other teaching artists, activists, directors, youth participants and non-profit organizations, all came together as a village and social network to organize the theatrical group. They use playwright as a tool to combat issues that impact them as girls and women in and out of prison. Winn asserts that:

Playwriting, in the context of *Girl Time*, embodies the need to listen to girls who have found themselves entangled in the juvenile justice system be invited then to revisit, and in some cases rewrite, scenes from their lives, as well as the lives of their peers (p. 3).

Through the creation of dialogue, development of characters, and igniting justice for the wrongs in society, Black girls in *Girl Time* are given a second chance, a reason to live and hope. Once girls, ages 14-17 are released from RYDC they are invited to participate in *Girl Time*'s summer program. During the summer the girls create eight to 10 original plays and perform each other's plays for an audience of incarcerated girls and other members of the community. A discussion follows each play, giving the girls, the community and even correction officers an opportunity to voice their concerns and dialogue about them. For the actors, Heath (2011) describes that saying:

Playing these roles means that individuals envision themselves to be other than what their circumstances have seemingly destined them to be-for example, trouble maker, loser,

punk, prostitute, or criminal-in-the-making. Entering dramatic roles that call up a range of attitudes, uses of language, resources in bodily presentation, and emotional alignment enlists human capacities so often unseen by and unrealized for youth whose early socialization has sent messages and given models of negativity ( p. xv).

Heath notes that African American female literacies are pushing society back through storytelling, performing arts, signifying, all in an effort to survive and gain enough power to rewrite history. When the aim of education is to abort a Black girl's creativity, history, and critical thinking, *Girl Time* gives birth to "the chance to create worlds together, not just the world on the stage, but social worlds where the young can absorb what it means to choose, create, and critique collaboratively" (Heath, 2011, p. xv). Programs like this provide the opportunity for teachers to facilitate and learn. That is, they learn about their students and their lives, and learn about their harsh realities and their resurrecting resilience. For Freire (2005), this is a call for educational leaders everywhere to know the world of which their children read. They need to know their inner spirit and their dreams in life. They need to know the language in which they speak to brilliantly ward off the oppressions of their world. They need to know where they go after school and how they survive. Most importantly, they need to get in touch with their students souls.

In *My soul is a witness: Affirming pedagogies of the spirit*, Dillard, Abdur-Rashad & Tyson (2000) use an explicit discourse of spirituality and a cultural ideology to answer three questions. 1) What does spirituality mean for the ways in which African American women educate and research? 2) How does the enactment and embodiment of a spiritually centered paradigm impact the learning of both teacher and student in the context of the classroom? And 3) what might such work imply in terms of theory and practice, particularly in teacher education?

Researchers perform a case study of a female African American professor at a large university in the Midwest. The case study is accompanied by three narratives shared by three African American scholars/teachers of the power and influence the professor under research possessed had over them with her spiritual pedagogy. What this pedagogy fosters is balance, harmony, unity and growth in the classroom.

The study shifts the Eurocentric paradigm to a non-Eurocentric one to reflect the nondominant cultural groups, specifically African American's ways of knowing. Recognizing the inspirational and exemplar work and accomplishments of the professor participant, Cynthia, readers are encouraged to explore the ideas shared by students who have experienced her teaching and influence. Spirituality is about balance, and a balanced leader shines. Cynthia is a balanced professor who cast a vulnerability over her students that open them to grow from her knowledge. Abdur-Rashid, Cynthia's student and co-author on the study describes her professor as embodying:

“A sense of purpose that permeates her whole being and is directed toward the greater good. It radiates a true commitment. Cynthia's purpose is directed toward the greater good of her students, she is truly committed to the academy as a site for her work. It is truly what she feels is her mission and you can see that in terms of how she approaches teaching her courses, her scholarship. Her administration” (p. 459).

Through her actions Cynthia gets her students to that place of at least entertaining the thought of that place of purpose and wholeness. Tyson shares his perspective of her influence saying, “I guess when we think of Cynthia and spirituality in education, her purpose is clear for each person that they engage at their own level, for the good of themselves first because she always starts with self and moves later to the greater good, the larger scheme of things” (p. 459).

Cynthia envelops all that spirituality is about by inspiring her students to start with self-awareness. Autoethnography stems from this concept.

Brown's (2006, 2009) work with autoethnography and mentoring is spiritual work and adds to the discussion of forming a positive Black girl identity. Brown achieves a spiritual balance with Black girls through self-reflection, expressive arts, validation, and relationship building, all tenets of spirituality. She achieves balance through femtoring, the act of female mentors and girls negotiating borders in ways that allows girls and women to see themselves in each other and bring about a rise in consciousness. Femtoring is like putting up a mirror, where mentors see themselves as the young girl staring back at her and vice versa. We practice this same concept at G.I.R.L.S Night. The sharing of stories and testimonies is one way to become vulnerable and receive the connection that comes from the experience.

Love (2006) and Richardson's (2002) work is spiritual work. Critical hip-hop literacies raises consciousness of the messages and portrayals of our young Black youth. Love and Richardson's work opens young people's eyes to the underlying aggressions and oppressions feeding mainstream ideologies. Their scholarship is a wakeup call to teachers and leaders everywhere to open up their classrooms to critical consciousness practices like African American female and hip-hop literacies. Each scholar brings an important piece to the table in regard to forming a positive identity for Black girls and interrupting the false messages they receive. Whether through theater (Winn, 2011), poetry (Joscon, 2008), or double dutch (Grant, 2011), scholars are engaging in the spiritual realm to steer Black girls towards their fullest potential.

### **Closing**

Auntie's Place is intentional about teaching kids how to have a spiritual connection. It is the number one mission of the organization—that children leave loving God and therefore acting

on the love of the Divine. When community-based pedagogy, social capital and spirituality intersect, children have the opportunity to grow beyond the schools' reach. At this intersection children are viewed as possessing funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). These funds of knowledge are built on by connecting to a child's interests and talents, giving life. When the adolescents in G.I.R.L.S. Group tapped into their interests and talents they, realized their purpose. The experiences at G.I.R.L.S. Group helped each of the girls go further in their purpose, equipping them with the leadership skills to succeed academically in order to one day use their purpose in their communities. Auntie envisions a continuous cycle of children going in, transforming from the inside out, and going out to impact the community. In the chapter that follows, I will further introduce the community-based pedagogical space known as Auntie's Place and the social capital and spiritual capital attained there by her adolescent Black girls.

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

Black girls living at the intersection of race and poverty may face several barriers to success. This may include a lack of resources to aid in pulling them out of poverty and break the generational cycle of its existence. Conducting a case study allows me to examine this issue further. Highlighted will be a community organization known as Auntie's Place, who interrupts this narrative of economically disenfranchised Black girls' lack of supportive networks, through their insertions of intentional, positive, resourceful social capital partnered with the building and strengthening of their faith in God. The combination of these elements aided in the positive shaping of Black girls' identities and have led to the success of Black girls who realize their worth and overcome their barriers. Through this case study I answer the questions I have been pondering about the lives of the adolescent girl participants of Auntie's Place. The questions within this case study are a) What structures and strategies are in place at Auntie's Place that allow Black adolescent girls to develop positive social capital? b) What types of social networks did the participants develop through their participation in Auntie's House? and c) What participant outcomes were evident as a result of these networks?

#### Case Study

'Case Study' is a methodology that is oftentimes used interchangeably with other qualitative research terms. Some scholars describe case study in terms of the end product or in terms of the unit of analysis. In brief, Yin (2009) describes case study research in terms of a process, asserting that it "allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events-such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the

maturation of industries” (p. 4). Stake (2000) suggests that the “what” that is studied in a case study is a *bounded system* (Smith, 1978). Beyond that, Merriam (2002) suggests the “what” is a:

Single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. The case then has a finite quality about it either in terms of time (the evolution or history of a particular program), space (the case is located in a particular place), and/or components comprising the case (number of participants, for example) (p. 178).

The bounded system could involve the case study of a single child, like in Herbert and Beardsley’s (2001) three-year critical case study of a gifted Black child living in rural poverty near Selma, Alabama. Comparing their study to the Kudzo vine, they wondered if Jermaine’s isolated and impoverished rural environment choked the creativity out of Jermaine like the Kudzo vine choked the life out of surrounding vegetation. They wondered about the negative effects such an environment had on the development of children’s gifts and talents, especially if they were the outcast of the community because of their mental or physical handicaps, like was the case for Jermaine and his family. Through the analysis of Jermaine’s creative writing portfolio, field notes, photographs, research journals, in-depth interviews and observations, Herbert and Beardsley’s assumptions were confirmed. Jermaine’s creativity and talents were being ignored at school and the labels placed on his family by the community were perpetuated in the classroom. Each found that Jermaine was exceptionally advanced and could answer and elaborate on any question the teacher asked, even if he was sitting upside down in his chair, but in spite of that he was seen by teachers as “bad” and by peers as wearing ill-fitting clothes. A significant finding from this study was that in spite of the labels put on Jerimiah by his community, he maintained a positive self-image and had a village of supporters, from his kindergarten teacher, the only teacher that understood Jermaine and fostered his gifts, close

family relationships, a best friend, and surprisingly, satellite television. Television was able to take Jermaine to worlds outside of his rural town, fostering his creativity.

Not only can profound findings come from a case study of a single individual, a case study can involve multiple people as well, like in the retrospective cross-case analysis that compares two fourth-grade language arts teachers' beliefs and practices as they respond to an influx of high stakes tests. One teacher works in a suburban school, the other in an urban school district. Overall findings from the study showed that the teachers' beliefs about literacy instruction are somewhat similar. Both believed that creating an atmosphere that was rich with text engages students' interests. They also believed that social interactions around texts aid comprehension, and "best practices" such as guided reading and literature discussions are useful teaching methods. Both teachers also remained in agreement with the dissatisfaction of constant testing in the district. Where the teachers differed was in their teaching practices, which created inequitable educational opportunities. In the suburban school, students spent more time socially constructing knowledge about texts, themes, and topics while students in the urban setting spent more time individually practicing skills needed to achieve understanding of a text's inherent meaning. Results from the study suggest that research on how teachers can engage urban students in the "best practices" possible for their success is needed.

Overall, a case is "a specific, complex, functioning thing" (Stake, 1995, p. 2). Like other forms of qualitative research, qualitative case studies seek meaning and understanding. The primary instrument for data collection and analysis is the researcher with an investigative strategy that is inductive, and with an end product that is rich in descriptions.

In my particular case, my research employs a qualitative case study design and draws heavily from Merriam's (2002) work on qualitative case methods. The case boundaries are a particular

group of Black adolescent participants involved in a particular community space known as Auntie's Place and G.I.R.L.S. Group meetings which take place within this space. My particular interest of what goes on in this group and how the girls' lives are affected by their group experiences causes me to be an active participant within G.I.R.L.S Group. My continuous participation as the adolescents' spiritual mentor has enabled me to gain the trust of the girls and to better understand their lives. Much can be learned from this particular case of Black girls engaging in dialogue and focus groups around identity, purpose and faith in God. Much can be learned of the particular literacy practices they use in their journey to freedom and truth. Much can be learned about the power of building relationships amongst Black girls as well as the influences in school, home, media and within their community that pull at their attention. Through my colorful narrative descriptions readers will vicariously learn, create an image or vivid portrait of excellent teaching through an understanding of community-based pedagogy that fosters a child's spirit and social capital. This case study has the potential to become a prototype that can be used in the education of students at the intersection of race and poverty throughout the world. Certainly readers will add and subtract, invent and shape their own knowledge to make this case study personally useful.

### **Autoethnography as Instrument**

Boylorn (2013) tells us that "the stories told about black women are often stories of stereotypes and contradictions disguised as truth" (p. 130). As Black women, our stories continue to be told for us. It does not help that media outlets transform stereotypes to truth. The entertainment industry gains ratings and deepens their pockets at the expense of shaming the queens of this universe. A mask has been put on Black women. They are portrayed as hypersexual, lazy, welfare queens, instead of African Queens. They are seen as angry Black

women who better not have a bad day. That only perpetuates the false truth that Black woman have bad attitudes. Unfortunately, many Black women internalize the lies themselves, feeding on society's rhetoric and living out its perpetuation. I once was that woman. As an adolescent girl living at the intersection of race and poverty, I internalized the rap videos showing Black girls as video vixens and "ride-or-die" chicks. I ran the streets with lost boys, giving more of myself to them than to investing in my worth. I jeopardized my future.

Social constructivism theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) rests on the concept that one's personal identity is not only socially but culturally constructed. Stereotypes dominate the social constructions of Black women. They are the only story popularized. For some, stereotypes of Black women are the only narrative they know. That is why autoethnography is essential to the counter-narrative of Black women. "Auto/ethnography can speak back to stereotypes and provide insight into the cultural milieu of black women in the U.S" (Boylorn, 2013, p. 131). Crenshaw (1989) suggests that Black women experience at least three distinct types of discrimination at one time: race, class, and sex. Due to constant assumptions that cause constant setbacks for Black women, there is cause for our Black women to finally look within; to combat our own insecurities, fears, and beliefs and the history that led to them, so that we as Black women can write our stories and be seen and respected for what we are worth.

I am separated in age from the G.I.R.L.S Group participants by about 15 years, yet I see myself in them. I come from the same community. I have experienced some of the same realities the participants have. I can identify with many of their struggles. I know what it's like to grow up without a father, visiting him in jail and holding on to his false promises, only to get disappointed over and over again. I know what it is like having a brother selling drugs and becoming a provider for the family. I know what it's like to watch my mom struggle to make

ends meet. I have sat for hours at the DFS office to receive food stamps and free clothing. I know what it feels like as a lost girl, looking for love in all the wrong places, thinking that being a ride or die chick would lead me to Mr. Right. I know what it's like to be a rebellious teen, getting arrested, and having a juvenile officer. I know what it's like to vandalize property, steal clothing and other merchandise from stores, party, smoke marijuana, get drunk and sleep around. I know what it is like to become a teen mom, confused about how we would make it. I am them. They are me. We are Black girls with an identity and a purpose in spite of the negative stamps put on us by the world. It is because I was able to break free from the barriers of stereotypical messages and mindsets and walk in my worth, that I feel the necessity to show other Black adolescents the way to a brighter tomorrow.

Because I have volunteered with G.I.R.L.S Group for four years, I have considerable affinity with the adolescents who attend. Some of us attend the same church and two of the girls are regular baby sitters of mine. I have the opportunity to strengthen our relationship outside of G.I.R.L.S Group while inspiring them through my daily spiritual walk and negotiation of daily trials. I have the opportunity to tap into their spirit on a consistent basis. My soul is a witness to the power of tapping into a Black adolescent girl's spirit. The way my life was transformed and with the lives I see transformed at Auntie's Place, I know there is a positive impact in spirituality and literacy intersecting. Auntie, the founder and active director of the organization brings the love of God to life for these children and their families. They come in broken and leave whole. I myself have been made whole through my involvement with G.I.R.L.S Group.

It continues to be a struggle pursuing a PhD while being a wife and raising four kids. Just when I have had a long day and feel defeated, Auntie's Place restores me. I joined this group after I resigned four years ago from teaching at a local public school; beginning a full-time

doctoral study at the nearby university. Curious about Auntie's program for adolescent, marginalized girls, I joined the group as a volunteer. There are other volunteer leaders in G.I.R.L.S Group that come from community churches and local colleges. Weekly meetings are facilitated by Auntie. Her topics are generated by the girls themselves. She forms the sessions around their interests and/or concerns. Experiences and lessons on forgiveness, sex, stereotyping and college preparation among other things are discussed. No one meeting is the same. G.I.R.L.S Group is more than a program, it is an experience. Each week is new and magical. From the sharing of testimonies to the study and theatrical performance of *Bad Girls of the Bible* (Higgs, 1999), to meeting at the movies to view and discuss a film. Each week tools are added to the girls' survival kit in some way.

In this context Black girlhood is about being free to be who we are created to be. To love ourselves the way God loves us and to walk in His designed purpose, a part from darker paths set up for Black girls to fail and become another statistic. We talk about how to avoid those landmines through topics on peer pressure, drugs, sexual identity, and imprisoned loved ones, to topics of graduation and future goals. Each topic is brought to life in a way so that the girls experience the love of God. When the topic came up about sexuality, we took a trip to Granny Pam's beautiful home and pampered the girls with hair, makeup and nails while inspiring them to first love themselves. We watched a powerful video about God's love and grace and held a deep discussion afterwards. For me, it was because of an absent father, for some, it may be issues at home that can cause Black girls at the race and poverty intersections to prematurely look for love in all the wrong places. Places where the enemy, as we see it, is waiting ready to alter Black girls' lives. At Auntie's Place we believe that when the girls learn their true worth, they learn to first love themselves and raise their standards, allowing God to fill their empty voids. G.I.R.L.S

Group is a safe space where Black girls' authentic selves can come out. They can put away the façade and be their vulnerable, scared, empowered, loud, quiet, opinionated, curious selves. At this particular gathering Auntie brought out hula hoops and face paint. It was awesome watching the girls innocently play and laugh freely. A luxury so far removed sometimes from their everyday lives.

I have led G.I.R.L.S Group sessions as well. For example, during our study on bad girls of the Bible, I read passages from Genesis and taught the girls about Eve, who is considered the "First Bad Girl of the Bible." With their interest in Rap and Hip Hop, I opened the session with a Rap I wrote about Eve's story. Immediately the girls were drawn in. I then lead them through a presentation that included discussion questions, which allowed the girls to apply the biblical story to their lives. Part of our discussion was on the temptations the girls faced in their everyday lives. For instance, several girls shared experiences about boys who tried to tempt them to have sex. Overall, the experience prompted multiple forms of critical literacy and African American female literacy that included reading and writing, rich oral discussions, drama, and exploring Internet-based literacies.

### **Context of the Study**

Social capital theory has taught us that self-fulfilling prophecies emerge according to the looking-glass self. Cooley clearly explained that one becomes what one believes oneself to be. So if society portrays young Black girls negatively it is not unreasonable that they internalize that belief. They far too often become underachievers both socially and economically. The social class of Black female marginalization and hence poverty is reproduced. It is reproduced by the power of the mind that has been shaped and reshaped

by the narrow pathology of America's social and economic institutions that denigrate the Black female—a truth that is unspeakable. (Partee, 2012 p. 70)

Auntie's Place is a space where minds are transformed. Black girls are reminded that they are in this world but not of this world. They cannot be defined by anyone other than their creator. This is the truth they must wrap their minds around and walk in, right out of poverty. Auntie's Place exposes young Black girls to the truth of their past and gives them hope and the tools for economic success. At Auntie's Place literacy inspires Black adolescent girls to do see themselves in a new light and be better than the generation before. Young Black girls at Auntie's Place are given opportunities to immerse themselves in rich literature. They are told stories of Black women who have survived and thrived in this society. They are introduced to Black women who went from poverty to leadership, myself and Auntie included. They are shown how to plan to be the best they can be. Girls in this space develop the desire to empower their minds and be at peace with their existence. That is success. The metacognition of being in this world but not of this world, working toward a purpose that is greater than their current situation.

What is unique about Auntie's Place is that this space fosters the spirituality of Black children. Spirituality is a unique way of being for adolescent Black girls. Much has been written about the spirituality of Black women, (Dillard, 2000; Cozart, 2010; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010), but not so much about the spiritual practices of Black adolescent girls in the hood. Drawing on this scholarship, my definition of spirituality is not rooted in religion, but in how Hull (2001) describes in her book, *Soul talk: the new spirituality of African American women*. She notes that "spirituality...involves conscious relationship with the realm of the spirit, with the invisibly permeating, ultimately positive, divine, and evolutionary energies that give rise to and sustain all that exists" (p. 2). Auntie's Place has a Christian foundation, but I argue that

spirituality can be practiced and experienced through other outlets such as Mindfulness.

Although life circumstances do not disappear, through mindfulness they do become less intense (Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Lawlor, M. S., 2010). People who practice mindfulness experience a boost in energy and find their lives more satisfying.

I also argue that Auntie's Place is an out-of-church space, free of the tensions, judgements and religiosity sometimes present in the church institution. Some churches place more significance on one's "sinful behavior" than building a relationship with them and making them feel loved and welcome. A major principle at Auntie's Place is relationship building. Relationships with one self, with humanity, with mother earth and her many natural gifts and resources, and with the power of the divine. During G.I.R.L.S Group we try to foster healthy relationships for the girls. Guiding them on how to pray and strengthen their relationship with God, to surrounding them with positive people to build relationship with and equip them with resources and influences to support them on their journey.

hands us and to celebrate our victories and resilience together. It is a time of spreading the love of God through various illustrations and experiences and reminding the girls that they are not alone.

### **Meet the G.I.R.L.S Group**

G.I.R.L.S Group meets at Auntie's Place, which is located in the public housing projects of a Midwest City in the United States. This group is comprised of about 12 Black adolescent girls ranging in age from 13-17. My study is focuses on 5 of these girls as well as Auntie herself, who founded Auntie's Place. Girls usually join G.I.R.L.S Group by graduating from the Princess Academy, the 9-12 year old version of G.I.R.L.S Group. Others come with friends or siblings and join that way. Some of the adolescent girls live in the neighborhood housing projects, others

come from nearby section 8 housing, or in homes further from the site. Many of the participants, including Auntie and me, come from a broken past or are experiencing current struggles such as an abusive household or the transitional issues of being an African immigrant/refugees. GIRLS Group is a time to convene every Friday evening for two hours to lay down the burdens life

*Adrian.* I began volunteering at Auntie's Place during my first year as a doctoral student in 2011. I lived in public housing as a teenage mother, right around the corner from where Auntie's Place is located. I noticed kids running and playing outside Auntie's Place for years, but never participated. I was busy "making messes" in the streets. In 2011, I was ready to help clean up streets I worked hard to destroy. In a blog written shortly after my arrival Auntie writes:

Yes, we do believe in miracles at Auntie's Place... When I first met with Adrian Clifton several months ago to discuss volunteer opportunities at Auntie's Place, I left that meeting with my head spinning and heart racing. PhD candidate, wife, and mother of three young children all wrapped up in one beautiful package. But it was as she began to unwrap the layers of her past life that I began to see the miracle emerge. Having lived through and triumphed over so many of the temptations and challenges that Auntie's Place kids and families face, I immediately thought "Wow! She'd be so effective as a G.I.R.L.S. Group team leader working with girls who have outgrown The Princess Academy. She's been working with the G.I.R.L.S. team ever since.. (Auntie, 2011).

Their G.I.R.L.S Group (Experiencing God in Real Life Situations) needed more Black female volunteers, women who looked like the girls, women the girls could relate to and look up to; instead of holding on to the myths that "account for most common forms of misrecognition of black women: sexual promiscuity, emasculating brashness, and Mammy-like devotion to white

domestic concerns” (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 49). Because I t to interrupt the political cycle that infects Black girls every day, I signed up immediately in the fall of 2011.

Being a leader in G.I.R.L.S Group has truly been life changing. Not only have I seen Black girl after Black girl transform, we come to know God together new and fresh ways. I am humbled by Auntie’s words and count it as a blessing to be able to use my past, one that I was once ashamed of, to teach and direct the paths of adolescent Black girls who are experiencing many of the obstacles I experienced at their age. They get to see somebody like them who made it through the barriers of a broken home and broken society who is thriving with the help of God.



*Figure 1.* The village known as G.I.R.L.S Group.



*Figure 2.* G.I.R.L.S. Group leaders

***Auntie.*** Auntie is the founder of Auntie’s Place. She was born and raised in a nearby Midwest City in Missouri, where she lived in an inner-city public housing development for much of her childhood and adolescent years. Auntie grew up poor, and though in a household with both a mother and father, she yearned for the attention of her hard working father who spent many days and nights away from home, and a mother who showed her more rejection and resentment than love. Auntie came from little but had dreams of leaving her impoverished

community and making it big-somehow, someway. With little attention from home, Auntie would immerse herself in literature, where she could escape her reality, exchanging her circumstances with the elaborate lives of characters in the novels and fantasies she read. After many struggles in life Auntie managed to attend college, graduating from a nearby university with a degree in Journalism in 1976. Shortly afterwards, Auntie married a pathologist at the same university who was from the east Coast where he too lived in poverty as a child. Auntie, still very broken from her rough upbringing, became a Christian in 1976 after a long season of church hopping. She desperately sought an intimate relationship with the Lord. Her husband is referred to as “Poppi” at Auntie’s Place. He followed suit and dedicated his life to the Christian faith three months later. They have been members of a great church in Mid- Missouri for more than 25 years. Poppi and Auntie have four children and three grandchildren. Since beginning their journey with the Lord, Auntie and her husband have been involved in various evangelistic outreaches, including “Free Prayer,” a door-to-door prayer outreach, which she co-founded in 1995. And, of course, she is also the founder and director of Auntie’s Place, which is located in the public housing development in Mid-Missouri.

This is a group of teenage girls mostly from the housing projects. They meet with Auntie and other mentors with the purpose of bringing the Bible to life for them, showing these Black girls who they are in God, instead of whom the world says they are. Maria Miller Stewart writes about this in *Words of Fire*. She so passionately proclaims, “O, ye daughters of Africa, awake! Awake! Arise! No longer sleep nor slumber, but distinguish yourselves. Show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties” (p. 27). This is our proclamation to the girls of G.I.R.L.S Group. We provide them with authentic experiences to learn and see who they are. Five girls were focused on for this study. These are five girls who I have been mentoring

over the course of the years and had built trusting relationships with them and their families. This afforded me easier access to girls and a willingness on their part to extend their time to me.



*Figure 3.* Auntie enjoying time with Amy.



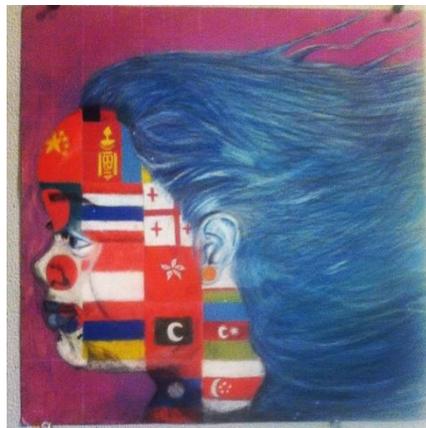
*Figure 4.* Bonfire hosted at an affiliated church

***LaShai.*** LaShai came to Auntie's Place as a first grader and started attending Precious Jewels, a focus group for girls' grades first through fourth. At the time LaShai lived across the street from Auntie's Place in the housing projects. Her mother was in the streets selling drugs and was not attentive to giving LaShai the love she longed for. Auntie remembers LaShai always being a sweet yet serious girl. Over the years Auntie has watched LaShai grow into her own person. I too have had the opportunity to watch the growth in LaShai over the 6 years I have mentored her. LaShai goes to the beat of her own drum. Her security in herself is admirable. She has lofty goals that she is not afraid to go after, one being to join an Asian hip-hop group known as K-Pop and travel the world performing. LaShai has been proactive in seeking guidance and mentorship from women like myself and Auntie who are where she hopes to be one day professionally, spiritually and/or personally. The connections LaShai has made through her involvement with Auntie's Place and G.I.R.L.S Group have led her to a promising future. During her high school years LaShai was involved in theater both in school and in church. She was a

leader in student council and a member of CALEB'S Club, a science club Poppi created to open the world of medicine to kids at the race and poverty intersection. Now a college freshmen, LaShai is majoring in fine arts and Asian studies. She plans to study abroad in Asia in the near future.



*Figure 5.* LaShai at play at Auntie's Place.



*Figure 6.* Original painting by LShai.

**China.** Following in her big sister's shoes, China joined Auntie's Place about two years after LaShai. She immediately joined Princess Academy, later Precious Jewels (grades 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>) and now G.I.R.L.S Group. Both a singer and songwriter, China uses music to tell her story of pain, love, joy and hope. Her most recent song is untitled, yet it is inspiring. Drawing from the frustration of constant pressure to sing on other people's time and terms, in a soft, yet strong voice she sings:

One day, one day I, will be ab-le to fly, I know I'm gonna make it, get my chance and take it-

One day, one day I, will show them that I, I'm what makes me, and they cannot stop me.

China is quiet but mighty. She has grown to be independent and set a part from her peers. She credits the mentors in her life who have come from Auntie's Place and church for continuing to hold her accountable for her actions. From going to school to hanging with friends at the mall,

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she can depend on running into a community leader who knows her potential and calls her out when she is out of order. Where the average adolescent would see accountability as a threat, China welcomes it because she knows where she wants to go. So much so that she is the only G.I.R.L.S Group participant who has gone beyond the KAA Christian Camp Auntie's Place sponsors to a week-long camp geared toward adolescents' strong in their faith. Each year they travel to a different destinations in the states and abroad to give back to needy communities. Last year China served at an inner-city school in Chicago. Currently a sophomore in high school, China expects to graduate a year in advance to pursue a degree in performing arts with the intentions to open a performing arts school of her own.



*Figure 7.* China attending the annual Christian sports camp.



*Figure 8.* China spending time with her college mentor.

*Kim.* “For more than seven years, we talked about it, brainstormed it, and probably even role-played it a time or two before the day actually came: Kim is a college girl!” (Auntie, 2014). At the age of 12 Kim first came bouncing into Auntie’s Place with a great big grin and eyes wide, full of curiosity about the space in the neighborhood called “Auntie’s Place.” She had heard about it from a neighbor and immediately visited to see for herself. She felt at home. She parked her backpack and her heart there every day after school. Early on, it was obvious that Kim was a leader. She would ask Auntie questions like, “Auntie, what can I do to help... what can we do to help inform the volunteers of what’s goin’ on around here every week? Can I have the job of signing kids in?” Auntie’s Place quickly became her home away from home and she wanted to do whatever she could to help make her “home” run smoothly. During those seven plus years, her pathway was strewn with all kinds of challenges - some much broader than a twelve-year-old’s shoulders should have to bear. At every intersection, Auntie encouraged her, “Kim, there’s gonna come a day when you have your own place and make your own decisions... that first place will be your college dorm room.” Often they joked about the day she would own the key to that first “place” and get to say who is in, who is out, and “...by the way, it is time to get out!” Auntie and Kim have had conversations like these sometimes, funny conversation, dozens of times over the years. Kim’s challenging seasons were tempered by her participation in just about every program or group available at Auntie’s Place: God’s Precious Jewels, The Princess Academy, Caleb - The Science Club, and the G.I.R.L.S. Group. During her senior year at Hawkins High School, Kim became Auntie’s very first paid “Junior Staff” member, helping in the office with various administrative tasks and assisting with groups for younger Auntie’s Place kids. Last fall, Kim finally embarked on her long-awaited journey to college in a small town in

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Mid-Missouri where she is a student athlete on a track scholarship, running on the women's track team. On Auntie and Poppi's very first visit to the campus to see Kim, there were no words to describe the joy they felt as College-Freshman-Kim took them on a tour of her beautiful campus. Since they had talked about this day so many times before, Auntie's heart sang as she turned the key in the lock of her dorm room door. "That door is leading Kim Houston to an exciting, full-of-promise future," Auntie proclaims.



*Figure 9.* Working with Kim on college applications.



*Figure 10.* Auntie and Poppi visiting Kim's college dorm room.

*Amy and Connie.*

“If I pointed them out in a group photo, there's nothing that would distinguish them from all the other kids. One has missing front teeth, and another one loves wearing a sherbet-stripped cap with matching gloves. They're all bright eyed, giggly, and oh-so-curious about everything” (Auntie, 2008).

Auntie's Rwandan friends moved across the street from Auntie's Place in 2008 and have infused so much joy and excitement into the little Auntie's Place haven. They have infused Aunties Place with their language and culture. “Some of the things these girls have been through, it is nothing but God,” Auntie reminisces over an interview. Amy and Connie came here from Ghana not knowing the language or culture. Within a year Auntie recalls Amy professing that she not only wanted to go to college, but wanted to pursue her PhD! There are kids in the community surrounding Auntie's Place who see going to college as something as out of reach as having dinner with the first family Michelle and Barak Obama. For Amy to speak confidently about her future shows that she has placed no limits on her abilities. Amy and Connie's father first came to New Hampshire to settle before sending for his wife and children. The weather was too cold for his taste so he came to central Missouri where he had few resources or family. Moving across from Auntie's Place turned out to be a blessing. Auntie remembers how precious the family was when she first met them. At first Auntie did not know if Amy was shy or did not like her. She was not mean but a little distant. Auntie figured it was probably the language barrier. Not knowing the language and culture is a great deficit that they both overcame. Today you would not know the struggles the girls went through adjusting to life in the U.S. because Amy and Auntie are close to inseparable. If I cannot reach Amy, I know to find Auntie and she will be at her side assisting her in some way or getting mentored and fed spiritually. At age 15 and 18

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Connie and Amy are both leaders in their family and community. They are both overcommitted to various extra-curricular activities from dancing in drill team and playing tennis for Connie to leading praise and worship at both the African and American churches for Amy, being leaders has led them to making and reaching their goals. Connie and Amy aspire to have careers serving and helping others. Amy wishes to go into nursing while Connie is undecided but knows college is definitely something she will pursue. In every culture there are brilliant things and there are dark things. What is wonderful about these sisters is that they have come to the United States and are taking advantage of every good thing in our culture as far as opportunities, while also bearing the good things from their African culture, embracing the whole idea of the village instead of individual gain.



*Figure 11.* Auntie at the zoo with a young Amy, Connie and siblings.



*Figure 12.* Connie and Amy attending a G.I.R.L.S. Group Christmas party.

## Data Collection

A trademark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy which also enhances the credibility of the data (Yin, 2003). Potential data sources may include, but are not limited to: field notes, archival records, interviews, physical artifacts, direct observations, and participant-observation. In case study, data from these multiple sources are then assembled in the analysis process rather than handled individually. Each data source is one piece of the “puzzle,” with each piece contributing to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon. This assembly adds strength to the findings as the various strands of data are tied together to form a greater understanding of the case. In this case study, the data-collection process incorporated the following: 1) in-depth and unstructured interviews with participants and informants, 2) field notes, and 3) recordings of focus group meeting.

*In-depth interviews.* The purpose for conducting in-depth and unstructured interviews was to help empower the participants themselves as well as other Black women. Collins (2006) explains empowerment saying:

When an individual Black woman’s consciousness concerning how she understands her everyday life undergoes change, she can become empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate her to embark on a path of personal freedom, even if it exists initially primarily in her own mind (p. xi).

Interviews were conducted to awaken the consciousness of the Black girls/woman in this study. Once awakened, reflection can occur of how far each participant has come from poverty to freedom. I first conducted an in-depth interview specifically for this research with Auntie and each adolescent girl at the beginning of the study in June. The in-depth interview introduced who each individual adolescent girl was. It highlighted each girls’ background, family dynamics,

school experiences, peer relationships, community involvement, including their involvement at Auntie's Place. I also interviewed Auntie to gather her perspective of each girls' character, involvement at Auntie's Place and G.I.R.L.S Group and other background information, like the struggles the girls have triumphed over throughout their adolescent journey and how she has seen God work in their lives.

**Table 2.3**

<p><b>Auntie's Interview Questions:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What has been your role/involvement at Auntie's Place?</li> <li>2. What has been the impact Auntie's Place has had on the lives of the girls?</li> <li>3. How have you seen participant grow in the program?</li> <li>4. Describe the relationship you have with the participants.</li> <li>5. How have you seen faith play a role in the girls' lives?</li> </ol>	<p><b>Purpose of Questions:</b></p> <p>These questions derive from my interest in finding out the impact of Auntie's role in the girls' lives as well as the role faith had played in their journey.</p>
<p><b><u>Adolescent Interview Questions</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What has been the impact Auntie's Place has had on your life?</li> <li>2. Describe your village (e.g. family, community, teachers, and friends) and how it impacts your identity as a young Black girl?</li> <li>3. Describe your peer relationships</li> <li>4. Describe the relationship you have with members of your family. How do these relationships shape who you are?</li> <li>5. What is faith? How does faith play a role in your life? In defining your identity?</li> </ol>	<p>From the questions selected my goal was to gain an understanding of what influences the girls were impact by, both positive and negative, and how those influence effected their lives. I also wanted to gain a since of the role faith plays and how it shapes who they are.</p>

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***Follow-Up Interviews.*** Follow -up interviews were conducted with each participant in October, the last month of the study. The purpose of these interviews was to follow up about questions not answered during the in-depth interview or to gain further clarification or elaboration on issues or topics. These interviews were more open-ended and longer in duration. Each unstructured interview was at least an hour in length or more. I created questions based on the interviewer's responses.

***Field Notes.*** Field notes were written in a note pad before, during and after G.I.R.L.S Group meetings and interviews. The field notes acted as my life notes (Bell-Scott, 1994). They were "diary-like reflections...with a record of my feelings, attitudes, and subjectivities during data collection" (Merriam, 2002, p. 208). They acted as "unedited, uncensored, woman talk" (Bell-Scott, 1994, p. 13). Dillard (2006) describes life notes as referring broadly to "constructed personal narratives such as letters, stories, journal entries, reflections, poetry, music, and other artful forms" (p. 5). My field notes included observations, lists, speculations and reflections. They formed an early stage of analysis during data collection and contained the raw data necessary to make sense of the girls' lives and contribute to my elaborate analysis in the study.

***Audio Recordings of meetings.*** Participants met weekly between June and September. Significant moments/conversations were transcribed and themes that related to the research questions were highlighted. I focused more on content rather than dialect due to cross-cultural differences.

**Artifacts.** Pictures, brochures, and funding material related to G.I.R.L.S Group was collected and analyzed. Pictures were taken during group meetings and on trips and excursions the girls went on with Auntie and leaders of G.I.R.L.S Group.

### **Data Analysis**

I drew on case study analysis as a primary means of interpreting and organizing my data. Yin's (2014) method of analyzing case study data was used as a guide for data analysis. Yin reveals though that "unlike statistical analysis, there are few fixed formulas of cookbook recipes to guide the novice" (p. 133). Instead, much depends on my own rigorous style of empirical thinking, along with the plentiful presentation of evidence and careful consideration of different interpretations. My analysis began by transcribing the recordings of interviews and meetings as well as from field notes. Simultaneously I analyzed artifacts such as pictures and videos related to the case, noting and categorizing emerging themes. I then made a matrix of categories and placed the evidence within the appropriate category. Eliminating any redundancies, I clustered units of relevant meaning. I determined key themes and wrote summaries for each. With the summaries I returned to the participants and followed up with a second interview to clarify information. I then modified my themes according to the clarifications. I identified general and unique themes for the findings and contextualized them into categories.

Data analysis occurred in two phases. Phase I was inclusive of procedures for a with-in case analysis of the data for each participant and the identification of emerging themes. In Phase II a cross-case analysis occurred in which similarities and differences in themes for experiences at Auntie's Place were examined.

### Phase I: Within-Case Analysis

The data analysis in phase I involved examining individual participant cases for emerging themes. This process consisted of six steps.

1. Assemble case files. Because Auntie, the girls and Auntie's Place were all units of analysis, I grouped the data accordingly in color coordinated folders based on the source. Within each file, I included transcripts, narratives, filed notes, and journal entries that pertained to each data source or case. The 5 steps that follow were repeated for each of the cases.

2. Reread all data sources. I reread the responses given by Auntie and the girls to get an overall feel for the data set as a whole. I also looked for consistencies in what each individual reported about Auntie's Place and its' contribution to their success.

3. Annotate all data. Notes about the feedback given by participants were written in the margins of the data sources. Responses were organized according to how they addressed my questions. Additionally, within this process I made notes of my own interpretations of the data. See the examples below. In this excerpt, Kim, a long time participant of Auntie's Place and a graduate of G.I.R.L.S Group, shares her view of the social capital attained through the science club Auntie's husband Poppi created.

I'm not like, into medicine like that. Like Science Club promotes, you know, through Auntie's Place, if you have that desire to be a doctor or something of that nature. Like Amy (G.I.R.L.S Group participant), that's one of her dreams. After she graduates high school she plans to go to college to medical school. Well, Science Club, through Auntie's Place gives her that opportunity and that avenue and experience to see what that even looks like. She's getting hands on training before she even gets to medical school. Some

of the things that she's experiencing now won't even be a surprise to her once she gets there.

This response in particular was noted as evidence of the social capital a Black girl at the intersection of race and poverty receives in this community-based pedagogical space. In the margin of the transcript I wrote:

Wow, what an incredible experience at these girls' finger tips! Where society might label Kim and Amy as incapable because of their race or economic status, here Kim and Amy are getting exposure in anatomy, CPR, drawing blood, etc. It is all about access. Black girls *will* take advantage of greater opportunities if they are simply introduced to them and valued as capable of succeeding in them.

4. Pattern Matching from the data. Pattern matching "compares an empirically base pattern-that is, one based on the findings from your case study-with a predicted one made before you collected your data" (Yin, 2014, p. 114). Prior to collecting data at Auntie's Place I hypothesized that Black girls at the intersection of race and poverty could find success and rise above their situations given the proper social capital intersected with a healthy spiritual foundation. Patterns emerged within the data that matched or supported this hypothesis.

5. Return to data to confirm, triangulate, and authenticate themes. After the patterns were identified, I took each pattern of themes and returned to the case files for each participant. Using all data sources, I checked to see if there was evidence within the data sources that would confirm and authenticate each pattern. I made a table of notes as to exactly where in the data set that pattern could be found. Patterns that could not be confirmed by the data were eliminated.

## Phase II

Phase II of the analysis involved cross-case analysis and consisted of two steps. These steps involved two subphases: Step one: cases were examined for common patterns, which led to the creation of theme categories that described the social capital generalized across the participants. Step two: Themes were examined again, but this time to identify patterns of social capital within the community-based pedagogical space of Auntie's Place, which characterizes the different ways this space supports low-income, Black girls and their success not only academically but spiritually.

Subphase one: Consolidate themes across participants. The themes generated in Phase I were consolidated into one master table of 20 total themes.

Subphase two: Look for common themes across participants and define categories.

The 20 themes were analyzed for common threads. Themes having commonalities were color coded. When color-coded themes existed in three or more of the six participants, a category was assign to it. For example, the category "Creative and spiritual pedagogy" emerged from themes across the six participants: (a) Auntie encouraged and modeled a lifestyle which incorporated relationship building (b) LaShai, now 19 years old, remembers Auntie praying with her at the age of 5 for her mom (c) China believes in herself and her ability to go to college due to the encouragement given by Auntie (d) Kim enjoyed sitting in Auntie's office absorbing her day to day activities (e) Auntie began to push Amy to enter a writing contest. Acting as her tutor and providing her with a computer to research, Amy won first place (f) Auntie dressed Connie and her siblings up like African princesses and took them trick-or-treating.

1. Identify patterns in the structure of Aunties Place. The themes within each participant were examined again in order to determine whether there was an overall structure within the community-based space that helped the girls succeed academically and spiritually. The structure was comprehended as a pattern, which incorporated an arrangement of categories that represent how Auntie dealt with the issues each girl faced. This structural pattern became a way of understanding the series of events that helped each girl become successful academically, emotionally and spiritually.

2. Return to data to confirm, triangulation, and authenticate categories and patterns.

Once the categories and patterns were identified, I reexamined each category to confirm the themes supported each category. Correspondingly, I reviewed the data sources to authenticate each identified structural pattern.

### **Closing**

The purpose of performing a case study methodology in this way was meant to capture the words and actions of intellectual Black girls/women as it contributes to my “commitment to Black women’s empowerment within the context of social justice” (Collins, 2006, p. 43). It sought to unpack their ways of knowing and spiritual beings as a prototype to a Black girl’s success. Assessing Black girls’ knowing and doing can catapult a movement of Black girls living free lives a part from deficitizing and dehumanizing influences.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCOVERY

It is becoming widely recognized that children's learning and development is significantly affected by their lives outside of school (Miller, 2011). With children spending only seven hours of their day at school five days a week, that leaves 133 hours out of school each week. Just within a span of a weekend, a child's world can change, especially when living within the uncertainties of poverty. Children's narratives about their weekend can range from anything from them getting into a fight, or a family member getting shot, to them going horseback riding or to the park with leaders from a community-based pedagogical space. Whatever the narrative, parents, teachers and community leaders should be aware of children's experiences outside of the school walls. It is vital then, to learn more about the ins and outs of and promise for community-based pedagogical spaces. Initiatives in after-school education are among the most prevalent and least understood of such efforts in the community, therefore I designed a study on how Black girls from poverty in a Midwest town experienced the structures and strategies of one particular after-school program, Auntie's Place. As enduring and loving relationships have repeatedly been cited as being among the most critical factors in making sure that students are successful beyond high school (Hirsch, 2005; Zhang, 2002), I drew on social capital theory to broadly represent this discovery. As described in chapter two, social capital refers to meaningful and resourceful support given to individuals that allows them to move forward in life and achieve various levels of success. Social capital can come in the form of relationships (Lin, 1999; 2000) or networks (Lee, 2001). It exist in the form of a material possession, like a car for instance, or in for form of information, such as how to apply for college. In the Black community, social capital can be described as a village working toward the same goal of raising someone to lead their community.

The findings that follow relate to a case study I conducted over the summer months from June to October of 2015, as well as data I collected within G.I.R.L.S Group from 2011 until 2014. The three leading research questions that guided the case study are: a) What structures and strategies are in place at Auntie's Place that allow Black adolescent girls to develop positive social capital? b) What types of social networks did the participants develop through their participation in Auntie's Place? and c) What participant outcomes were evident as a result of these networks?

### **Auntie's Place-Based Pedagogy**

In my study I observed several structures and strategies of Auntie's Place that increased the empowerment of Black girls and their attainment of meaningful and resourceful social capital. Of these, most notably the programs' location and time, its intimate group meetings and one-on-one opportunities, its formal affiliation with two prominent churches; its creative and spiritual pedagogy; and the spiritual growth Black adolescent girls experience through the demonstration and use of African American female literacy.

**Education "by any means necessary"**. "By any means necessary" was a phrase used by a French scholar known as, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his play *Dirty Hands*. Through a speech given by Malcolm X at the Organization of Afro-American Unity Founding Rally on June 28, 1964, it entered the popular civil rights culture. Douglas (2012) went on to use the phrase in his article that explored the urgency for Black men to learn and acquire knowledge. In general, the phrase states that all available tactics will be used until a desired outcome is achieved. Violence will be used if necessary, if violence is not necessary, then it should not be used. The G.I.R.L.S. Group participants feel an urgency to get to G.I.R.L.S. Group on Friday nights. They rearranged their

schedules and arranged transportation to get to G.I.R.L.S. Group “by any means necessary” because they know they will find love and purposeful resources once they get there.

Wellman & Frank (2001) speak of “Resource Delivery” as the ability of alters (network members possessing resources) to deliver resources to the ego (one in need of/receiving resources). The physical space where Auntie’s Place is located is in the heart of the public housing projects. This was a strategic move on behalf of Auntie and Poppi as a way to increase their ability to deliver resources by planting themselves within walking distance of egos who are in need. Douglas and Peck (2013) speak to this fact of egos finding ways to get the help they need, saying, “Traditionally and today, the Black Diaspora had achieved education by any means necessary through accessing a variety of learning spaces outside schools, including families, churches, and music” (p. 68). A little more than a decade ago Auntie and Poppi began renting out two apartments in the neighborhood, transforming them into constructive learning spaces. One apartment is equipped with a computer lab, tables for eating, homework and fellowship, a library, and an office. The apartment next door is like a home away from home, with bright colors, pictures of the children on the walls including children and youth when they were toothless, couches, bean bags, and a flat screen. This is where G.I.R.L.S Group takes place.

Every Friday night the teenage girls meet up at Auntie’s Place for G.I.R.L.S. Group. We lounge on the couch, pass around snacks while passing around stories, love, and testimonies. During my many visits to G.I.R.L.S Group, I was struck by the positive energy of the space. Laughter floods the room as people from various walks of life gather to learn about the word of God and share life with one another. Each time I visited Auntie’s Place for observations, I saw college volunteers playing soccer with kids in the yard, African refugees from the neighborhood on the computer doing research, and many others taking part in programming and volunteering.

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People from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds participated: African, African-American, White, Asian, Latino, and so forth who had various educational backgrounds (primary school, middle school, high school, college students, college graduates, etc.) G.I.R.L.S Group is comprised of African and African-American teenage girls in middle and high school. The adult mentors are made of Auntie, who is African American, myself, an African American graduate student, an African college student a White woman in her 60s and an Asian undergraduate student volunteer. The diverse crowd is usually engaged in lively discussion and/or learning in a way that fosters growth. With everyone packed into the living room of the apartment every Friday night at 5:00 p.m., it is a lively atmosphere filled with love, smiling faces, purpose, laughter and hope for the future. In comparison with the intense atmosphere of the public housing projects, Auntie's Place is an extremely uplifting space of learning and growth for young minds. In this space prejudice, assumptions and judgment are not invited in. Auntie's Place in a space of unconditional love and forgiveness. Program director Auntie explained,

Auntie's Place is a place to learn about and experience God's love and tender mercies. Children of all ethnic and religious backgrounds are welcome. G.I.R.L.S Group specifically was created for girls dealing with more serious life issues. When God sent us over here He said, "I want you to go and smear the love of God over these kids. I want you to model Jesus Christ as if Jesus was their midst." That's a big order! If God has said I want you to teach this when the Africans [refugees] came, we would have been at a loss. But his universal language of love-that's a bridge in which you can walk across with the teaching.

G.I.R.L.S Group participant, Amy, further detailed the advantages of the timing of the program:

When it comes to high school I just like to get in and out. Most teachers leave Black students alone-they don't challenge us. They have no idea what happens in our community. Here we are more than just a student number. We are engaged in our purpose.

In describing the after-school benefits of G.I.R.L.S Group it should be highlighted that the program's timing also seemed to have significance in providing the girls with a safe and productive place to spend their Friday afternoon/early evening hours. It is also important to note the after-school timing of the program operates outside the rigid walls of both the school and church. As noted previously, the hours between 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. are time periods when teens are supervised the least and are prone to accidents and serious problems in behavior (Hirst, 2005; Zhang, 2002). Auntie herself raised this point. When I asked her what most girls would be doing if they were not in G.I.R.L.S Group, she said most likely "out in the streets." Another participant China similarly explained,

I could easily fall off into peer pressure but I always have people around me that hold me accountable and are over my shoulder making sure I am doing what I am supposed to.

In helping adolescent Black girls develop meaningful and resourceful social capital, then, Auntie's Place has several advantages. It offers a motivating atmosphere. It has the capacity to retain and flexibly work with engaged youth. It provides girls with a way to avoid the pressures of adopting negative social capital that leads to being "out in the streets" after school.

It should be pointed out, however, that the after-school timeframe, although advantageous in attracting students who are motivated and desire a safe haven from trouble and/or danger, periodically presented the G.I.R.L.S Group meetings with attendance-related challenges. Specifically, some girls were forced to miss meetings on occasions due to other obligations

(work, babysitting siblings, sports practices, etc.) and, because of transportation issues.

Periodically some girls were late or had to leave early. In working with adolescents living in poverty it is important to understand how unpredictable their lives can be. Several adolescents in G.I.R.L.S Group are daughters to single-mothers who work evenings and sometimes two jobs to make ends meet. These mothers need the teenage daughter to care for her younger sibling(s). Other adolescents have to work in order to provide their needs, causing their attendance to be dependent on their work schedule. Others, like Amy, have several outside commitments, such as facilitating choir rehearsal at a church her father pastors. In spite of these challenges, the after-school timeframe of Auntie's Place and the G.I.R.L.S Group program appeared to be a major advantage to the program.

**Trust through intimacy.** Research shows that as “individuals reach adulthood, intimate relationships can then determine a number of psychological, emotional, economic, and social outcomes” (Thomas, Barrie, & Tynes, 2008, p. 117). The small, intimate environment of G.I.R.L.S Group meetings is a second structural facilitator of social capital development underlying Auntie's Place. It was advantageous for meetings to have no more than 10 to 12 girls in attendance each week. This allowed the girls to receive close support from one or more of the mentors who serve in G.I.R.L.S Group. Coleman (1988) highlighted how social capital is acquired from relationships where obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness are maintained. LaShai speaks on the trust maintained in G.I.R.L.S Group meetings. Without the established trust they would not be able to talk about the topics they engage in:

Well, G.I.R.L.S Group was really great for me, because I got a chance to talk about things that, uhm, you know, adults kind of shy away from a little bit, like sex and, you know, knowing your worth and kind of, ah, knowing how to be treated as a woman, and

so that kind of, ah, those kind of talks, and then spirituality as well, learning about different women in the Bible that normally wouldn't be brought up, you know, brought up in church.

The trust created in this space allows for the girls and mentors to speak openly about real life issues. The desire is for the girls to be as equipped and prepared as possible for the world and all its challenges. To build trust amongst the girls and to gain allies amongst the families, Auntie did something many school teachers and administrators rarely do, she knocked on their door. Connie remembers one such visit:

One day Auntie just came, and she knocked on our door, and then I know she spoke. She spoke to my dad, and she introduced herself to us and she just said to come by like every afternoon. The first couple times she [Amy] went, then I remember I walked across the street. I saw my neighbor Serenity and Star playing in front. They were all neighbors. And they were chilling, a bunch of kids like sitting on the bench, like, you know. I'm like, what is this place? And I came in exactly the same way as kids club. It was awesome, cause like everybody went to Auntie's House. Every kid in the neighborhood went.

Not only did Auntie gain the girls' trust by seeking after them and entering into their home, she also gained by in by the other children the kids trusted that went there. They saw them and were convinced Auntie's Place was a safe place to be. Every girl participating in this study spoke of the trustworthiness being a huge asset to the program-differing from their experience at school. The following comments from Amy and Connie, respectively, highlight special moments with

G.I.R.L.S Group leaders:

My favorite memory is when Mrs. Coleman hosted a big birthday party for us at her house. She went all out for us.

I remember one Halloween when we were like, six or seven, and Auntie and Angie (leader) dressed us up like princesses and took us to church for games and candy.

(Laughs)

Consistent with the girls' remarks, I observed the intimate environment to be conducive to the supportive relationships developed among all participants and leaders. These small moments built trust amongst the girls and mentors allowing for a flow of love, support and accountability to be reciprocated.

**Auntie's Village.** Lin (2000) asserts that people from marginalized nondominant backgrounds tend to have relationships with people who are most like them, limiting their knowing of "highly ranked" people, or people with meaningful and purposeful resources. Furthermore, they do not have roles or affiliations with groups/organizations that are meaningful and resourceful. Auntie's Place has formal affiliations with two local churches, providing meaningful, purposeful, "highly ranked" people and resources to the girls. The village of supporters affiliated with Auntie's Place help to facilitate the girls' social capital development. These affiliations enable the ability to establish and sustain bridge building relationships, relationships among and between individuals who come from different backgrounds and who have had different experiences (Miller, 2011). The adolescent girls involved in this study seem to have an advantage over their peers due to the opportunities to be intellectually and professionally mentored by Auntie, believers affiliated churches, and college students who are close in proximity to the age of the adolescent girls. This formal church affiliation allows for the girls at

Auntie's place to receive one-on-one mentoring. Many church members spend time with children during the week, taking them to church and community functions. Church volunteers also get together in the summer and during holidays to sponsor the children for school supplies, gifts, mission trip and camp sponsorship. The adolescent girls have intensive exposure to passionate, loving, creative, intelligent, experienced believers who mentor them and walk with them through their life circumstances, one of the pivotal structural pieces of Auntie's Place. Girls claimed that their understandings of God and faith, or their future and worth, flourished in these contexts of strong, lasting relationships with knowledgeable mentors. Auntie speaks on this saying:

I love what we do with the girls. I love the leaders we work with. The wonderful thing about the G.I.R.L.S Group is it's not just me-we all come to this from different points on the ladder. You know what I mean? We come from different backgrounds, different socio economics, different races-and I just think it is so wonderful that we teach what we teach and they hear it from so many different perspectives. There is always somebody in the group who can relate to someone else in the group/or a leader because we are all coming at this from different vantage points and we all have different personalities. I'm the old lady of the group, but then we have Mrs. Adrian who's closer to their age, we have actually had college students who have been leaders. I think the strength of the group is the leadership team.

Auntie goes on to describe an instance where she called on an affiliated ministry for assistance with the annual mom's appreciation dinner:

In many ways I'm like an octopus and I have my fingers and tentacles out in many groups and so I've been going to groups-in fact I'm speaking at a church tomorrow night

and I've asked them if they wouldn't mind participating in a) praying for the mothers of Auntie's Place and b) writing an encouraging note to a mom that they will get as they arrive so that they have had someone who has thought about them and says welcome to this event.

Social capital is based on who you know. Auntie knows many people in places of influence and power who she can depend on to come through for her girls. Because the resources and assistance Auntie ask for goes to a good and just cause, people generously give of their time, money and resources. Auntie believes in the girls she serves so much, she is bold in asking for what she knows the girls deserve: opportunities and access. My observations of G.I.R.L.S Group adolescents interacting with the leaders and volunteers from affiliated ministries confirmed the interview findings.

**God as my personal savior.** "God is necessary for survival," (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 221). As Black women, we have to persevere in the midst of storms. We have to keep going. It is important that we teach this reality to the next generation. Harris-Perry expresses that "being strong comes from showing forgiveness, having faith in God, learning from other women" (p. 222). From my observations, developing relationships among the girls built a bridge to faith and a relationship with God. In several instances Auntie and the adolescent girls made references to having a relationship with God. During an unstructured interview with LaShai, she talked about her sister China supporting her as she pursued singing Korean hip-hop music. She says:

When I told my sister a while ago, I was like, hey, you know, I have this passion inside me, I want to sing. You know, I mean, I might not be the best right now, but I want to become a great performer...and she [China] was one of those people God, I think God put in my life, you know to say, here's your other backbone, here's somebody you can

lean on. To, to help you through this, cause I know it's hard for you, I know you're struggling through it, and sometimes you don't want to talk to me as your father, I know you don't want to talk to me sometimes because it's too hard

(LaShai, personal communication).

LaShai is illustrating her faith by expressing how God will help her through her fear of singing, especially a genre such as Korean hip-hop known as K-Pop. LaShai trust that God is using her sister China to carry out his love. She believes God is using China to provide her with the support she needs to fulfill her bold endeavor. Harris-Perry (2011) speaks to this notion of living outside the boundaries of the status quo, saying:

God provides an alternative measuring stick for judging their human worth. When judged against social values rooted in white beauty standards, economic success, political power, or normative domestic arrangements, African American women consistently fall short. By focusing on divine valuation based on their character, kindness, service, and strength, black women shift the angles of the crooked room and produce a new image for themselves. Faith is a resistance strategy (p. 223).

Faith keeps LaShai going and pushes her to believe she can do great things. During an unstructured interview with Connie, she expressed her belief in God's miraculous power when she describes how she and her family, as African immigrants, ended up in this Midwest City, living directly across the street from Auntie's Place:

Connie: It's funny, because when Dad got here [America], he was not even thinking about living here. He moved to this city a weekend before we [mother and siblings] moved here. And after spending three years in New Hampshire, we already had a house,

bedrooms, like everything, and he was like, no, I'm moving. And he moved the weekend before we came to the states.

Adrian: Now, what happened that made him want to move?

Connie: It was winter and too cold, oh, and obviously it was God.

Connie attributes God for leading her family to this Midwest City and to Auntie's House. This type of faith is strengthened by faith-building excursions Auntie puts together regularly. Over the summer, Auntie designed an outing for group that was designed to inspire the girls to build a personal relationship with God. It involved Auntie and other leaders carpooling the girls to Auntie's home in a beautiful well-to-do neighborhood and having a spa day for them. Upon pulling up to her home, the girls were ushered up her sidewalk where colorful words of affirmation decorated the concrete with chalk. Upon entering her home, a leader took the girls coats and gave them a gift bag filled with warm socks, flip flops, lotion and perfume. The kitchen was filled with treats, appetizers, and sparkling beverages. The setting was like that of a gala or ball for a princess. Auntie wanted the girls to experience the love of God by showering them with the best, because that is what she believed they deserved. Just because their circumstances caused them to be treated unlike princess, Auntie did not want that to confuse them. She wanted them to understand that their worth went far beyond their current circumstances. Through the act of pampering the girls and putting on an elegant event, Auntie was showing the girls God's unconditional love. Following the fellowship with appetizers the girls settled in for a movie depicting the grace God has for them. The message came from a well-respected, young, Black man who pastors a church in Ohio. The message was very kid friendly, using language and visuals the girls could relate to. One girl confessed that she saw this man as her God-father. She never knew her biological father. The sermons she had listened to of his

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helped raise her and shape her into the woman she was becoming. The message the pastor presented was followed up with a discussion with the girls about God's Grace. The evening ended with the girls playing hula hoop in Auntie's backyard while girls painted nails and styled one another's hair.



*Figure 13.* Goody bags for the girls at Spa Day.



*Figure 14.* Amy applying makeup at Spa Day.



*Figure 15.* Kim painting her mentor's fingernails.

During the G.I.R.L.S group meeting that followed, Kim reminisced on the event. She spoke to the girls sharing the insight she received from the experience:

God's grace gives you freedom. The video brought such a relief. You can just be yourself-you don't have to keep track of all your sins. God isn't taking tallies-be yourself- strive to do your best and allow God to love you for who you are. You are not too bad and there are no rules.

Kim's peers agreed. Many reacted the same way, expressing how they could relate to the video and admired the way the pastor made the message easy to understand and put the biblical concepts in their terms, using their language. Each admired his humor and the visuals he provided. The girls also expressed feeling a sense of closeness with each other during the event. They each loved getting pampered and were elated about all the good food. The spa experience was used to help inspire the girls to love themselves the way God loves them. Once they love themselves the love becomes contagious and they can genuinely love others. There was indeed a noticeable difference in the girls' closeness between the first session I observed and those I observed several months later. Their many hours of engagement in love, faith and grace practices clearly helped them develop a degree of unity with one another and themselves. And while "team building" among the girls is not particularly one of the major goals of G.I.R.L.S Group, activities that facilitate team building create stronger bonds among the girls that seem to be significantly advantageous for them in and out of Auntie's Place. Pointedly, literature in education and sociology shows evidence indicating that contributory and purposeful relationship networks can strongly undergrid the development of knowledge and skills (Coleman, 1988).

**A place of refuge.** Each girl agreed that their experiences with G.I.R.L.S Group were engaging, purposeful, fun, and that the volunteer leaders were a valuable dynamic in the creation

of a spiritually driven, loving and positive learning space. The most popular of the leaders is Auntie of course, receiving many comments from the girls of their gratitude and appreciation of her time, wisdom, commitment, dedication, her long individual conversations, her love of God and her open door policy in her office. They appreciated Auntie's style of delivery with her teachings-she provided structure while still teaching in an "out-of-school" and "out-of-church" way. LaShai, a participant of this study and a first year, first generation college student shared this quote-which represents the feelings of countless others-illustrating the influence of Auntie and the creative, spiritual and "out-of-school and church" structure of G.I.R.L.S Group:

In G.I.R.L.S Group I got a chance to talk about things that teachers and other adults kind of shy away from, like sex, knowing your worth and knowing how to be treated as a woman of God. Those types of talks and the spiritual guidance as well; learning about different women of the Bible that normally wouldn't be brought up in church. I really think Auntie gave me insight in certain situations-to where I'm just thinking, "I had this talk with Auntie and the girls and their opinions," so I look at situations different and have become more optimistic about situations when normally I would have gotten really angry. G.I.R.L.S Group strengthened me as a whole. To find this really deep love of Christ, just seeing how Auntie treated me with such love and kindness just made me want to be closer to God just as much as she was being close to God.

The following comments from Kim expresses the many roles Auntie and her husband Poppi have played in her life:

Auntie and Poppi are my family. It's [Auntie's Place] more than just a program. They've been a significant part of my life. They have been at every major event in my life-banquets, dances, track meets, 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, and graduations. They have been there. It's

the people that make the program. Auntie and Poppi care for me. Once I knew they loved me, I could depend on them, trust them-I realized family don't come one way.

My observations of Auntie's teaching and my interviews with her affirmed LaShai and Kim's sentiments. Referring to the G.I.R.L.S Group meetings as a place that made them whole, Auntie said she wanted to spread the love of God to them and prepare them for how to activate their faith in real life situations. She told me that her philosophy with the girls is that the battle is in their minds. If they renew their minds their mindsets will change and therefore the way they view themselves will change and in turn will influence their choices. Importantly, I was a witness to the ongoing support Auntie provided the girls, inspiring them to make lofty goals that can be attained through both collaborative and individual efforts. I witnessed her working with girls in a careful, yet thoughtful way while fostering them to be independent or to depend on each other for extra support. During interviews, Auntie repeatedly described her and the leaders commitment to meeting the girls' unique needs on an individual basis, from providing them with transportation, mentoring their parents, or being present at ball games. Auntie describes her commitment to LaShai in particular, saying:

LaShai was in Precious Jewels (7-12 year old group), she was a first grader and that was the time when her mother was "out there." LaShai was always a sweet, serious girl. I knew something was happening with LaShai in Precious Jewels as a first grader when we were writing letters to Jesus and she wrote this card: Dear Jesus thank you for changing my mom and making her a better person. She spelled person p-r-s-n (laughs). I knew something was happening so over the years I prayed for her family and eventually became a second mother to LaShai's mom...LaShai's pulled me aside on several occasions and we've had conversations like attorney/client conversations. She shares her

heart about things and issues and situations she's been through and I share mine. I've just been amazed by her growth. I remember when I first met her mom and now I'm like wow! I'm blown away.

Auntie's commitment to meeting not only the girls needs but the families needs in conventional and unconventional ways (spiritually and creatively) appeared to lay the ground work for long lasting relationships to develop among and between the girls and staff members.

### **Relational Knowing**

The strategies and structures previously described are clearly an important part of the productive social capital the adolescent girls' developed; however, it is noteworthy to point out the different types of relationships that cultivated this space as well. Data elluded to the establishment of diverse, resourceful relartionships among peers, the adult staff, and volunteers from affiliated churches. Inferring from social capital theory, I describe these as "familial" and "connected" relationships.

**Familial relationships with peers.** My first observation of G.I.R.L.S Group in 2011 was one where I carefully obsereved to see how the adolescent girls interacted with one another. Considering that over half of the girls had been attending Aintie's Place since they were toothless, and at least six had siblings in the group, it was not surprising that there was an enourmous amount of enthusiastic talking, laughing, joking and interplay between them. In my field notes I noted preceeding in the 5 to 10 minutes proceeding the opening of the meeting, there were several conversations between the girls. Everything from who got into a fight at school that day to how many hours some had to work that week, multiple conversations occurred across the room. I noted that the group was homogeneous in gender, race and age, but heterogenoeus in the struggles they came from or were currently in. Kim had been homeless off and on since

participating in GIRLS Group. Amy and Connie were African immigrants, once in a one room hut. China and LaShai were at one time being raised by a single mother. The majority lived in subsidy, low income housing or in the projects in proximity to Auntie's Place. LaShai and China experienced living in the public housing projects to their mother getting married, to their mother owning her first business and home.

These Black teenage girls, ranging from middle to high school, each had a unique walk in life that brought them to G.I.R.L.S Group. In spite of the different paths they came from, the girls were very familiar and comfortable around each other. Many considered themselves close friends through their participation in Auntie's Place over the years. When asked to describe the relationship with the girls in the group, Connie answered by saying, "my relationship with the others girls, like me and Kim, have grown so close. I love Kim. Our friendship has gotten stronger. I would have never gotten close to her if it wasn't for G.I.R.L.S Group. So many of us will be lifelong friends". Auntie goes on to describe the outcome of the girls' familial bond:

We have never had a girl in Princess Academy or G.I.R.L.S Group get pregnant, get on drugs or get into a ratchet relationship while they are actively participating in the group (personal communication).

By "ratchet" Auntie is referring to dysfunctional relationships. The G.I.R.L.S Group program helped foster familial bonds that worked to support one another and hold one another accountable. Almost all participants interviewed noted the support amongst the girls and leaders as one of the major assets to the program. Amy describes G.I.R.L.S Group as a home away from home. She sees Auntie and Poppi as her spiritual mother and father, and sees the leaders and her peers as the sisters she never had.

**Relational bridges.** Possibly even more beneficial to the girls than the familial bonds they formed with each other as peers in the G.I.R.L.S Group program were the strong connections that were forged among girls and adults. Collins (2008) speaks of the wisdom of Black women. The relationships the girls built with the adult mentors allowed them to receive knowledge and wisdom from women who have valuable life experiences. These women passed on their wisdom to the young Black girls. Collins asserts:

Living life as black women requires wisdom since knowledge about the dynamics of race, gender, and class subordination has been essential to black women's survival.

African American women give such wisdom high credence in assessing knowledge (p. 345).

Putnam (1995) and others refer to relationships that bring about such a connection as bridging relationships, or relationships that expose people to life-enhancing individuals, resources, and opportunities that had otherwise been unavailable or at least viewed as unavailable. Lin (1999) suggests that exposure to relational bridges is particularly important for women, people of color, and those from lower economic statuses, connected relationships are exceptionally important to Auntie and the G.I.R.L.S Group program. Relationships that built connections appeared to extend the range of the girls networks.

Of the connections, it was most notable that G.I.R.L.S Group exposed the girls to volunteers from affiliated churches, staff from Auntie's Place and college students from the local university. G.I.R.L.S Group participants' relationships with these individuals varied in intensity and nature, but they all appeared to provide certain benefits and advantages to the girls. For example, many of the girls took advantage of volunteers and their desire and willingness to act as their mentors. I myself mentored four of the G.I.R.L.S Group participants, checking in on them

often and helping them in any area of their life where they are needing guidance. Girls are mentored throughout the the program. They spend time together both in and outside of G.I.R.L.S Group working toward developing logical and cohesive life goals, aligning them with the word of God and their overall purpose. From these relationships, G.I.R.L.S Group participants claimed to gain not only Biblical wisdom but also support on the ground level. This included experiencing unconditional love, motivation and a sense of hope. The commonality of experiences between the peers and their mentors caused the connection between them to be even stronger. From Auntie, to myself and many of the leaders of G.I.R.L.S Group come from situations similar to the girls. Auntie grew up poor in public housing with a mother who rejected her. I grew up with an abusive father who was in and out of jail and witnessed my mother struggle to raise 4 children broken and alone. Others leaders share stories of neglect, teenage pregnancy, drop out, etc. The list goes on and on of the mistakes and brokenness we come from. It was our faith in God that brought us out of our individual darkness and the light that we share to our mentees daily as they find their way out of their broken situations. From these connections, the girls see their mentors as friends who they can approach about anything that concerns them. Many of the girls even discribed their mentors as role models whose testimonies should be celebrated and triumph emulated. These relarionships opened their hearts and minds to how to make God real in their everyday lives as adolescents, sisters, daughters, and eventual college students, community leaders, mothers and wives. LaShai emphasized the strength of these connections made between our personal mentor/mentee relationship:

Mrs. Adrian, you have been there for me, allowing me to make money by babysitting your kids when I didn't have a job and giving me that motherly love when I couldn't go

to my grandmother . I can come and talk to you about anything. When I couldn't get that from my mom, I'd be like, "Adrian can you come get me?" You were always there. I invested a lot of time into LaShai outside of Auntie's Place encouraging her and believing with her as she dared to dream big dreams. At times when her mother or others close to her brought her discouragement, I would remind her of who God said she was. I would validate her existence and remind her of her worth.

Auntie describes how each of the girls in this study have taken advantage of opportunities to be mentored. Auntie is impressed with how Amy and her sister Connie have, for example:

I've seen Amy take advantage of opportunities to be mentored by people. There's a couple that was dating that volunteered here a few years ago, Nancy and Drew. She got so close to them she called them "mom" and "dad." Once she said, "I went to a movie," and I asked, "who took you?" and she said, "mom and dad." I replied, "*your* parents took you to a movie?" She said, "no, Drew and Nancy!" Her parents have probably never been inside a movie theater! I've seen Amy and her sister Connie too, really take what's good in American culture and take advantage of it.

It is clear from these comments, my observation of G.I.R.L.S Group meetings, my interviews, and through my own experience as a mentor that the connections made through mentorship brought the girls strength, exposure and love. Girls bridging relationships with Auntie's Place staff, church volunteers and college students, emerged as being of high importance. Every G.I.R.L.S Group participant emphasized the blessings that evolved from getting to know Auntie, her staff, myself, and the list of other volunteers involved. They spoke of how the individuals' walk with God helped model for them how to experience God in real life situations. They spoke

of how their mentors' walks inspired them to grow in their personal lives, how the relationship developed their networks of support, and a host of other positive rewards that have come from connecting with adults who care. When asked to describe the connection between her and Auntie, LaShai explains how deep their connection runs:

Seeing another African American woman so strong and not swayed by anything helped me a lot. Normally when I'm going to school I don't see African American teachers. I don't have African American women pouring into my life. To see that woman [Auntie] pouring into my life-it affected me tremendously. I even talked to my mother about Auntie and she and Auntie got connected and somehow my mom got saved in the midst of that. Auntie made me feel like I was worth something as an African American...I used to get bullied because I wasn't white enough to hang with Whites and I wasn't Black enough to hang with the Black people. I was always in this middle group with people who weren't even American, with a bunch of foreigners. Auntie made me realize that you are who God says you are. You're this amazing person. You have to believe that for yourself. You can't let other people determine how you feel or how you think about you. That's why now a days I'm not that influenced by what other people think because I just continue being me. So if you sway, I'm not going with you.

The connections Auntie makes with the girls runs deeper than mentorship, she truly values the girls' existence and dedicates her life to making sure their minds are cleansed of fear and doubt. She goes even further by building relationships with the mothers, and instead of pointing a finger at them, drawing them close with love as she inspires them to seek after more for their children and themselves. LaShai's sister China speaks of her connection with Auntie. She remembers living right down the street from Auntie's Place:

I remember attending programs as a kid and becoming really close to Auntie and talking to her. I continued going to Auntie's Place and attending Kids Across America Camp and eventually G.I.R.L.S Group and began helping Auntie with anything she needed. Auntie was like another grandmother.

Several girls expressed helping out at Auntie's Place wherever needed. I witnessed girls signing children in as they came in, wiping tables after meals and helping outside with organized games. The love they received from Auntie motivates them to give back to Auntie's Place. Many of the girls have been attending Auntie's Place since they were young children, 5 to 7 years old. Many of them have experienced almost a decade or more of love from Auntie, showing them they can trust someone without being lied to or let down. Auntie's love is consistent and steadfast.

The girls illustrated how the connections they made with adults through Auntie's Place and the G.I.R.L.S Group were not typical of those that they or other Black adolescent girls usually have. For example, consider how Connie and Amy came to the United States as immigrants from Africa as little girls. Their first place was right down the street from Auntie's Place:

Connie: One day Auntie just came and she knocked on our door and she spoke to Amy about it. And she just told us where Auntie's Place was. We invited her in and got to know her. She said to come by every afternoon and she told us the time. The first couple times she [Amy] went.

Amy: I remember walking by and seeing all these kids and Serenity and Tiffany on the bench. I was like, what is this place? Everybody went to Auntie's Place. Every kid in the neighborhood.

What stands out is that Auntie went to them. She sought them out. She went out of her circle of comfort and entered their world, getting to know them on their territory. Building connections with Black adolescent girls involves seeing beyond their address and going in to get to *know* them. Consider also how Auntie's Place was described as a place everybody went to. Where in many institutions Black children are rejected, at Auntie's Place, little Black girls are accepted, invited in and welcomed.

Kim was especially appreciative of her connection with Auntie and her mentors. She was grateful to have the opportunity to go to Jamaica on a missions trip with one of the affiliated churches. She was also thankful that through her connections, she was able to raise money in an unexpected way:

I was going on a missions trip to Jamaica and had to make some money, because in my position, I don't have \$500 just laying around anywhere. I went to school. This girl had a bracelet on I liked made out of bandanas. I bought one from her. This was before I said I was going to take her idea and make money. The same day I went to Auntie's Place and my mentor Jenna was like, "okay Kim we need to start strategizing how you're going to raise money for Jamaica". I'm like, "uh, how much do I need?" She was like, "\$500 Kim." I'm like, "how am I going to raise \$500 in three weeks?" I looked down at my wrist and saw the bracelet I bought. I ended up going to Auntie about it and she was like, "you know Kim, I think this would be a really good idea to do for sororities on campus." I'm like, "ain't nobody gonna buy nothin from no 14 year old." She's like, "no I really think it would be a good idea." So we came up with a name, Wacky Bandz. Christina, another one of my mentors, has a high ranking job in a sorority and she thought about making it a competition between the sororities. Which ever one bought the most would

get a portion donated to their charity. So Auntie and I were on the phone ordering business cards. This was so crazy to me! She ordered 150 business cards with designs on them. And then Christina called and wanted me to come speak to her sorority and propose my idea. After that we drafted an email to send to the other sororities. I got email after email from sororities wanting me to come speak. I ended up scheduling three dinner speeches in one day! 200 girls at one house wanted bracelets. It was blowing up before my eyes. The girls were going crazy! Another mentor of mine handled the finances, She set up a spread sheet and kept track of the sales and how much money I made each night. Me being 14 I didn't know about that.

Auntie shared her perspective on how Kim's business came about, highlighting what Wellman & Frank (2001) characterized as the "Ego's Social Characteristics," or Kim's ability to attract social support:

People just started drawing to her [Kim]. I remember one time this girl who was helping her, Kim said, "Auntie, she said her grandpa owned an oil company and her dad works for the oil company. And her dad is the vice president of a bank." And this girl was drawn to help Kim develop her business plan for her Wacky Bandz! She's the one that got her into all those sororities to speak at dinners. Kim just took advantage of the help they wanted to give.

What is meaningful to note is the village of caring mentors who took Kim under their wing, using their influence to develop her business. She had people draw to her to help her. Auntie's place is full of mentors ready to draw near to boys and girls and help them develop into responsible human beings. Mentors at Auntie's Place have instilled hope into the girls. The girls receive high levels of mutual support. Auntie and her leadership team speak highly of each of the girls.

Always framing their lives in a positive way. The positive reinforcement appeared to increase the girls' confidence that they could become successful in whatever they desired to do.

### **Worthwhile Investment**

Auntie and her volunteers invested time in the girls. Their consistent flow of love caused bonds to strengthen and bridges to be built to networks of support. As a result of these relationships, three major outcomes were observed: (a) girls' increased understanding of fundamental spiritual elements, (b) girls' increased sense of self-efficacy, and (c) girls' desire to remain connected to Auntie's Place by becoming volunteers and giving back to Auntie and the kids who attend.

**Spiritual growth.** Hull (2001) describes spirituality as involving a "conscious relationship with the realm of the spirit, with the invisibly permeating, ultimately positive, divine, and evolutionary energies that give rise to and sustain all that exists" (p. 2). Auntie's Place has a Christian foundation, but I argue that spirituality can be practiced and experienced through other outlets as well. Social capital theory "describes certain outcomes, advantages, and/or disadvantages that are derived from relationship networks" (Miller, 2011 p. 38). One of the biggest principles at Auntie's Place is relationship building. Relationships with one self, with humanity, with mother earth and her many natural gifts and resources, and with the power of the divine. During G.I.R.L.S Group we try to foster healthy relationships for the girls because it is believed that through these strong relationships certain positive outcomes and advantages derive from them. Guiding them on how to pray and strengthen their relationship with God, to surrounding them with positive people to build relationship with and equipping them with resources and influences to support them in their journey. As I reviewed the Auntie's Place handbook prior to my initial observations of G.I.R.L.S Group. I wondered if the depth of love

that it posted could be effectively translated to the G.I.R.L.S Group setting. It was astonishing to observe, in the following months, as Auntie and others led the girls to not only understand the love of God but also to actually apply God's word to their own context in focused and coherent ways. Auntie's out-of-the-box approach to teaching appeared to be a critical factor in this growth. She explained the program's philosophy in developong young lovers of Christ:

We at Auntie's Place are unapologetically Christian, but we don't shove it down anyone's throat because God doesn't do that with us. We don't have to force blood to flow through our bodies, it's a part of the package. At Auntie's Place love is a part of the package. We get more face time with kids than their parents do, or want to even, so we take advantage of the time we have to display love to children in unconventional ways.

Through Bible studies, field trips, and even leisurely conversations with their mentors, The G.I.R.L.S. learn to depend on God and reflect His heart in day-to-day situations.

I witnessed an impressive journey, in this regard, among many of the girls. In G.I.R.L.S Group meetings girls were boisterous and talkative when together as a group, but when working with girls one-on-one they were more reserved, insecure, lacked knowledge of God and their worth as young Black girls. Some even felt defeated by the circumstances in their lives. By early spring, many of the girls displayed confidence and communicative capabilities that had noticeably blossomed. Their relationship with God had begun to form and they were able to effectively convey their understanding, some even presenting a series on women of the Bible, to a group of 50 mothers at Auntie's annual appreciation dinner. They were able to respond appropriately to questions like, "Who was the Woman at the Well?" One of the girls, LaShai, who was once shy and timid, explained her preparation for her presentation in an interview:

**Adrian:** So tell me a little bit about what you are going to be presenting at the Mom's Banquet?

**LaShai:** The Woman and the Well. And I'm going to be dressed in a costume and I have a video on You Tube by Mandisa-her song is "Not Guilty." And um-I'm presenting a poem, a spoken word that I made myself. I used the guy who made it first. I used some of his quotes then I made it myself-made it my own.

**Adrian:** Okay. And can you kind of walk me through that process a little bit of first hearing this spoken word and how you had to prepare for this big final poem that you are presenting.

**LaShai:** First I had to pray to God. I had to put myself in that woman's shoes. Then I read the scriptures on it-on what happened. Then I started to cut pieces out and put pieces in and try my best to think of what this woman was going through in through in those times.

**Adrian:** Can you tell me a little bit about the story of the Woman at the well? Or who she is? Whose shoes did you have to get into?

**LaShai:** Her identity is the identity of a woman who feels guilty of what she's done-about how she's sleeping with someone that's not her husband and about how people talk about her because of what she's done. They blame her and kinda see her as beneath. They don't see her as a person who makes mistakes as well as they do. They just see her as a woman who is unfitting and not worthy to be talked to-just laughed at.

**Adrian:** And then what happens at the well?

**LaShai:** She has met a Jew, which is Jesus. And he just basically tells her that she's more than what people have been saying about her; more than all the lies. And she feels so condemned in her spirit that she wants to go and talk to people she's never talked to before-to go and tell people-the same people were laughing in her face-about this person who has told her who she was on the inside and who she was on the outside. He didn't laugh at her-didn't mock her; basically showed love, mercy, forgiveness and kindness towards her.

**Adrian:** Good. So you went through listening to this spoken word piece and then going back and reading about it, praying about it, getting yourself in her shoes-which is powerful! And then kind of making that spoken word your own?

**LaShai:** Yea

LaShai's statements were representative of other girls who, as a result of supportive relationships and engaging instruction, demonstrated noticeable growth spiritually and personally in their

confidence and self-worth. LaShai utilized spoken word to express herself and extend her knowledge of the biblical story, the *Woman at the Well*. Utilizing African American female literacy made her expression authentic to her beliefs and culture. When I asked program leaders about the growth in their relationship with God, their confidence, communication and public speaking that I observed among the girls, they said that similar results happened every year. It would indeed seem that girls' growth in this regard will serve them well as they move forward in life—regardless of whether their father is in prison or their mother is abusive.

China showed similar signs of growth in her relationship with God and her ability to express that. In late August, upon China's arrival back home after attending a summer camp, I conducted an unstructured interview with her in her bedroom. Upon entering her room, I was drawn to her guitar on the wall along with awards she had pinned around. She had awards for things like honors choir, track and field, A-honor roll, and a KAA (Kids across America) Camp leadership award. I looked down to see a bible on her table along with a book titled, *Sold*, about a Muslim girl who must work in a brothel to support her family. China described the book as one of her favorites. I noticed several pictures on China's wall of friends at KAA camp, so I asked her about KAA:

**Adrian:** Okay, so just kind of recap for me as if I've never heard of KAA. Just kind of tell me a little history or background of KAA. I guess we'll just start there.

**China:** Right.

**Adrian:** So what is it?

**China:** So KAA is Kids Across America. It's a Christian camp and a sports camp. And it, I think it's from like May to August. And it may like go from there. And they like hire like our—like close to our age, like college students, counselors that are Christians. And they let, they like, ah, pretty much guide us and lead us in the way of Christ and help us understand it and stuff like that. And so I've been a camper for six years, and this year was different from like all the other years, like, cause I went to Higher Ground, HG, I went to Higher Ground first.

**Adrian:** Okay.

**China:** Then I went to K3, so you can totally like see the difference between the two.

**Adrian:** You went to Higher Ground and then what?

**China:** And then K3.

**Adrian:** Oh, got you.

**China:** It's the camp.

**Adrian:** Okay.

**China:** The, yeah. And so, and you can like see the difference like with like being like actually fed knowledge, like at HG, and then when you get to like camp it's just like, kind of like bunch of fun, bunch of fun, bunch of fun.

**Adrian:** Uhm-hmm.

**China:** And then you get taught to be like a servant and a leader, and you're around a bunch of like. Literally like you're around like spiritual people, and then when you get to camp, like everyone's a Christian (inaudible) but you hear kids cussing here, cussing there.

**Adrian:** Uhm-hmm.

**China:** So it's just like, but HG, you really get the real experience, and you actually get to serve people. Like, we have to carry these 200-pound crosses in groups to the three different camps.

**Adrian:** Hmm.

**China:** And then we went to this garden, it was really, it was a really nice garden. And they were expecting boys, so they gave us like a bunch of food and stuff, but we worked from 11:00, I think it was 10:00 to 4:00.

**Adrian:** Wow.

**China:** Yeah. So we actually like did the work and actually served people, and we always like, they would always ask us what the moral was or what we got out of it, so it was a lot of real knowledge that you got at HG, and you were like taught to have like a quiet time with God and things like that.

China is illustrating her maturity in the Lord. She is hungry for more knowledge and looking at life beyond sports. Now she is seeking Higher Ground (HG), which is a camp that takes teens to

a whole new level of serving and time with God. What is more, “Black women build, change, and express their religious commitments through song and music, literature and art, collective organizing and charitable endeavors” (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 233). China encompasses all of that. Through the songs she sings with her guitar or on piano, to the literature she was actively reading on her nightstand, to the acts of service she is involved in. China is building, changing, and expressing her religious commitments. China’s maturation and spiritual growth has made the hard work and sacrifices worth it. Through the girls’ continued success, Auntie is able to see the return on her investment.

**Reach back and pull forward.** Due to the connections made at Auntie’s Place and to the increase in their knowledge of God’s love, the girls’ self-worth increased. Both Kim and LaShai not only went to college but are thriving. I found it extremely noteworthy that not only did the girls’ value in themselves improve, but strong relationships were forged during their time in G.I.R.L.S Group and Auntie’s Place which fundamentally contributed to their continued connection with Auntie, Poppi and their mentors. The relationships formed at Auntie’s Place go beyond their k-12 experience. It has become a lifetime of love and support. So much so, many come back to volunteer and give back. The history of Auntie’s support (Wellman & Frank, 2001) is constant. Girls consistently help out at Auntie’s Place. Some, like Kim and LaShai, come home on college break to help with daily and administrative tasks. In an interview, Kim explained the transformation of going from an ego who was in need to an alter who gives of her time and resources to other kids:

Going with her [Auntie], sitting in the audience sometimes at one of her speaking engagements when she goes out and promotes Auntie’s Place and raise funds...it’s very interesting...the process and how I got from the kid perspective to the economic and

social perspective...People think it's all about hanging out-No it's much more than that. This is real deal stuff... I'm no longer receiving from Auntie's Place, now my time is spent volunteering and being there any way I can. That means so much more now than it ever has, more than receiving.

LaShai echoes this sentiment when she describes the different gifts she has to share with Auntie's Place kids:

Well, I, I'm an artist, and I'm also a writer. I write a lot, I draw a lot. I mean. I'm basically this big box of just art. So basically it's all types of art. Any art you can think of, I hold that talent. Which is crazy to me, cause like, God, you gave me all this, these gifts of writing and, you know, art, dancing, singing, playing music, cause I love to play music. I love listening to music. You know, it's just forms of art. I also like cooking. I am really good at cooking. Actually, I can see a chef do one thing without even touching it. I and I have it. I can recreate it right there...and I also like watching kids and helping children.

100% of the girl participants claimed that they would stay connected and give back Auntie's Place in one way or another. Whether it be through volunteering, donations, working as director, or even opening up Auntie's Place organization in another location to spread love to all marginalized children at the intersection of race and poverty.

### **Reflection**

After examining the setting, philosophy, structure, and resources of Auntie's Place and the G.I.R.L.S Group program, it became obvious that the program thrives largely on its ability to facilitate intimate relationships. According to Lin (1999, 2000), such relationships are factors of productive, life-changing social capital networks. The work at G.I.R.L.S Group not only appears

valid in that it increases Black girls' understandings of God's love and their self-worth, but also has value in highlighting how community-based pedagogies can, through their capacities to foster structures, strategies, and values; facilitate social capital networks that are productively serving as social resources for marginalized families and communities.

Community-based learning spaces like G.I.R.L.S. Group at Auntie's Place are useful, especially in fostering the development of intimately connecting relationships that extend the depth and range of Black girls' social networks. Girls meet peers who have backgrounds, roots, lifestyles and dreams that are different from their own. They are held accountable by-and develop bridging relationships with-"highly ranked" successful adults, many of color and many from a past of living in poverty. They gain fresh flows of information and support, new codes on how to act, and many times, new vision about how their lives can manifest.

Auntie, other mentors and I had utility in that we introduced new ideas and opportunities to the girls. Such bonds served as effective life changers and connectors to opportunities. Auntie's Places affiliation with community churches and local university was of fundamental importance in increasing the program's capacity to provide productive social capital development. The affiliations infused invaluable (and reliable) sources of human capital (in the form of college student mentors and community business women's support) and economic/physical capital (in the forms of financial assistance and learning resources) to the program. In addition, the continued presence of college students and church volunteers provided G.I.R.L.S Group participants with sources that are tangible for hope and guidance. These Black girls understandings of "success" and "college" appeared to be fostered by their relationships with the affiliated mentors. Attachment with university institutions is a clear policy and programming implication that might be adopted for community-based programs. This allows for

connections with well-established, resource-rich organizations that can provide human, financial, and/or social capital, making it easier to reach the capacity to serve marginalized children in productive and sustainable ways.

## CHAPTER 5

In this chapter, I present a summary of the study and major findings. Second, I discuss the findings of this study as they relate to the theoretical and empirical literature on social capital, literacy and community-based pedagogy. Lastly, I conclude with implications for families, educational institutions, community leaders, inner-faith networks and for future research.

**African American female literacy.** In this study I adopt African American female literacy (Richardson, 2003) as a way to understand the literacy activities Black girls use to negotiate their lives. Through African American female literacy (AAFL), literacy is treated as a social practice (Street, 2013; Gee, 2001), as being threaded into the tapestry of Black girls' lives. Their purposes, beliefs, passions and ways of being are reflected in the African American female literacy practices they adopt. African American females communicate these literacies through storytelling; conscious manipulation of silence and speech; code/style shifting; signifying; performance arts such as singing, dancing, acting, steppin', and stylin'; as well as crafts such as quilting and use of other technologies. The Black female develops creative strategies to overcome her situation, to "make a way outa no way" (Richardson, 2003, p. 680).

**Storytelling.** These literacy practices honor the various ways of being and knowing for many Black girls. As a Black female myself who has negotiated through the confusion of finding my identity as a young Black girl in the trenches of society, I understand the process of using literacy as a weapon of nullifying assimilation while searching for purpose. Storytelling is one tenant of AAFL. The G.I.R.L.S. Group revolves around the telling of stories, one example is the biblical stories that are shared during group lessons. These stories are brought to life as stories from the bible are related to a current life situations. The group leaders bring bible stories to life

in unconventional ways. Perhaps even more impactful are the personal stories shared amongst the group. For example, during a G.I.R.L.S Group meeting following the spa day, Auntie held a discussion with the girls about God's grace and unconditional love. Auntie shared a story of how her youngest daughter ran away as an adolescent and disappeared for a number of years. Never did she deny her as her daughter or push her away from the family. In telling her story Auntie expressed the importance of always reminding her daughter how much she loved her. She ended her story by saying, "That is who God is to us. God's intimacy does not go by rules." In G.I.R.L.S Group the girls learn that their stories are valid. They become more and more comfortable voicing their imperfections, mistakes, and failures as lived stories of experience that all of the girls can use to learn, grow, and tell another girl. In G.I.R.L.S Group it is important for girls to see themselves beyond their shortcomings—beyond who their family is and their current address. As girls we (black women) transform our struggles into a powerful message to tell another Black girl who seeks guidance. There is no room in G.I.R.L.S Group for shame. Girls are encouraged to keep their heads lifted high regardless of the dark passages in their stories. The girls' stories were powerful. Leading to connections I made through what I discovered during my service at Auntie's Place with Auntie and five of her G.I.R.L.S Group adolescents. Five girls who have taken the lessons and relationships gained at Auntie's Place and used them as social capital to become leaders in their homes, schools, communities and eventually greater society.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore a community-based pedagogical space that serves Black adolescent girls living at the intersection of race and poverty. My questions explored what educators can learn from community-based pedagogical spaces such as Auntie's

Place, where adolescent girl participants defy their “at risk” conditions to become successful in secondary school before going on to thrive in college. They have a right to exercise success that embraces the knowledge of their worth. Knowledge is power. When one knows better, one does better. Once each girl tapped into her worth by hearing, reading and experiencing God’s word, accompanied by the support and affirmation of leaders and mentors who reminded them continually of their potential, they began making choices conducive to their value. Success stems from this awakening of self. To focus on this broad query, three specific questions were examined. First, what structures and strategies are in place at Auntie’s Place that allow Black adolescent girls to develop positive social capital? Second, what types of social networks did the participants develop through their involvement with Auntie’s Place? Third, what literacy strategies were evident as a result of these networks? I sought to know what was within the structure of Auntie’s Place that helped these adolescent girls become leaders at school and in their community when individuals and institutions suggest they should fail.

**Social capital.** Social capital theory guided my study (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 200, 2001; Wellman & Frank, 2001). This theory grounded my curiosity about what literacy practices and resources may have empowered these girls of economically disadvantaged families to become successful leaders. I was curious to see whether development of literacy strategies helped to justify the success these girls experienced in life.

**Participants.** The participants in this study were five adolescents--two in college, one senior in high school and two sophomores. All were Black females although two were African immigrants. The girls were selected on the basis of informal observations in and out of Auntie’s Place. These girls stood out based on their positive behavior, their conversations, language and the healthy choices they made in their relationships and life choices in general. While some

adolescents at the corner of race and poverty turn to outlets such as drugs, alcohol, sex, and even dropping out of school, these girls have counteracted that narrative by engaging in positive programs like G.I.R.L.S Group on Friday nights, mentoring opportunities, leadership at school, while surrounding themselves around positive influences.

**Kim.** Kim, for instance, is one of the greatest success stories of Auntie's Place. She has been participating in Auntie's lace for seven years. Surviving abuse and homelessness, Kim stayed committed to G.I.R.L.S. Group and other opportunities Auntie's Place offered. Through the social capital network created at Auntie's Place Kim started her own business known as "Wacky Bandz," bracelets made out of ripped bandanas. As a way to raise money to go on a mission trip to Jamaica with an affiliated church, Auntie suggested she begin the endeavor, supporting her throughout the entire process. Auntie connected Kim to an Auntie's Place volunteer who was in a sorority at the local university. She took a particular liking to Kim, setting up speaking engagements with sororities across campus to promote her business and her cause to serve on a mission trip in Jamaica. Shortly after Kim started the "Wacky Bandz" business she exceeded her goal, raising over a thousand dollars within the first month. Auntie used her access to a financial institution to open up a bank account for Kim, teaching her how to balance and manage her account. The social capital attained through this experience has attributed to the leader, hard worker, public speaker and the community servant Kim is today.

**Connie and Amy.** The bright smiles on Connie and Amy's faces greet everyone they meet. They hold a positive outlook on life in spite of coming to the U.S as immigrants from dire conditions in Africa as small children. Auntie describes the sisters as two young woman who have taken advantage of every opportunity Auntie's Place has provided. Connie echoed all the girls when she talked about the sisterhood G.I.R.L.S. Group has provided. Moving to a foreign

land, away from their family and culture was shocking for their family. Moving across the street from Auntie's Place provided Connie and Amy with a safe space where their identities and culture were welcomed and celebrated, becoming a home away from home for the pair. One example of a social capital resource provided by Auntie's Place that has transformed Amy and Connie's lives, are their involvement in Caleb's Science Club.

Caleb's Science Club has been a program the sisters have attended since they were each ten years old. Poppi started the science club as a way to introduce children from poverty to the field of medicine, while providing them with leadership and mentorship opportunities. On the first Saturday of every month, Poppi picks up Amy and Connie from their home and takes them to the school of medicine on the university's campus. The girls partake in various activities in the medical school from learning first aid and CPR to experiencing anatomy and dissection. The girls conduct research with current minority medical students who mentor the girls on how come up with diagnosis and cures for particular diseases. At the duration of each session the girls eat lunch at a dining hall on campus to further their border crossing experience. Through the experience of being exposed to the college space, field of medicine, and working with medical students who look like the girls, the sisters have been compelled to pursue higher education and attend a four year college institution to further their chances to have a career that will give them the opportunity for to give back to their family and community. Amy plans to enter medical school upon graduation this year. Connie is undecided on a college major, but knows she wants to serve others in some capacity. To assist Amy in the college application process, Auntie connected Amy with a Black girl in the medical school who is walking her through the process. The social capital attained from just one of the programs brought out by Auntie's Place has created a path of success for the sisters. It is important to note the fact that Poppi went out of his

way, beyond his “job description,” to pick the girls up from their home. He entered into *their* space, without being stricken by fear, assumptions or stereotypes. So many time teachers expect students and families to come to them, instead of engaging with the communities they serve.

**LaShai and China.** LaShai and China are two roses who have grown from concrete. Having a mother who sold drugs left them feeling neglected at times. This season in their lives could have led to a series of emotional and psychological issues, but because of the bridge built at Auntie’s Place, China and LaShai were able to receive love and restoration when they were unable to get it at home. LaShai was able to receive counsel from Auntie throughout her life, but particularly during her adolescent years when she was feeling the most insecure. LaShai has always known she was different from the Black girls in her family, her school and in her neighborhood. Instead of hip-hop, LaShai loves to listen to Asian inspired music, loves going to and performing in theatrical productions, and enjoys the company of a diverse group of peers from various races and cultures. Through the long talks, the lunch dates, and the G.I.R.L.S. Group retreats to places like a condo on a lake front, LaShai grew to embrace what made her unique, from her thick thighs to future goals. LaShai began to embrace her gifts and talents. She is now thriving in her first year of college where she is majoring in theater and Asian studies. She has plans to study abroad in Asia next year. Long term, she and her sister China talk about opening up their own fine arts institute.

China has such faith in their pursuit that she has arranged to graduate a year early from high school in order to attain her college degree earlier. Through the spiritual guidance she has received not only at Auntie’s Place, but at the summer Christian camp she faithfully attends, China has been more confident and driven than ever. My follow up interview with China took

place right after KAA camp. KAA or Kids across America Christian sports camp, has been a major influence in China's life and has been instrumental in strengthening her faith and belief in God. From the stories that are shared there to the lives she has seen transformed, including her own. KAA camp inspired China to begin going to Higher Ground, a two-week camp that China describes as giving you a deeper understanding of the word of God. She also enjoys getting the opportunity to serve the local community within one level of camp and abroad at the next camp level. Over the past five years I have observed China become more confident and more willing to set herself apart from peers. Utilizing case study enabled me to be more descriptive in the narratives of the participants. Therefore, I designed my study to be qualitative in structure.

**Qualitative methods.** Qualitative methods enable the researcher to look holistically at events and view how the components construct the whole. Drawing on case study (Merriam, 2009) I sought to unveil and explain the experiences of adolescent girls and how they became successful in spite of living in at-risk environments. Two interviews were conducted with each participant. The majority of the interview data was collected during the first interview with each participant. Second interviews were conducted for clarification, elaboration, and an extension of data obtained from the first interviews. Interviewing began in June 2015 and ended in October 2016. Overall, the data collection for this study derived from four different sources: 1) interviews with Auntie and the adolescent girls, 2) field notes which served as supplementary data for the interviews and G.I.R.L.S. Group meetings, 3) audio recordings of G.I.R.L.S Group meetings, 4) and artifacts. These recordings helped me reflect and sift through the content of the conversations, with attention on the social capital being provided and the African American female literacy practices being utilized and demonstrated.

Data analysis began with the first interview and continued throughout the study. There were two phases of data analysis. Phase I, the within-case analysis, consisted of six steps of examining individual adolescent cases for emerging themes. Phase I analysis began with creating case files, annotating data, writing individual narratives, and extracting themes from the narratives. Phase II of the analysis process involved a cross-case analysis in which similarities and differences in themes for the individuals were examined. In this phase, themes were consolidated across individuals. From these themes, categories were established and defined. Three major categories emerged from the themes. Those categories were then arranged in various patterns that represented how Auntie's Place provided social capital that the adolescent girls took advantage of to become successful. The patterns became ways of understanding the series of social capital resources and events that helped the girls become successful in and out of school.

### **Major Findings**

**Fictive kinship.** What Auntie displays with the girls as well as what the girls display with each other is known as fictive kinship (Guttman, 1976). A growing body of research has studied African American communities and the existence of extensive kinships within these communities (Aschenbrenner, 1973; Hill, 1972; Stack, 1974). These extensive kin networks are important sources of informal social support (Hatchett, Corcoran, and Jackson, 1991; Chatters and Taylor, 1994; Stack, 1974). In anthropology, kinship generally implies a familial relationship, such as by blood or by marriage while fictive kinship is commonly used to describe bonds or identification between individuals outside these ties (Shiptoll 1997). Kinships are found in fraternal or religious contexts in the form of associations, such as the use of "brother" to refer to a priest. On a personal level, kinship symbolizes an attempt to strengthen ties between non-kin

individuals (Ballweg 1969). William Shakespeare used it in his plays, such as “The Winter’s Tale” and “Henry VIII” (itself a salient discussion on how female fictive kinships could be empowering for the women involved (Vanita 2000)). In the U.S. fictive kinship ties have played important roles in the lives and culture of Black Americans (Gutman 1976). Black families are generally described as having two types of fictive kinships within ethnographic literature: Those that involve unrelated individuals, such as close friends, and those bringing in unrelated individuals into an extended family network, such as unrelated individuals being addressed as “aunties” or “uncles” (Chatters, Taylor and Jayakody 1994). In his classic 1967 ethnographic study of Black street corner men, “Tally’s Corner”, Elliot Liebow explores their use of kinship terms to, validate, describe and even formalize close friendships such as “going for brother”, “brother”, “sister”, or “going for cousins” (Liebow 2003). There were benefits to such a relationship, including emotional and financial supports, even taking care of each other’s children, were often part of such relationships. Liebow saw such relationships increasing the self-esteem and emotional stability in men. Signithia Fordham (1987) proposes that fictive kinship among Black Americans emerged not only as a symbol of social and cultural identity, but as a response to racism as well.

**Community-based pedagogy.** Through the use of fictive kinships, Black people began to educate one another while exchanging information and resources. Community-based pedagogical spaces organically came about through the need to survive and gain access. There is a long history in the black community of such practices. Historically, people of African descent have always found creative ways to educate and liberate themselves in spite of laws which at one time banned them from reading or writing (Shujaa, 1994). Douglas (2012) asserts:

Slaves, for instance, established educational networks within plantations and used clever subterfuge to learn to read. They did so often at significant personal and collective risk, as many Southern states established laws that made the education of slaves a heavily punishable offense (Cornelius, 1983; Webber, 1978; Williams, 2005)” (p. 44).

Black people found a way to learn “by any means necessary.” It is no surprise that this tradition would continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century when Black and Brown bodies are seen as threats instead of fountains of knowledge. Black girls must find alternative ways to learn what it means to be a Black girl because her teachers are not telling her she has purpose. Black girls must turn spaces like church and the beauty shop for information on how to navigate and survive through life. Black girls in a Midwest town of Missouri can turn to the unique affordances of “Auntie’s Place” where not only do they learn how to navigate their lives, but how to grow in their spirit and build a personal relationship with God, a resources no one can take a way.

**Research questions.** To reiterate, the questions guiding this study were, a) What structures and strategies are in place at Auntie’s Place that allow Black adolescent girls to develop positive social capital? b) What types of social networks did the participants develop through their participation in Auntie’s House? and c) What participant outcomes were evident as a result of these networks? My findings focused on the following:

\*Of the many entities of Auntie’s Place that have influenced the lives of its participants, most notably are: the location and time of the programs, the interpersonal closeness of the group meetings and one-on-one time, the affiliation between Auntie’s Place and two prominent churches in the community, the program’s creative and spiritual pedagogy, and the value of African American female literacy.

\* The relationships established between and among peers, staff and volunteers were diverse and resourceful. As shared in the preceding chapter, the types of relationships (familial and connection) were influential in the adolescent girls' development of social capital.

\*Auntie and her volunteers invested great amounts of time in the girls. Their consistent engagement of care caused bonds to be strengthened and bridges to be built as networks of support. As a result, three significant outcomes were noted: (a) girls' increased understanding of fundamental spiritual elements, (b) girls' increased sense of self-efficacy, and (c) girls' desire to remain connected to Auntie's Place beyond G.I.R.L.S Group.

### **Discussion**

In this section of the dissertation, I present themes of the study's findings, connecting them to theoretical and empirical findings in the literature. The themes are personal in terms of how each participant attained social capital from a community-based pedagogical space known as Auntie's Place.

**Location and time.** The location of Auntie's Place and the time of the G.I.R.L.S Group meetings are significant strengths of the G.I.R.L.S Group program, contributing to the structures and strategies of Auntie's Place which allow the participants to access meaningful and resourceful social capital. Similarly, in Douglas and Peck's (2013) study, Black Bermudian men were able to access meaningful and resourceful social capital through relationships built at the barbershop. The accessibility of the barbershop was vital to providing those Black men with knowledge and information. His study on how Black Bermudian men utilized community-based pedagogical spaces highlights the history of community-based learning spaces. He writes, "Members of the Black Diaspora have produced a strong heritage of accessing education through community-based pedagogical space" (Douglas and Peck, 2013 p. 72). In spite of legislations to

ban Black people from reading and writing, they continued to find access to educate themselves. The Black men in Douglas and Peck's study accessed information about their community and the world in the barbershop. This was a safe space where Black men of all ages and backgrounds gathered to inform and educate one another. One barber in particular could not read, but knew more about politics and the world than a renowned reader. His literacy attainment came from the conversations and teachings within the barbershop. This barber was not ridiculed for being illiterate but celebrated as a knowledgeable leader of his community. The knowledge accessed in this space cannot be taught in a classroom. Black men were able to express themselves and be accepted in ways the dominant culture does not value. Similarly, The Black adolescent girls in this study find Auntie's Place to be easily accessible with its location within their community and walking distance of their homes. Auntie's Place operates during the evening hours when crime and violence are high in their community. Because of its location, the time it is open and the welcoming environment, Black girls are drawn to come and able to access the many resources readily available for them to advance their future.

What is unique about Auntie's Place though is the type of knowledge acquired in this community-based pedagogical space. Black girls participating in G.I.R.L.S Group were fed the knowledge of God, love and purpose. They are fed strategies on how to see themselves the way God sees them in order to advance beyond poverty. Black girls are exposed to highly ranked people and experiences to enable them to do so. Auntie goes above and beyond the average barbershop or afterschool club to ensure Black girls understand the importance of applying the word of God to their lives. This acquired knowledge is not provided within a public school setting. David Kass (2006), executive director for an agency known as Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, notes that "On school days, 3-6 PM are the peak hours for teens to commit crimes, be in or

cause car crashes, be victims of crime, and smoke, drink and use drugs. This is typically the time of day parents are at work, leaving adolescents home alone and open to such behaviors. Children at the intersection of race and poverty have an increased risk of engaging in criminal activity sometimes due to financial uncertainty in their communities (USA Today). Wellman & Frank (2001) connect social capital to resource availability and resource delivery. Auntie's Place is positioned in the heart of the housing projects, making the space available to those at the race and poverty intersection and increasing the delivery of its resources while decreasing the likelihood of the girls engaging in risky behavior.

**Intimate group meetings and thoughtful moments.** The small, intimate environment of G.I.R.L.S Group is a second strength to the unique structure of Auntie's Place. Adolescents were able to be themselves in a relaxed setting and receive one-on-one attention from mentors and leaders without the distractions of a large group. This allowed social capital to be acquired more directly. Meetings tended to have no more than 10 to 12 girls in attendance each week with at least five mentors and leaders present. Baldrige, Hill and Davis (2011) investigated data emerging from 24 cases of Black men, ages 18-30 who graduated from the Empower Youth program; a federally funded non-profit youth leadership and community program serving social capital to Black boys from low-income families. In the study, they too found the benefits of the interpersonal, one-on-one relationships of the program enhanced the boys' lives and increased their success through the intimate and genuine relationships built amongst the adults and the boys. Boys felt like the adults in the program understood them and could guide them in a meaningful way. Once the boys realized the adults cared about them, they were more motivated to make positive choices. Also, take for example Kevin, a participant in Douglas and Peck's (2013) study on Black Bermudian men. He enthusiastically describes the wealth of information

he attained at a local barbershop. The intimacy of the setting led to the flow of information from everything from sports to politics. Additionally, Brown (2006) describes the intimacy of her mentor group CAG, bringing to life the effective relationship building practices that occur in that space. The mentor volunteers, who are adult scholars, activists, and community leaders in their own rights form an intimate group setting with adolescent girls which allowed for bonds to be made between the mentor and mentee and for barriers to communication to be broken. Through the small, intimate setting, both mentors and mentees felt safe to tell their narratives, allowing common ground, understanding, trust and empathy to be built among them.

Similarly, the G.I.R.L.S Group sessions provided intimate settings, accompanied by highly ranked leaders and mentors who were either college educated, current college students, business owners, community activists, all with privilege and resources that together formed the network capital which could enable the girls to be exposed to flows of knowledge, information, opportunities and resources. Introduced by Wellman & Frank (2001), network capital is a form of social capital that people use when in need. These “personal community networks” are made up of “supportive ties with friends, relatives, neighbors and workmates. Such ties supply “network capital,” the form of “social capital” that makes resources available through interpersonal ties” (p. 233). Coleman (1988) agrees, reiterating how social capital is acquired from relationships where obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness are maintained. The intimacy of the setting set the climate for interpersonal ties to be formed and strengthened through the obligation and commitment on the part of the girls and the mentors, high expectations set for the girls by their mentors and the trustworthiness formed between them.

**Christian ministry affiliations.** There is an old African proverb that says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” At Auntie’s Place, Auntie relies on her “villagers” to help carry the load

of responsibilities that comes with providing social capital for the girls. From having volunteers to mentor and provide the girl's with one-on-one time outside of G.I.R.L.S Group, to the finances needed to provide resources and opportunities for them, Auntie would not be able to do what she does without the affiliations she has with two Christian ministries who have supported Auntie's Place in more ways than one. Peter Miller's (2011) work with homeless youth addresses how youth survive with the social capital attained in shelters. Homeless shelters can serve as part of a youth's village, providing them with the support they need to access information and resources. Tommie Shelby, a case worker at a homeless shelter can be considered a member of her clients' village. She explained how she helped her clients navigate the complex school system by educating them on their rights as a family was trying to transition back into the school system. Winn (2011), along with other teaching artists, activists, directors, youth participants and non-profit organizations, all came together as a village and social network to organize a theatrical group that used playwright as a tool to combat issues that impact them as girls and women in and out of prison. Not only are the girl participants empowered and their lives strengthened by the expressive experience Winn and her fellow villagers provide, programs like this create the opportunity for teachers to facilitate and learn. That is, they learn about their students and their lives, and learn about their harsh realities and their resurrecting resilience.

A village of supporters resurrected the creativity of a gifted Black child living in rural poverty near Selma, Alabama in Beardsley's (2001) three-year critical case study. In spite of the labels placed on Jerimiah by his community he maintained a positive self-image and had a village of supporters. These included; his kindergarten teacher, the only teacher that understood Jermaine and fostered his gifts; close family relationships; a best friend, and surprisingly,

satellite television. Television was able to take Jermaine to worlds outside of his rural town, further fostering his creativity.

There is no denying the power of a village, especially for youth at the intersection of race and poverty. Lin (2002) is adamant about the fact that without a village, people from marginalized (nondominant) backgrounds tend to have relationships with people who are most like them. This limits their knowing of “highly ranked” people. Furthermore, they do not have roles or affiliations with groups/organizations that are meaningful and resourceful. The Christian ministries affiliated with Auntie’s Place are a part of the village that restores, replenishes and resurrects the worth of Black adolescent girls through “highly ranked,” well connected, capital-filled Christians who provide meaningful resources like the backpack drive put on at the beginning of every school year and the thousand dollar scholarships given to the girls to attend missions trips out of the country and camps over the summer. Each adolescent in this study has either been a part of mission trips in Jamaica or experiences like attending the annual Christian sports camp in a rural city in Midwest Missouri. Auntie’s Place supporters and affiliates fundraise all year in order to provide each child with the fees and traveling supplies needed, from toiletries to clothing. Girls are able to go to camp and enjoy the experience without that worry of not having what they need. For the families Auntie serves, it is the first time children leave their communities and experience other parts of the state and world. These experiences further stimulate the girls’ success as they also increase their global awareness.

**Purposeful faith building.** The mission of Auntie’s Place is simple; to spread the love of God to children. Auntie remembers longing for her mother’s love as a child. When she found God, it filled that void of feeling unwanted and unloved. Many of the children who show up at Auntie’s Place are much like the little girl Auntie was. They are longing for someone to validate

their existence and love them. Auntie is purposeful about building up each girls' faith and love for God during G.I.R.L.S Group meetings. In the Bible, The Apostle Paul taught that "faith is the substance [assurance] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Because the girls participating in G.I.R.L.S Group have witnessed more tragedy and disappointment than adolescents living a more privileged lifestyle, their faith is vital in the betterment of their lives. It would be easier for the girls to give up if they compared their situations to those who are afforded different opportunities, for example. It is important for them to have trust in God so that with this trust, they may have at minimum, a mustard seed of faith that will carry them through in spite of their life circumstances. Faith reminds them that they have worth. They have gifts and talents that can be used to build God's Kingdom.

Cynthia Dillard once said, "Only when spirit is at the center of our work can we create a community in love" Dillard 2006 (p. 37). Community-based pedagogical work is spiritual work. Spirituality is at the depth of each our beings. Auntie is purposeful about teaching the girls about their inner being. She gets the girls into a habit of cleansing their spirit so it is not filled with the garbage the world throws into them, such as low self-esteem, low expectations, pessimistic thinking, stereotyping, prejudice, judgment, misunderstanding and miscommunication. Auntie believes spirituality is the solution to deeply rooted issues of hate, greed and selfishness in our society. Through her love and the purposeful building of faith, girls are healed from the effects garbage has had on their minds, bodies, and souls and begin valuing their worth and strengthening their faith.

I argue that Brown's (2009) work with Black adolescent girls is spiritual work. Though not specifically building on a Christian foundation, Brown challenges research that paints a picture of Black girls as "at-risk and suffering from societal pressures instrumental in the

development of low self-esteem, loss of voice, and self-inflicted harmful behaviors” (p. xii). Her dedication to SOLHOT is invested in celebrating Black girlhood through hip-hop culture and a feminist methodology as a way to “transform oppressive institutions, policies, relationships, and beliefs” (p. xiv) of young Black women. Black women come in broken and leave full of worth and appreciation for their being. Love is spread through the inviting atmosphere, the smiles, the hugs, the dancing, singing and the writing of their narratives and of history.

**Creative and spiritual pedagogy.** “Creative and spiritual pedagogy” is a unique strategy of Auntie’s that fostered meaningful and resourceful social capital development. Auntie found creative ways to do spiritual work that strengthened the girls’ souls. She found that this is a vital piece missing in public education. Community-based pedagogy, social capital and spirituality go hand and hand. Intersected, they have the capacity to reach children beyond the schools’ reach by viewing marginalized children as funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) and building on their interests and talents, giving life new meaning for them. When the soul is healed, the mind and body follow suit. The renewed person then becomes a change agent in the world. McCormick’s (2000) work with marginalized youth and poetry can be described as creative and spiritual pedagogy. Marginalized youth express themselves in creative ways in a space that fosters love. In this community space, the students do not have to worry about being threatened or seen as a threat. In this space, their words and voices matter. McCormick describes it as a “sanctuary within, a place to play out conflict and imagine multiple possibilities for identity” (p. 194). It is through the creative writing of poetry that lives are validated and their souls are fed positive validation of their self-worth.

**Demonstration and use of African American Female Literacy.** African American female literacy was at the center of the G.I.R.L.S Group meetings. Both the leaders, mentors and

adolescent girls used AAFL within the group meetings and outside in their personal lives. African American female literacy can be described as:

Storytelling, conscious manipulation of silence and speech, code/style shifting, and signifying, among other verbal and nonverbal practices. Performance arts such as singing, dancing, acting, steppin, and stylin, as well as crafts such as quilting and use of other technologies...the Black female develops creative strategies to overcome her situation, to “make a way outa no way (Richardson, 2003, p. 680).

Literacy honors the various ways of being and knowing for the Black girls in this study. AAFL runs through G.I.R.L.S Group like a vein. From the stories told by Auntie of her life before she knew God, to the YouTube videos that are shown depicting a biblical story. At times girls are silent, exercising their conscious manipulation of silence, and at other times they are vocal and opinionated regarding a topic. Girls exhibiting code switching, speaking consciously during group meetings, while being loud and boisterous outside the space with friends. Amy demonstrates AAFL in community spaces like the churches she attends. She sings worship music at the African church her father pastors and at the church she attends with Auntie. Singing strengthens Amy’s soul and the souls of anyone who listens. Amy sings inspirational music in both English and her native African tongue. Amy and her sister Connie both express themselves through dance as well. They regularly perform for the African weddings of friends and family. Their dances tell stories of love and hope in the African family. Coming to the United States as immigrants from Africa, singing and dancing has been a way for the girls to navigate into their new world while staying connected to their African traditions and heritage.

LaShai and China are also sisters who use African American female literacy as a way of survival and negotiation. LaShai's love of art and theater led her to major in those subjects in college while China continues to sing at churches and at sports events at school and in the community. China writes original songs as a way to express herself and release her emotions. LaShai recently put on a performance with Amy for the mothers of Auntie's Place. Each dressed in costume and expressed their version of a biblical passage through spoken word and song. African American female literacy is a part of the girls' beings. For Kim, social media is her biggest outlet. She gathers inspiration from the people she follows on twitter and shares inspirational quotes with her friends to help them get through their day. As an athlete, Kim reads about the struggles many of her favorite athletes have faced. This keeps her encouraged, knowing that with faith, she too will be a famous athlete whose story will inspire and encourage others. African American Female literacy (Grant, 2011; Jocson, 2008; Winn, 2011) is a form of expression used and demonstrated throughout the literature. It runs through the blood of Black girls at the intersections of race and poverty.

**Relationships with peers and adults.** Social capital is formed through relationships. Coleman (1988) asserts: If physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material form, and human capital is less tangible, social capital is less tangible yet, for it exists in the *relations* among persons. Just as physical capital and human capital facilitate productive activity, social capital does as well. For example, a group within which there is extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust is able to accomplish more than a comparable group without the trustworthiness and trust. (p.100).

Lin (2000) posits that relationship networks are most effective if they a) are heterogeneous; meaning that they come from people of various backgrounds and from places with different

valuables to bring to the table; b) have an extensive range. This means the ability for the resource to make a difference and be useful beyond what they can easily be attained; and c) are attached to institutions; ranging from schools and universities to business and churches.

The common thread of social capital in this study is the building of relationships. Participants of G.I.R.L.S Group were able to experience strong relationships with both their peers and the adult leaders and volunteers. It takes a village to raise each girl. Auntie's Place has been that village where healthy relationships are fostered with positive, "highly-ranked," resource-filled people that have led Black girls to success for almost 20 years. Auntie has proven over again that the formula of love through spirituality and social capital through relationship building works for girls living at the race and poverty intersection.

### **Conclusion**

I began this investigation in an effort to ascertain what can be learned from economically disadvantaged adolescent Black girls who are successful leaders in and out of school and who are thriving in or destined to thrive in college. Within that framework, knowledge is shared on what resources and values contribute to the success of these adolescents. I sought to clarify the individual perspectives of the Black adolescent girls and their Mentor Auntie by observing them tell their own stories about how each had become leaders in school and in their communities and attained the resources needed for college. Their views were critical to understanding what is needed for girls living at the intersection of race and poverty to find success.

Although my study demonstrates how faith and spirituality play a central role in the lives of successful Black girls, they are not enough. Meaningful and resourceful social capital is vital to their success. Poor adolescent girls not only need to be provided with a supportive and

encouraging atmosphere, they need to build relationships with “highly ranked” individuals who have the meaningful and resourceful capital to meet the girls’ mental, physical and spiritual needs in a way that will advance them to become leaders in their communities. Our society is split between the “haves” and the “have nots.” Girls at the race and poverty intersection are not readily exposed to people who have access to college preparation information, for example. Highly ranked individuals like Auntie and her husband Poppi are college educated and can provide the girls with the resources they need to enter and thrive through college. From filling out the FAFSA to taking college visits, the highly ranked individuals provide the girls with a road map to success.

Having such support whether it be from a community-based pedagogical space or from a supportive village, it translates to valuable social capital. Social capital attainment fueled by progressive spirituality and faith did exist for all participants. While their push for success was present, their scope was futuristic. Each girl viewed Auntie’s Place and specifically G.I.R.L.S. Group, as a way for them to obtain the resources for education and eventual careers that would change their lives forever. Through the knowledge acquired about the word of God, the girls were equipped to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). The girls with a strong relationship with God learned how to transfer God’s word to facets of their daily lives. “Pressing toward the mark” is rooted in the history of Black families. Historically, religion and spirituality have been at the center of African American community life and experiences (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Frazier, 1962; Long, 1997; Taylor & Chatters, 1991).

Little empirical attention however, has been given to the functions of spirituality in the everyday lives of Black girls living in poverty. In the social sciences some attention has been

given to the study of African American Christian churches. Much of this research has focused on the churches' roles in meeting service needs that have been abdicated by other service institutions (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991). Some studies have explored patterns of religious involvement among African Americans (Chatters, Levin, & Taylor, 1992; Chatters & Taylor, 1989; Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1995; Taylor & Chatters, 1991). Others have focused on the mediating effects of religion on psychological (Williams, Larson, Buckler, Heckmann & Pyle, 1991; McAdoo, 1995) and physical health (Wallace & Williams, 1997). More research needs to be contributed to results brought about by literacy attainment of poor Black girls who practice faith and spirituality. The strengths and benefits that come from such a lifestyle need to be highlighted in further studies.

The strength of the girls in this study were evident in their ability to overcome obstacles they faced on a daily bases. They were able to persevere and still focus on graduating high school with college as their ultimate goal. Because they were focused on high school and college graduation as their goal, they took advantage of the social capital present at Auntie's Place that would allow them to obtain the necessary attitude and skills to propel them to a successful career. These social capital resources included involvement in Caleb's Science Club, for example. The G.I.R.L.S Group participants participated in a science program created by Poppi and funded and supported by the medical school at the local university. Once a month the girls would go to the medical school and learn about the field of science and medicine from black and Brown medical staff and students. Getting exposure to the medical school and experiencing hands on activities such as anatomy and dissection was one thing, but to receive the instruction from people who looked like the black and brown girls of G.I.R.L.S Group was even more

impactful for the girls, catapulting them into leadership roles and further guidance on entering college.

### **Implications**

It is important to note that the five adolescent girls in this study found success through Auntie's Place, however not every story told by Auntie is a success story. Girls do leave, and while some return others go on to make choices in their lives that are not always healthy. Auntie never has her finger out to shame a Black girl, but her heart does hurt for them when they are a way. One thing I admire about Auntie, among other things, is that she does not stop the clock if a girl discontinues her commitment to G.I.R.L.S Group. Auntie has a way of "keeping the party going" in a since. Auntie will continue to reach out to girls who leave, but she does not let those instances rob the other participants of their "Godly experiences." Auntie moves forward with a resilience that is contagious, planning impactful meetings, providing purposeful resources and taking the girls on life-changing field trips. Auntie, however, understands that her space is not for everyone. Though everyone is welcome, not everyone feels welcome at Auntie's Place. It is unrealistic to believe *every* Black girl will be impacted by Auntie and her mentors. Though Auntie positively impacts *many* Black girls at the intersection of race and poverty, she does not impact them all. Difference in religion or other alternative beliefs and lifestyles may keep a girl from attending Auntie's Place.

The implications from this study suggest that teachers and leaders of community-based pedagogical spaces bear in mind: (1) There are tensions that come with community leadership, (2) the support given by a "highly ranked" individual is important, and (3) spirituality and faith are necessary components for the success of many girls living at the race and poverty intersection. Included in this chapter is insight into what Auntie does and how she does it so that

educational and community leaders as well parents can adopt practical practices into their lives to support Black girls.

It is important to note that when working with youth and families at the race and poverty intersection, the rewards are plentiful but the sacrifices and stress that comes with serving are plentiful as well. Community and educational leaders working at this intersection must guard themselves from fatigue and/or burnout. Oftentimes, when one child finds success, another may fall victim to their circumstances. There were countless occasions when Auntie wanted to quit. In an interview at the beginning of the study, she joked about wanting a one way ticket to a faraway place, away from all the pain that painted her reality. Auntie rarely talks about the kids who curse at her, or the parents who yell at her because their child was suspended for fighting. Auntie does not openly discuss the hours she has spent in court testifying on behalf of an Auntie's Place kid, or the hours spent in parent- teacher conferences advocating for a family. There are countless nights when Auntie gets little to no sleep or has little to no time with her family and friends. Advocacy work requires balance. That balance looks different for everyone.

The support given by a "highly ranked" individual, or an individual with access to meaningful and resourceful social capital is vital. That support may not always be what teachers traditionally define as support, such as a space for Black girls to pray, worship and study freely. For some families, their support comes in the form of sending their adolescent to a community-based pedagogical space to obtain the mentoring and tutoring they need. Teachers can look for other types of support, such as the support provided by a soccer coach or barber, simply by looking beyond the traditional academic activities. Teachers can use and capitalize on the skills and knowledge that Black girls bring to school by building relationships with them and

connecting to other stakeholders in their lives. They must recognize it takes a village to raise a child and then become a part of that village.

Spirituality and faith were necessary factors in the success of these particular girls. The participants needed to know that though dominant society perpetuated negative messages about Black girls, they had a source of love that they could access to receive confirmation that their Black lives mattered. They have learned how to build a relationship with God and now they are using the word of God to navigate life's circumstances. They are also confident in their faith as believers. Teachers and community leaders alike can use these students to possibly help younger girls who lack self-esteem and hope. When they realize there is a source who loves them unconditionally and paid a price for them to live, they begin to value themselves and make choices conducive to their worth. Students at both levels can benefit. Older adolescents can gain pleasure from guiding and mentoring a young girl. Younger girls gain some one-on-one attention from someone who has faced similar life circumstances that helps them overcome theirs.

**My journey.** One of the most troubling realities related to my research topic is that many adolescent girls at the intersection of race and poverty do not thrive in and outside of school. Many are not connected to a "highly ranked" individual or to a community-based pedagogical space that can fill in the gaps of their needs. Further research needs to examine why students who have the potential to be successful and generally like to learn often do not achieve at school at a rate that is commensurate with their abilities. I was one of those adolescents. I was smart and held potential, yet I was not living out my purpose. I was distracted by peer pressure and the ideologies brought on by society and the media. I did not have a space like Auntie's Place growing up to help me recognize my worth and help me build a promising future. Because of my reality, my involvement as a G.I.R.L.S. Group leader did more for me than I did for the

organization. My life was transformed through my leadership at Auntie's Place and my spirit was strengthened. I joined G.I.R.L.S. Group as a group leader the summer of 2011. At that time I was a young mother and wife. Auntie grew to be a second mother for me, someone I could trust with my most hidden secrets. I began confiding in Auntie about issues I was facing in my personal life. Not only did Auntie pray with me and give me a shoulder to cry on, she paid for me to receive family counseling from a Black woman, who was a well renowned faith-based counselor. I received counseling until my issues were resolved. Through my utilization of Auntie's resources, or social capital, my personal life was restored. During that process, my commitment to Auntie and the girls grew stronger. This is the cycle for the participants as well. Auntie continues to deliver love, trust and resources and in exchange the girls' commitment to themselves, their family, their community and to God grows stronger. It is a cycle that Auntie plans to keep spinning.

**For the teacher.** As a classroom teacher, in order to keep the cycle going that continues to spin at Auntie's Place, it is important to value your children. Seeing them as children, as human beings, instead of a student number is the first step. The second step is relationship building. Auntie takes time to build relationships with every child she works with. Relationship building comes in many forms. Home visits are one form of relationship building. Home visits are a practice Auntie utilizes regularly. Going into the children's space, meeting their families, and personally inviting them to events is a practice Auntie has found successful. Another way Auntie builds relationships with the girls she serves is by attending their churches and inviting them to hers. On these occasions she provides the transportation to the girls and their families. This form of relationship building means attending the African churches that many of the immigrant families attend. It means wearing the African attire that an African mother custom

made and smiling, though she does not know the language. Another form of relationship building for Auntie means having an open door policy for children to access her love, wisdom and knowledge and for her to hear their stories about their day or their lives. During these times, Auntie gives the girls her undivided attention to what they have to say. These are just a few of the practices teachers can adopt to begin to create a bridge of love and understanding between them and their Black girls.

**For the community leaders.** It is important for leaders in the community to take into account the implications provided for teachers. It is pivotal for community organizations to partner with other organizations in the community who are working toward the same goals. There are many organizations in this particular community doing great things for marginalized families and youth. The issue with this is that these organizations are doing the work alone. It is more effective to serve a community with multiple resources than to conquer it individually. Like Auntie, community leaders must collaborate with other like-minded organizations so that their reach, impact and social capital they provide can be greater.

**For the parents.** As a mother of four I understand the demands on put on parents. As suggested in the previous implications, relationship building and collaboration with community organizations are vital for parents as well. Often times, parents kill the dreams of their own children. Whether it be from fear, doubt or ignorance, parents are a huge indicator of their child's success. It is important for parents to view their children as gifts. Not as unplanned mistakes, but as unique and purposeful gifts. Once parents see their children as gifts, a relationship can be built around this truth. Parents can then cater to their child's needs and interests. Parents can advocate for their children in and out of school. With this advocacy, parents can find community-based pedagogical spaces that can aid them in raising their child to be a positive and purposeful

community leader. There is no recipe to read on how to raise successful children, but with the right village, every child can rise.

### **Closing Statement**

Oftentimes, activities related to social capital and literacy in the Black community are overlooked as teachers and researchers attempt to determine the literacy practices of Black girls. When investigating home literacy practices, families from a variety of cultures and backgrounds in the Black community have their practices compared to those practices that are considered to be more traditional practice. Teachers overlook the value of a child following a recipe beside their grandmother in the kitchen rather than reading a fictional book sent home in their reading bag .Or teachers may find more appreciation for a child writing a fictional story than a Black girl writing a rap song. Often times when the traditional practices are not observed, a deficit is noted instead of a unique skill. Spaces like the barber and beauty shop, the park where Double Dutch is played, or the sanctuary of Auntie’s Place, are non-traditional spaces that are different by their nature. They are not deficit in quality or in how they influence the literacy and spiritual development of the Black adolescent girl. Further investigations could examine the role of spirituality and faith in the lives of Black adolescent girls living in poverty, studying how they become leaders in and out of school and how they gain access to meaningful and resourceful information. Additional research is necessary in the field of community-based learning spaces as well, especially in the context of spaces serving youth and families at the intersection of race and poverty. Of particular importance is work on the connection between these spaces and university partnerships. Examining the disconnect and formulating ways for marginalized community spaces and schools to access university resources and vice versa is of utmost importance. In order for the field of literacy to move forward, attention to spaces like Auntie’s Place is vital, as

it creates a relational bridge between the community, schools, universities and inner faith networks. Black girls with access to this relational bridge are better able to thrive and live up to their fullest potential academically, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Like the story of Jesus being resurrected from the dead, through this act, life is given to those who believe in him. The same is true of Black girls. When Black girls are loved and surrounded by people who believe in them they too are resurrected with a resilience that keeps them living and thriving, causing the world to make room for their purpose.

### Appendix

**Table 2.1.**  
**Prevalence of obesity among girls age 12– 19 years, by race and ethnicity, United States**  
**1988– 1994 and 2009– 2010**

	1988– 1994	2009– 2010
<b>White</b>	8.9%	14.7 %
<b>Black</b>	16.3 %	24.8%
<b>Latina</b>	13.4%	18.6%

**Source: Centers for Disease Control National Center for Health Statistics/National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey III.**

**Table 2.2. Pregnancy Outcomes by Ethnicity (2011)**

	Pregnancy	Live Birth	Abortion	Fetal Lost
<b>White, Non-Hispanic</b>	40	30	10	5
<b>Black, Non-Hispanic</b>	115	60	50	15
<b>Hispanic</b>	100	70	12	15

**Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**

**Table 2.3**

<p><b>Auntie’s Interview Questions:</b></p> <p>6. What has been your role/involvement at Auntie’s Place?</p> <p>7. What has been the impact Auntie’s</p>	<p><b>Purpose of Questions:</b></p> <p>These questions derive from my interest in finding out the impact of Auntie’s role in the</p>
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## SOCIAL CAPITAL ATTAINMENT WITH ADOLESCENTS AT THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND POVERTY

<p>Place has had on the lives of the girls?</p> <p>8. How have you seen participant grow in the program?</p> <p>9. Describe the relationship you have with the participants.</p> <p>10. How have you seen faith play a role in the girls' lives?</p>	<p>girls' lives as well as the role faith had played in their journey.</p>
<p><b><u>Adolescent Interview Questions</u></b></p> <p>6. What has been the impact Auntie's Place has had on your life?</p> <p>7. Describe your village (e.g. family, community, teachers, and friends) and how it impacts your identity as a young Black girl?</p> <p>8. Describe your peer relationships</p> <p>9. Describe the relationship you have with members of your family. How do these relationships shape who you are?</p> <p>10. What is faith? How does faith play a role in your life? In defining your identity?</p>	<p>From the questions selected my goal was to gain an understanding of what influences the girls were impact by, both positive and negative, and how those influence effected their lives. I also wanted to gain a since of the role faith plays and how it shapes who they are.</p>

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## VITA

Dr. Adrian Clifton is a wife and mother of four. After teaching first grade for five years as the first African American teacher at a local elementary school she attended as a child, she saw disparities in the lack of resources the school system had to viably meet the needs of marginalized students and families. As an educational leader Adrian took the initiative to further her education in learning, teaching and curriculum by pursuing a doctorate degree at the University of Missouri Columbia in that field. Upon beginning her program in 2011 Adrian joined Granny's House, a non-profit after school ministry who serves marginalized youth in public housing. While mentoring the teenage girls she noticed the broad range of literacy being used and demonstrated in this setting. Adrian began a case study on the African American female literacies used and demonstrated in their GIRLS Group (God in real life situations). She has continued this research in her dissertation, focusing on the social capital attained in this community-based learning space. In 2013 Adrian Clifton became the curriculum director and teacher for Boys and Girls Club. This rich experience allowed her to hire a team of culturally responsive k-5 teachers that brought learning to life for Black, Brown and poor children. From learning about leaders that looked like them to participating in Photovoice to give voice to their worlds and perspectives; this leadership position further showed her the power of love and exposure for Black, Brown and poor kids. 2014 brought Clifton great honors as she was given the alumni award from the Fun City Youth Academy. She attended this academy as a child and served as their principal in the summer of 2015. It was during this service that the marginalized children's reading scores exceeded the reading scores of their White peers attending Columbia Public Schools summer sunsation program. In 2014 Adrian was inducted into the Rollins Honors

Society for her work in the community. Adrian now serves as the co-founder and president of the newly established non-profit, the Worley Street Roundtable. This is a grassroots organization made up of mothers, fathers, grandparents, community leaders, students, educators and most importantly supporters of the Columbia Public School System. The mission is to thread together students, families, universities and outside organizations with the public school system to create viable ways to help our Black, Brown and poor children succeed-not only academically and socially but spiritually. Through this position Adrian has been able to speak on several panels both at the University of Missouri-Columbia and Lincoln University where she encourages future educational leaders and teachers to be the change they want to see by building relationships with their student's families and actively participating in their communities. As president of Worley Street Roundtable, Adrian has been driven to build relationships with the school board, with deans and presidents of local colleges and other community organizations serving marginalized children and families as we bridge together networks, resources and support for at-risk youth and their families. Adrian served as a graduate assistant at The Bridge winter semester of 2016. The Bridge is a space which supports diversity and inclusion in the College of Education while fostering difficult topics such as race, gender and religion through various diverse programs. Adrian Clifton is a committed community agent who looks forward to changing the world, leaving it better than how she found it.