GRACE: Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel

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Lauren Mims

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Abstract

Black American adolescents are in a more vulnerable system than their white counterparts due to a persistent gap in wealth, high poverty, access to resources, overrepresentation in the prison-industrial complex, and other factors that perpetuate structural oppression and hinder achievement. This study describes the results of Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE), an eight-week program developed specifically for 10th and 11th grade black girls. The once weekly eight-week program used group and individual activities to emphasize the importance of historical, ecological, and phenomenological contexts. Using surveys, this study examined patterns in self-perception, racial identity and achievement for a small cohort of students (N=10), both before and after the eight-week session. Results indicated that participant scores in self-perception, racial identity, and academic achievement improved. Findings can be used to support implementation of programs and policies that give black adolescent girls the tools they need to rise above circumstances to excel.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables:

List of Figures:

Prologue

"Dear Lupita," it reads, "I think you're really lucky to be this Black but yet this successful in

Hollywood overnight. I was just about to buy Dencia's Whitenicious cream to lighten my skin

when you appeared on the world map and saved me."

- Lupita Nyong'o in her acceptance speech for the Best Breakthrough Performance Award at the 7th Annual Black

Women in Hollywood Luncheon

How do black girls in America receive, process and internalize messages as they come to

terms with who they are and begin to form salient identities? For one girl struggling to fit in, the

emergence of Lupita Nyong'o, a young actress who won an Oscar for her riveting performance in

12 Years A Slave, stopped her from bleaching her skin, a dangerous process which can cause

severe dermatological consequences due to the prevalence of illegal and dangerous substances

such as mercury in popular skin lightening creams (NHS, 2012). To this young girl, lightening

her skin seemed like the only way to fit in with the American standard of beauty. After sharing

the letter she received from a fan, Nyong'o admitted that she too struggled throughout

adolescence to feel beautiful as a woman with "night-shade" skin, often praying to wake up one

day with lighter skin (Nyong'o, 2014). When she saw Alek Wek, a darker skinned model, she

commented that it was as if she saw her own reflection and felt a confirmation of her external

beauty, which helped her on her journey to find peace and happiness within (Nyong'o, 2014).

The story of adolescent girls struggling to find their identity within mainstream society

occurs, unfortunately, quite often. In Essence Magazine's 2013 Images of Black Women study,

women respondents reported seeing extremely negative images of black women in the media.

Respondents noted that black women were depicted in the media by such phrases as "gold

digger," "modern Jezebel," "uneducated sister," or "baby mama" almost twice as much as they

were depicted as a "young phenom," "real beauty," "girl next door," or "community heroine."

These negative media images were cited as being a source of embarrassment to the women surveyed. The findings and anecdotes of girls and women who struggle to find themselves within society begs the question: What are we doing for our young black girls struggling to define themselves within mainstream society? How can we help every girl develop a healthy sense of self?

GRACE was designed specifically for black girls, with the aim of changing the narrative and experiences for girls yearning to conquer the metaphysical dilemma of "being a woman and being colored" in society (Shange, 1974). The program aims to help girls rise above circumstances to excel as the "young phenoms," real beauties," "girls next door," and "community heroines" of the 21st century.

Chapter I: Introduction/Statement of Problem

Though white and black children have the right to attend the same schools as a result of the 1954 landmark decision in <u>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas</u> in which the United States Supreme Court declared "separate but equal" education inherently unequal, black children continue to face and overcome a greater number of barriers to graduate from high school and/or pursue higher education across their lifespan than their white counterparts (Balfanz et. al., 2010). These barriers, which include a disproportionate rate of school discipline, juvenile detention, and/or feeling of unfair treatment by teachers or fellow students because of their race, have dire consequences for the overall success and well being of black children and adolescents in America (Butler-Barnes et.al., 2013; African American Policy Forum, 2014). While the prevalence of mental illness has increased dramatically across all races within the past two decades, black adolescent girls display a higher incidence of emotional and mental health issues than girls of any other race (National Institute of Mental Health, 2012). Notably, in a survey conducted by The African American Policy Forum (2014), 67% of black girls surveyed reported feeling sad or hopeless for two or more consecutive weeks. These feelings of depression and sadness often correlate with experiencing and coping with the aforementioned barriers, which can be attributed to a pattern of historical, systemic oppression, that directly influence and undermine a child's school achievement, socio-emotional health, and self-efficacy (Chavous, 2008; National Association of School Psychologists, 2012).

Millions of dollars have been spent on increasing the achievement outcomes of black students and reducing the black-white achievement gap. Current school reform programs aim to improve outcomes for black students in schools by targeting school characteristics, such as teacher quality and achievement on standardized tests, but they fail to address social, emotional and mental health issues, often termed "the missing piece," for students who face these barriers on a day-to-day-basis (Elias, 2006; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014). Further, those solutions

do not acknowledge the history that has served to reinforce the gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Although the focus on individual schools, testing and rigorous instruction may have some merit, the thinking may be shortsighted in its failure to address all factors that may contribute to achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

The next logical step in devising programs for black children should be to address the socio-emotional health issues faced by black girls, yet research found that over 100 million philanthropic dollars were spent over the past ten years on initiatives tailored to mentoring and educating black boys, less than a million dollars were allocated to mentoring and educating black girls (Cooper, 2014; African American Policy Forum, 2014). The purpose of this thesis is to go beyond the typical targets for improving adolescent achievement. While no school-based program or policy can alter the situation of a particular student outside of her or his school day, programs can serve to provide positive developmental experiences, aid in identity formation, provide role models, and work to improve the subjective experiences of children in schools. Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE) aims to provide a culturally grounded in-school intervention for black adolescent girls that emphasizes an individual's ecological and phenomenological context, including her personal and racial identity, as well as her previous record of academic achievement.

This paper will provide a review of the literature on adolescent identity formation (self, racial, and gender), offering context to the lives of black adolescent girls. Then, this paper will suggest a new program designed to improve the subjective experiences and achievement outcomes of a small cohort of girls. Such research complements current research by combining what we know to build a new program. Finally, this paper will present results of an evaluative study of a small group of black adolescent girls who participated in the eight-week GRACE program.

Chapter II. Review of Literature

Adolescence

Adolescence, which can be defined as the period between the ages of ten and seventeen, is marked by great physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes. The word "adolescence" comes from the Latin word "adolescere," which literally translates to mean "to grow up" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). One of the major psychosocial tasks entails adolescents defining who they are within the realm of their social contexts.

Erik Erikson's stage theory proposed that identity formation is the key developmental task of adolescence (Erikson, 1950; 1968). He theorized that from birth, children form identifications based on their family and the society in which they are embedded. As a child reaches adolescence, she or he begins to question the messages that have been received throughout her or his childhood. During the process of questioning, adolescents separate from their parents and begin to spend more time with peer groups. Adolescents explore their roles in society and must decide which identifications from childhood to retain or discard. The ultimate goal through this process of reconciliation is to achieve a competent, satisfactory identity, or a "sense of self" (Erikson, 1950; 1968).

Extending the work of Erikson, James Marcia (1966; 1980) proposed four states of psychological development: identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, diffusion, and identity achievement. Identity foreclosure is a state of accepting the identity given by one's parents or socializing agents. Identity moratorium is the beginning state of a commitment to an ideology or commitment. Diffusion is a state of not committing to, or searching for one's identity. Identity achievement is a state of commitment and strong ego identity. Each state is important because it determines an individual's personal choices and commitments. A well-developed identity gives an individual a stronger awareness of her or his strengths, weaknesses, as well as recognition of her or his individual uniqueness.

The purpose of developing a healthy identity is to cope with the ways in which one is perceived socially as well as historically (Spencer, Dupree & Hartman, 1997; Spencer et. al., 2003). Coping, which is defined by Spencer (1995, 1999) as the adaptive reaction to stress, predicts positive or negative outcomes. A negative identity, a product of maladaptive coping patterns, can lead to deviant behavior and poor psychological functioning (Brittian, 2012). Maladaptive coping can also lead to academic disengagement, stereotype threat, and low self worth (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd & Varner, 2013). On the other hand, a healthy, positive identity can lead to academic achievement, positive self worth, and a strong sense of racial identification; attributes which have been found to serve as buffers to negative outcomes (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd & Varner, 2013).

<div align="center">Racial Identity</div>

History

In order to discuss models of racial identity formation in the United States and how they pertain to child and adolescent development, it is important to recognize the historical contexts of race, discrimination, and oppression in the United States because the modern racial inequalities we see today have direct roots in the historical treatment of African people and their descendants in America. Over a period of approximately 300 years, from 1500 to 1800, 388,000 Africans were brought to America and enslaved on plantations through the transatlantic slave trade (Gates, 2014). Slavery, which James Madison (June 6, 1787) referred to as "the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man ever," dehumanized people of African descent, and stripped the African peoples of all rights and freedoms in America.

In Thomas Jefferson's only book, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781), he wrote that although he found slavery cruel, blacks "whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind" (page 87). He concluded *Notes* by saying that he does not know how black and white people could ever co-exist due to this difference in body and mind, which transcended skin color, and

hypothesized this difference was likely attributable to a difference in genotype between the two people.

While slavery and involuntary servitude, except when mandated as punishment for a crime, was made unconstitutional in 1865 by the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the notion that black people were inferior and that the two races should be separated persisted. Remarkably, in 1896 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Plessy v. Ferguson that "separate but equal" facilities were constitutionally legal, and between 1876 and 1965 states passed strict Jim Crow Laws, laws that enforced segregation and made it illegal and a punishable offense for black people to enter certain areas of public establishments. Black and white children were required to attend separate schools, no matter the distance. It is without a doubt that separate schooling for white and black students, although legally allowed, was not equal in the amount of funding and resources allocated per pupil. Black schools were severely underfunded and under resourced, and this severely stunted black children's access, opportunities, and abilities to learn and receive an equal education (Library of Congress, 2008). The legal opinion that "separate but equal" was an acceptable legal notion was not overturned until 1954, more than fifty years after the Plessy decision. In Brown v Board of Education of Topeka Kansas (1954) segregation in the public schools was held unconstitutional. Although this decision characterized a positive move towards bringing about racial equality in schools, the march for equality in all aspects of life had only just begun.

The Civil Rights Era, identified as the period of 1955-1968, marked the struggle to end racial segregation and discrimination. The social movement, which was characterized by sit-ins, boycotts, gatherings, marches, protests and other mass movements, occurred across the United States as men and women demanded full equality (Library of Congress, 2008). The successes of events such as the Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-Ins (1960), the Montgomery Bus boycotts (1961), the March on Washington (1963), the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 moved the nation towards overcoming inequalities

(Library of Congress, 2008). Importantly, fifty years after the March on Washington, America was undeniably in a different era. Structural inequalities, however, still persist in school systems, prisons, neighborhoods, and other American institutions. Issues of racial inequality permeate in society and undermine the health, wellbeing and success of black people in the United States (Library of Congress, 2008).

Cognizant of racial inequalities, in addition to the processes of identity formation articulated by Erikson (1950; 1968) and Marcia (1966; 1980), Erikson described an additional struggle in the process of identity formation for adolescents in the "oppressed and exploited minority" (Erikson, 1950; 1968). Erikson believed that black adolescents often develop a negative identity filled with self-hatred as they grapple to define their identity within mainstream white identity (Erikson, 1950; 1968). In short, black adolescents must define and navigate who they are within society through modern day racialized processes, systems, and ideologies (Zamudio et. al., 2011).

Cross' Model of Nigrescence (1971)

In one of the most recognized models of racial identity development, Nigrescence, W.E. Cross (1971) theorized that all children must begin the process of racial identity formation from a place of self-hatred and/or miseducation due to their social status in white society. The word "nigrescence" comes from the Latin word "nigrēscēns," which literally translates to mean, "to become black" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). Nigrescence consists of five stages of identity development that occur throughout a person's lifetime, moving from a stage of self-hatred to a stage of self-actualization and, finally, cultural affirmation (Cross, 1971). Specifically, the five stages of Cross' model are pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment. The first stage, pre-encounter, suggests that individuals in this stage either have low black racial identity, but a strong "other-group" identity (such as being American), or have black self-hatred (Vandiver, p.177). In the encounter phase, individuals experience some sort of racially prejudiced event that requires the person to re-

conceptualize his or her racial identity. The third stage, immersion-emersion, is the recognition of the importance of blackness and subsequent emersion into black culture. Often in this stage, black people connect with their ancestry and develop pride in their heritage. This immersion in history leads to the development of rage and anger against white America and guilt for the previous stage of self-hatred and/or the inability to recognize blackness as a salient factor in one's identity (Vandiver, p.178). Individuals in the internalization stage feel confident in their identity as a black person and have positive group-esteem. Finally, those in the internalization-commitment phase begin the process of uplifting fellow members of their race.

Phinney's Proposed Stages of Ethnic Identity (1989)

Phinney (1989, 1990) synthesized and extended the work of Erikson (1968), Marcia (1966), and Cross (1978) by developing corresponding states of adolescent ethnic identity development, which appear to be particularly salient for minorities, that parallel Marcia's four states of psychological identity development (identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, diffusion, and identity achievement) and Cross' (1978) five-stage model of Nigrescence (pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment). Like previous theories, Phinney (1989, 1990) proposed that individuals move from unexamined ethnic identity to a committed identity. Under her theory, early adolescents in the first sequence demonstrate a relatively unimportant view of ethnic identity, with ethnic identity holding little to no significance or importance. Individuals in this sequence often demonstrate a preference for white culture. The search for and/or exploration of one's ethnicity characterize the second stage. This stage can occur after a particularly traumatic event and can lead to the devaluing of white culture. Throughout this exploration, individuals develop an appreciation for their ethnicity and can reach the final stage, ethnic identity achievement and internalization.

She posited that reaching the final state requires developing a resolution that acknowledges the statuses of the dominant and the oppressive groups in society so as to maintain a confident sense of one's own ethnicity (Phinney, 1989, 1990). Reaching a final

resolution requires what W.E.B. Dubois (1903) coins a "double consciousness," a permanent

state of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" and of "measuring one's soul by

the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt or pity" (Dubois, 1903). Therefore, in

order to develop a competent identity, black adolescents must identify themselves as individuals

as well as members of a marginalized community (Tatum, 1997; Phinney, 1989, 1992; Cross,

2001). Due to the subordinate nature of black men and women in society, black adolescents are

at risk of developing an unhealthy racial identify because they face more barriers and have to

devote significantly more time to developing and maintaining a healthy identity (Tatum, 1997;

Thomas, Speight, Turner-Essel, and Barrie, 2012).

       Black adolescent girls face a double jeopardy of race and gender as they must define

themselves as black and as women (Beale, 1970; Harris-Perry, 2001). Both come with their own

stages and processes of identification. Throughout the history of the United States, black women

have been considered "da mules of the universe," (Hurston, 1937) often tasked with assuming

menial roles in society, such as caring for other people's children, cleaning and performing

manual labor (Thomas, 2012; Harris-Perry, 2011). The "gold digger," "modern Jezebel,"

"uneducated sister," or "baby mama" stereotypes, as mentioned in the Prologue, coupled with

the "strong black female" stereotype that casts black women as unflinching and unfailingly

strong, serves both to constrain and typecast the roles and perceptions of black women in

society (Harris-Perry, 2011). For example, in Sojourner Truth's 1851 address at the Women's

Convention in Akron, Ohio she explained how the "strong black female" stereotype altered how

she was portrayed by mainstream society. The relevant passage from her speech read:

> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over
> ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or
> over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me!

       To help youth through this stage of identity formation and deconstruct historical notions

of sexism and gender oppression as they develop as black women, girls often find their identity

within society from the network of black women around them (Davis-Maye & Perry, 2007). This network, which includes mothers, aunts, grandmothers, sisters, and fictive kin, nurture, care for, and serve as a role model for youth. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) writes that this process, which is referred to as "other mothering," is shared and cherished by members of the black community. It is through this motherline, a network headed by black women, that youth are able to process who they are as well as develop competence, hope, and independence (Davis-Maye & Perry, 2007). The woman who delivers this care also finds the experience rewarding and redemptive (Davis-Maye & Perry, 2007). In a speech delivered about race, gender and patriarchy, Audre Lorde wrote that:

> For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power I rediscovered. […] Interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being"

Davis-Maye & Perry (2007) investigated the influence of other mothering on perceived maternal figures and hope within a sample of 866 African American or Creole/Mixed girls between the ages of 9 and 19. Over half of the girls identified a high level of support from a maternal figure in their lives. Researchers found that while younger children most often identified immediate family members as a maternal figure, many sixteen to nineteen year olds reported "some other person." The research confirmed the importance of mothering and posited that the shift in who was reported as a key mother figure could be attributed to the change in a child's developmental needs; that adolescents spend more time outside the home with peers and other adults and may be at a time where they are looking for women who reflect ideal qualities of womanhood. Finally, these findings can inform work with black adolescent girls by underscoring the importance of women – informally or professionally connected with these girls - who serve as supportive maternal figures in a child's environment.

Phenomenology and Ecological Systems Theories

The review of literature sheds light on how complicated it is to understand development for black children. Although each of the research theories described the importance of certain aspects of a child's environment as being influential to development, none of these researchers' theories fully explain how each aspect of a child's historical or developmental environment affect her or his identity. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1989), Bronfenbrenner and Morris' Bioecological Model of Development (2006), and Spencer, Dupree & Hartmann's PVEST (1995, 1999) theory ground history and experiences as essential processes in identity formation across a lifespan, and will form the theoretical foundation for developing an intervention that aims to help girls across multiple domains.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1989) developed the ecological systems theory that posited that individuals shape and are shaped by their environment. Although previous research focused on individual factors such as parenting to be most influential to development, Bronfenbrenner emphasized the importance of individual development within a greater, more complicated system of influences. These systems, which he explained, each operate on different levels and exert their influence on the child as well as her or his environment differently. These differences alter how a child perceives, interprets, and interacts with the world and, reciprocally, how the child exerts an influence on his or her environment. When one system fails a child can become more vulnerable to poor developmental outcomes.

Modern theorists believe that human development is a transaction between an individual and her or his context, as well as between and among contexts (Huston, 2014). Individuals are seen as active agents in their development. Individuals affect their environment and development through their agency (Huston, 2014). Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) shifted their focus from environments and systems to what they deemed a model "oriented toward the future" that placed greater emphasis on the individual. In the Bioecological Model, researchers

emphasize two new correlates that stress an individual's ontogeny (biology, behavior, and psychology): process, person, context, and time, as well as proximal processes (2006). These forces affect development through reciprocal interactions over time, which vary in form, power, content, and time across the individual and the environment, in which she or he is embedded (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006).

An Alternative Theoretical Approach: PVEST (Spencer, 1995, 1999)

Black children and adolescents in America are situated within a more vulnerable ecological context than their white counterparts due to a persistent gap in wealth (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2011), a high poverty rate (American Psychological Association, 2011), disadvantaged access to resources, overrepresentation in the prison-industrial complex (Alexander, 2013), and a host of other factors that perpetuate structural oppression and serve as barriers to achievement. Bronfenbrenner's (1989) theory that the systems in which a child is embedded exert an influence on a child's life is important, but arguably does not explain how black children who are disproportionately embedded in systems which are fraught with inequality are able to cope and thrive in society. Spencer (1995, 1999) and Spencer, Dupree & Hartmann (1997) extended Bronfenbrenner's (1989) theory, with specific tailoring to the experiences of black children and adolescents. They posited that it is not merely the ecological context that alters children's development, but the perceptions and actions of the children during those particular experiences within their system that shapes their identity. Therefore, it is not only the ecological context that shapes how a child perceives, interprets and interacts with the world (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), but also a bidirectional processes where both the systems in the environment and a child's cognitive processes shape her or his development (Spencer et. al. 1997). This bidirectional influence and emphasis on the influence of a child's cognition pushes back on the prevalent notion that inherently places black children in a risk-based framework because of the disproportionate embeddedness in vulnerable contexts instead of a resilience framework (National Black Child Development Institute, 2014).

Black Children & Adolescents in School

Schools can serve as a platform for growth and development, by providing culturally relevant education, but they also can serve as a site for stress engagement and threat to development if the child cannot adopt a corrective, adaptive problem-solving strategy (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The educational utility belief is referred to as the belief that education is an opportunity structure for people to be upwardly mobile (Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd & Varner, 2013). African American and Latino students often experience academic disidentification, a disconnect of their personal identity from domains in which they experience stigma or do not believe they can be upwardly mobile (Butler-Barnes et. al., 2013). Belief in education as an opportunity structure serves as a form of protection against their self-concept and self-identification, but is detrimental to academic outcomes (Crocker & Major; 1989; Osborner, 1997; Steele, 1997). Ogbu (1986) attributed this process of dis-identification to conflicting messages in black society that black children had to "act white" in order to achieve academically. Therefore, Ogbu theorized, in order to do well in school students had to deny part of their racial identity to succeed (Ogbu, 1986).

In recent years, "acting white" has been revisited and no support has been found for Ogbu's theory (Harris, 2011). Black students often endorse working harder and for many more hours than their white counterparts, yet a persistent gap persists (Harris, 2011). Researchers often cite other reasons for compromised achievement, such as the stereotype threat vulnerability. Claude Steele (1995) found that when tested on material typically seen as problematic for black students, participants underperformed relative to white students, reporting that they felt more concerned about their abilities, provided more excuses for their abilities on the exam, and displayed a greater reluctance to have their race linked to their performance. When given the same test, without the threat of judgment, students performed equally or better than their white counterparts. This feeling that their race is a significant barrier to black adolescents achievement can lead to learned helplessness, reduced effort due to a

feeling of futility, which, in turn, can serve as a barrier to achievement.

Whereas the intervention literature targeting academic achievement among Black students is replete with studies with adolescent boys, (e.g. Travis & Ausbrooks, 2012; Lee et, al., 2011; Grant, 2010; Wyatt, 2009), currently little research or empirically validated interventions exist that evaluate programs developed specifically for black adolescent girls during the school day to provide that platform for growth, but similar programs that target ethnic and racial identity among black girls have shown promising effects. Belgrave et. al. (2004) evaluated a culturally relevant afterschool program for early adolescent middle school girls and found that the program had a significant impact on ethnic identity, marginal significance on androgynous gender role, and borderline significance on relational orientation. Thomas, Davidson & McAdoo (2008) examined the effects of Youth Empowered Sisters (YES!), a culturally relevant afterschool intervention for black adolescent girls in the 9th and 10th grades and found that students enrolled in the program had a stronger ethnic identity, deeper sense of communalism, an increased awareness of racism, and greater participation in youth activism. The programs provide support for culture and gender relevant programming and its effects on ethnic identity and communalism, yet they do not address outcomes of academic achievement.

Some educators have tried to employ culturally relevant pedagogy, "pedagogy of opposition," in the classroom as a means of respecting the unique context of black youth in society, so as to "promote collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). Culturally relevant pedagogy emphasizes that students must develop their academic skills and competence, be provided with culturally competent curriculum and instruction (instruction that utilizes students' culture), and be given materials that allow them to analyze society and be critically conscious (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). In classrooms of successful teachers, the teachers believed in the success of each of their children, emphasized that learning could occur bidirectionally between students and teachers, the instruction derived from student needs, and students were encouraged to work with, and not in competition with,

other students (p. 163). Friere (1970, p. 69) called this teaching strategy *co-intentional*

education.

> Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action they discover themselves as permanent re-creators.

While the programs and pedagogy mentioned above seem promising, these strategies are

uncommon and not widely employed as an important means of instruction. Henry Louis Gates

Jr. wrote that "of all histories and cultures in this world, it is those of the people of Africa and its

diaspora that have been most devalued and ignored in the context of instruction of human

civilization" (Henry Lewis, 1993, cited in Ginwright, 2004; Grant, 2008). The examples

mentioned above are alternative approaches to the traditional and prevalent mode of instruction.

GRACE aimed to join the small canon of research on educational strategies for black girls

to improve outcomes of ethnic and personal identity, as well as academic achievement. The

program acknowledged the unique position held by black students in society, the feelings of

helplessness felt by many black girls who feel threatened in the school environment, and serve to

provide a platform for relational building as well as learning. Specifically, this study aimed to

evaluate a unique program for girls during a critical point of their development when they are

looking for models of womanhood and may exhibit signs of disengagement that can or already

have led to academic failure. Using quantitative methods, this study examines changes in levels

of functioning in self-perceptions (sense of self and personal choices); (Erikson, 1950; 1968;

Marcia, 1966; 1980), racial identity (level of racial and/or ethnic commitment); (Cross, 1971;

Phinney, 1989; 1990) and achievement (level of effort, hopefulness, and academic achievement);

(Ogbu, 1968; Steele, 1995; Butler-Barnes, Chavous, Hurd & Varner, 2013) for a small cohort of

students, both before and after an eight week program. In doing so, the study hopes to offer a

deeper perspective of academic achievement that emphasizes both the phenomenological and

ecological contexts of individual students. Previous research has shown evidence for the importance of self-perception, racial identity, and achievement in the positive, healthy development of black adolescent girls. The results of this study have the potential to contribute some important insights to the field.

Research Questions:

This thesis presents a small pilot study, Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE), designed to address the gaps in the field in researching, designing and implementing programs for black adolescent girls. There is a great need to provide programs that acknowledge the unique historical, phenomenological and ecological circumstances of black adolescent girls in schools. This thesis asks: how Does Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE), a culturally grounded in-school intervention for black adolescent girls, affect self-perceptions, racial identity, and academic achievement?

This thesis has four main hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: Participating in GRACE will result in an improvement in self-perceptions (as measured by pre-and-posttest scores on the Children's Hope questionnaire).

- Hypothesis 2: Participating in GRACE will result in an improvement in racial identity (as measured by pre-and-posttest scores on the MCAIQ).

- Hypothesis 3: Participating in GRACE will result in an improvement in academic achievement (as measured by pre-and-posttest academic grades).

- Hypothesis 4: GRACE will serve as a platform for participating in positive developmental activities (as measured by posttest scores on the Youth Experiences Survey).

Chapter III. Design and Methodology

Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE) is a quantitative study of black

adolescent girls in the tenth and eleventh grades who participated in an eight-week program.

This study uses quantitative survey data collected through pre-and-posttests, as well as posttest

only survey instruments. The following sections will describe GRACE and the procedures used

for data collection.

Program Description

Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE) was an eight-week program

developed specifically for black girls in tenth and eleventh grades. The program, which was

offered once a week for two hours, used specific group and individual activities to emphasize the

importance of historical, ecological, and phenomenological contexts (Figure 1). GRACE provided

structured, activity-based programming and group based mentoring, one mentor with up to four

youth (MENTOR, 2011). Throughout the structured programming, which will be discussed in

greater detail below, girls were encouraged to collaborate and bond with each other through

each activity, as well as receive guidance and support from the facilitator and graduate student

assistants, informally throughout the program and formally through activities where the girls

were split up into groups of three with a graduate student assistant who led the activity.

Previous mentoring initiatives have found that group mentoring can build relationships and

improve group processing, as well as serve as a means for targeting developmental achievements

(Dishion, McCord and Pouin, 1999; Deutsch, Wiggins, Henneberger & Lawerence, 2012).

The curriculum and programming each week was designed to improve self-perceptions,

racial identity and academic achievement. More specifically, the program aimed to a) promote

adaptive coping, b) promote agency and pathways to set and/or achieve goals, c) improve how

one perceives the black community, referred to as "social orientation," d) improve how one

perceives her facial features and/or skin tone, referred to as "appearance orientation," and e)

decrease the number of negative media images a student believes to be true, referred to as

"stereotype endorsement" (See Figure 1). Sample program activities are listed below.

Proverbs and Collaborative Activities

Proverbs, collaborative activities, works by black authors, and academic assistance aimed to promote role models and representation. In a paper discussing educational practices beneficial to black children, Asimeng-Boahene (2010) advocates for the use of African proverbs (concise words of wisdom) within classrooms to provide a counter-story (stories that encompass ideas of diverse students) that enables students to adapt and appreciate diverse perspectives and viewpoints. African proverbs, such as "for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today" and "smooth seas does not make a skillful sailor," were introduced at the beginning of each session to engage students in higher level philosophical thinking. Situating blackness within a positive context of "pride, effort and achievement," such as through affirmative proverbs, aimed to combat feelings of discrimination and racism (Harper, 2011).

After the proverb, which served to introduce relatable components of African culture, high school and university students collaboratively discussed proverb implications. A group spokesperson explained what the proverb meant to them using posters and art supplies. Afterward, the students were given time to write creatively about the proverb in their scrapbook. Polleck (2011) found that socio-emotional competence projects, such as journaling bolster self-awareness (by fostering identity development), self-management (through responsible decision making) and awareness (by building relationship skills); (Polleck, 2011 p.103). Therefore, this activity aimed to improve students' self-perceptions and awareness of their own lives through the proverb journaling prompts.

After students independently wrote in their journals, they read and discussed works that aligned with the theme of the proverb. These works, written by black women, aimed to introduce other mothers and provide relevant literary examples. Research found that reading and learning about Afrocentric reading materials placed the unique perspective of being black in America

within a greater historical context (Perry, Steele & Hilliard III, 2003). Additionally, hearing women's voices aimed to provide support by showing youth that their perspective was valid, relevant, and shared by other older, supportive role models. Each quote was printed and given to the student's to read when needed. The excerpts hoped to echo what students felt so as to promote connectedness, both with other group members and with prominent, successful black men and women.

Goal and Accomplishment Activity

One-on-one personal goal setting allowed the students to discuss, brainstorm and freely choose the long and short term goals they wanted to pursue; goals that represented their personal interests and values (Bird & Markle, 2012). The students were required to write their goals on paper. Writing the goals on paper boosted accountability and gave personal goals, which often-go unwritten, greater meaning (Bird & Markle, 2012). If a student did not have any ideas, the group set goals to investigate options (e.g. college, trade schools, jobs) together. After writing down their goals, students created jars to document accomplishments throughout the program on slips of paper. This process increased connectedness because it allowed the community to share important aspects of their week and mitigate any negative experiences. The process also increased positive thinking, which helps adolescents cope with anxiety, depression, anger and aggression (Ng, Ang & Ho, 2012). This positive thinking and goal setting in moments of stress served as a form of coping. The undergraduate and graduate student volunteers were trained to monitor for signs of epiphanic moments, life events (such as trauma, unemployment, neighborhood violence or economic distress) that could lead to unhealthy choices (e.g., believing that their desired pathway is no longer possible) (Walsh, 2011 p. 375).

Academic Instruction and Tutoring

After an hour of instruction and guided activities, high school students were given time

and assistance in completing their homework and assignments with help from graduate students. During the tutoring sessions, students spent time going over deadlines for the upcoming weeks Finally, high school students were required to check in during each session with the facilitator to go over academic plans for the week to boost accountability and let the students know they had someone invested in their scholastic achievement, which was demonstrated to increase academic outcomes (Leaper, Farkas & Brown, 2011).

Participants

Research participants were selected from a Boston metropolitan area high school with approximately 250 students (42% male, 58% female). The total minority enrollment was 98% (68% black, 31% hispanic, 2% white, and 1% American Indian), with 85% of its student body at an economic disadvantage (77% qualified for free and 8% qualified for reduced lunch). To be eligible, the student must have met each of the following criteria, which will be explained in greater detail below:

      a) Identify as female;

      b) Identify as black;

      c) Be enrolled in either the tenth or eleventh grade;

      d) Demonstrate a need for academic support (i.e. had a 2.5 cumulative grade point average or below);

      e) Qualify for free or reduced lunch; or[1]

      f) Be recommended by school personnel.

Thirty students were recruited for the study. Twelve students submitted their forms by the deadline and were invited to participate. A total of ten students participated in the program and responded to surveys (See table 1 for complete demographic information). One student had a time conflict (the program was offered during a required class occurring at the same time that

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[1] One student did not qualify for free or reduced lunch due to an oversight made by the school during the identification of eligible students

the group was offered); one other student declined to participate because she reported not to

enjoy working in groups.

All participating students reported being female and black and/or African American. The

ages ranged from 15.30 - 18.20 years old (*M* = 16.49, *SD* = .92). Approximately 30% of the

students were in 10th grade (N=3) and 70% of the students were in 11th grade (N=7). Nine

students qualified for free lunch, while one student paid regular price. Students had completed

between 8 and 15.5 credits (*M* = 12.45, *SD* = 2.92) at the start of the program. According to the

grading scale used by the host school, approximately 40% (N= 4) of student grade point

averages were categorized as Exceeding (B- to B+), 40% (N = 4) of student grade point averages

were categorized as Meeting (C- to C+), 10% (N=1) of student grade point averages were

categorized as Approaching (D- to D+), and 10% (N=1) of student grade point averages were

categorized as Beginning (F+). No student's grade point average was categorized as Honors (A-

to A+).

Criterion 1: Identify as female

The program was developed and led by a black female graduate student and sessions

were delivered with the assistance of two other black female graduate students. The group was

developed as a single-sex program because the process of identity formation for black girls is

unique and different than adolescents of any other race or gender (Beale, 1970; Harris-Perry,

2001). Because the black community relies on a matrilineal line for support (Davis-Maye &

Perry, 2007; Hill Collins, 1990; Lorde, 2007), the program made gender a criterion to foster the

familiar sense of nurturing and caring seen in the community.

Criterion 2: Identify as black and/or African American

All students who participated in the program were required to identify themselves as

black and/or African American. How a student thinks and problem solves is directly influenced

by current and historical cultural patterns (Vygotsky, 1978), thus for the program to be most

effective it was important to create a group of students who shared a similar cultural

background. All proverbs, lessons, and activities selected for each program session were chosen

to address the unique cultural process of development for black adolescents who engage with

the world within a more vulnerable ecological context than their white counterparts due to a

persistent gap in wealth (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2011), a high poverty rate

(American Psychological Association, 2011), disadvantaged access to resources,

overrepresentation in the prison-industrial complex (Alexander, 2013), and a host of other

factors that perpetuate structural oppression and serve as barriers to achievement.

Criterion 3: Be enrolled in either the tenth or eleventh grade

GRACE required students to be enrolled either in the tenth or eleventh grade because

students in these grades must begin the process of thinking about and planning for life after

graduation. That is, they are beginning to think about enrolling in summer enrichment

programs, taking the SAT, planning to apply to college, or determining a career path. Students

in ninth grade were excluded because their attention is devoted to adjusting to the high school

environment. Students in twelfth grade were excluded because many deadlines to apply to

colleges and/or internships would likely have passed by the conclusion of the program.

Criterion 4: Demonstrate a need for academic support

A 2.7 grade point average or below was chosen because students with a GPA at or below

this grade point average may face greater risk for failure to graduate and/or to pursue higher

education (America's Promise, 2011). Students exhibiting a history of academic struggle may,

after facing repeated negative feedback (such as reprimands by the teacher and/or bad grades)

begin to feel helpless and disengage. This disengagement, as mentioned earlier, can be

detrimental to academic outcomes (Crocker & Major; 1989; Osborner, 1997; Steele, 1997).

Further, this disengagement can lead to a pattern of maladaptive coping that also can lead to

adverse outcomes such as mental health issues, poor health or deviance (Spencer, 1995).

Criterion 5: Qualify for free or reduced lunch

In 2011, the National Assessment of Education Progress found a 28-point gap in reading proficiency levels between children eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch and those who were ineligible for free or reduced lunch (NAEP, 2011). Moreover, children reared within poor families are more likely than children from non-poor families to drop out of high school (Acs et.al., 2013). These finding emphasize the importance in working with students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. In order to determine which students may face economic struggle, as an eligibility criterion, GRACE included students who qualified for free or reduced lunch through the School Nutrition Program, which provides free meals to students in any household with an income level between 130-185% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (between $30,615 - $43,568 annually for a household of four in 2014) (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014).

Criterion 6: Be recommended by the school counselor

Some students fit criteria 1 and 2 above but may not have met either Criterion A or B. However, because the student faced a recent stressor, such as death of a parent, being held back repeatedly, or returning after maternity leave, this criterion was included for any students the school thought would benefit from the program regardless of whether they met Criterion A or B.

College/Graduate Student Research Assistants

Undergraduate and graduate students were invited by way of email and distribution of flyers on campus to assist in the weekly GRACE program (Appendix A). Students eligible for participation had to submit a written application, pass a criminal background check, sign a consent form agreeing to participate and abide by the rules of GRACE, agree to participate for the entirety of the program, and attend (4) training sessions; which included orientation, initial training, cultural sensitivity training and follow-up training. In addition to selecting only those college participants who agreed to participate fully in the above-described process, students were selected based on the content of their application. Five undergraduate and/or graduate students applied to participate in GRACE. Two students, both graduate level students, served as research assistants throughout the program. Three students had a conflict with the time of the

program's implementation and were unable to participate.

Procedure

Letters of introduction (introducing the principal investigator, the program and logistics) and separate parent consent and child consent forms (describing GRACE, the program's intended purpose, participation information, study procedures, and potential risks and/or benefits) were sent to thirty students (See Appendix B, Appendix C, Appendix D). Students were invited by the school to a follow-up luncheon as a reminder to submit their consent form. Students who fit one or more of the criteria and submitted the consent forms before the start of the program were invited to participate for the full eight weeks. Once in the study, students were assigned an ID number. A key was created that linked participant's names with their unique ID number. This key was kept in a separate password protected folder on a secure server. Students received no compensation for their participation in the program. This research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Tufts University Institutional Review Board. Additionally, the study was approved by the principal investigator's M.A. thesis committee in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development, as well as by the high school principal at the host site of the program.

Data Collection

During the first and final program sessions, students completed the Children's Hope Scale (referred to on the survey as "My Goals;" Appendix E), the Multi-Construct African American Identity Scale surveys (referred to on the actual survey as "Who I am;" Appendix F). During the final program session only, students answered the Youth Experiences Survey (referred to on the survey as "Your Program Experiences;" Appendix G). Additionally, information about basic demographics (age and race), academic grades, number of credits, and free or reduced lunch benefits also was obtained, with consent, from the school database. Information about each instrument is described in detail below.

Measures

       Self-Perception (Appendix E). The *Children's Hope Scale* was developed by Snyder et. al. (1996) and defines children's hope as "a cognitive set of abilities in one's capabilities to produce workable routes to goals...as well as initiating movements towards goals" (Snyder et. al., 1996, p. 401). The six item self-report scale measures both the agency and the pathway components of goal seeking. Response options range from a one, equaling "none", to a six equaling "all the time." Both pathway and agency constructs displayed internal validity for use with children ages 8-16. The total response score was on a scale of 1to 6, with one being "none" and six being "all the time." Questions 1, 3, and 5 refer to goal-oriented agency. Questions 2, 4, and 6 refer to the goal oriented pathways. The final score is calculated by determining the mean score.

       Racial Identity (Appendix F) The MCAIQ was developed by Smith & Brookins (1997) to measure constructs of racial and/or ethnic group identity for African American youth. Smith and Brookins (1997) describe "African American ethnic identity" as shared physiology, as well as the endorsement of a common sense of peoplehood, values, culture and experiences (Smith and Brookins, 1997, p. 362). The MCAIQ is composed of 21 5-point Likert scale items with 3 specific, reliable construct sub-scales. The 3 sub-scales are *social orientation* (the preference to socialize with people of your own race), *appearance orientation* (one's comfort with outward physical appearance) and *attitudes* (the degree of stereotype acceptance or rejection) (p. 367). The scale demonstrated moderate to high consistently and internal consistency (from .65 to .84) for use with African American youth. Higher scores indicate, respectively, high in-group orientation and high rejection of stereotypes.

       Academic Grades (Appendix G) The school developed a unique categorical grading scale to organize student's performance that corresponded with their cumulative grade point average. Scores by grade point average ranged from 0.00-4.33 points. According to this grading scale, student's grade point averages were categorized into 5 different categories: Honors if they fell between 3.66-4.33 (A- to A+), Exceeding if they fell between 2.66-3.33 (B- to B+), Meeting if

they fell between a 1.66-2.33 (C- to C+), Approaching if they fell between a 0.66-1.33 (D- to D+) ,

and Beginning if they fell below a 0.66 (F+). The school used these grading scale categories to

calculate final averages and determine how well a student is meeting the standards and

commitments to learning.

　　Program Experiences (Appendix H) The *Youth Experiences Survey* was developed at the

University of Illinois to assess recent high school developmental experiences in organized

activities (Hansen & Larson, 2005). The 70-item scale is divided into developmental domains.

The present study omitted constructs not relevant to the study design. The survey included 32

questions, with response options ranging from 1 (Yes, definitely) to 4 (Not at all). The survey

included six questions about identity experiences, six questions about initiative experiences,

four about learning basic skills, five about cognitive skill acquisition, and five about teamwork

and social skills. Lower scores on the measure indicate experiencing a greater number of

developmental activities.

Data Analysis

　　IBM ©SPSS© Statistics 21 was used to analyze the data. Due to the nature of the sample

size, no tests of significance were performed. Instead pretest and posttest scores were analyzed

for patterns and trends, both individually and by subgroup (by grade in school and by grade

point average category). Pre-and-posttest scores were analyzed for the Children's Hope survey,

the Multi-Construct African American Identity Questionnaire, and academic grades.

Additionally, posttest only scores (the survey was only administered upon program completion)

of the Youth Experiences survey were analyzed.

Results

　　As previously described, students were selected based on specific criteria (i.e., race,

grade, grade point average, qualification for free or reduced lunch, school recommendation),

thus it is important to recognize that these students represent a small minority of the school population. All identifying information, such as names or other unique characteristics, have been altered to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The findings of this study are reported sequentially based on the research hypotheses. First, the demographic characteristics such as race, age, grade, and number of credits completed, and initial grade point average of the youth participating in the program are described. Second, scores on self-perception, racial identity, and academic achievement are described.

Self-perception

Overall

Children's Hope was assessed at pre-and-posttest using 6 questions. Results indicated a 31.58% increase in children's hope from pretest [$M = 2.47$, $Mdn = 2.75$, $SD = 1.05$] to posttest [$M = 3.25$; $Mdn = 3.42$; $SD = 0.97$]. Thus, the hypothesis that participation in GRACE would result in an improvement in self-perception was supported (Table 2).

Grade Level

In analyzing by grade level, 11th graders seemed to improve more than 10th graders (Table 2). Among the 10th graders, results indicated a 27.48% increase in children's hope from pretest [$M = 2.22$, $Mdn = 3$, $SD = 1.35$] to posttest [$M = 2.83$; $Mdn = 3.17$; $SD = 0.88$]. Among the 11th graders, results indicated a 37.2% increase in children's hope from pretest [$M = 2.50$, $Mdn = 2.50$, $SD = 1.03$] to posttest [$M = 3.43$; $Mdn = 3.50$; $SD = 1.01$].

Grade Equivalence

In analyzing by grade equivalency, the student in the Approaching category showed the most improvement (177.27%), followed by the student in the Beginning grade category (73.2%), students in the Meeting category (39.48%) and, finally, students in the Exceeding category (9.54%) (Table 2).

Racial Identity

Overall

Twenty-one questions were used to assess the impact of GRACE on racial identity. Results indicated a small improvement, 8.15%, in racial identity from pretest [M = 4.17, Mdn = 4.36, SD = 0.65] to posttest [M = 4.51; Mdn = 4.76; SD = 0.50] on 3 specific construct subscales (social orientation, appearance orientation, and attitudes) (Table 3). In looking at improvement by subscale, results indicated a 10.99% increase in social orientation from pretest [M = 3.82, SD = 0.88] to posttest [M = 4.24, SD = 0.75]. Results indicated a 7.13% increase in appearance orientation from pretest [M = 4.35, SD = 0.70] to posttest [M =4.66, SD =0.41]. Finally, results indicated a 4.72% increase in attitudes from pretest [M =4.87, SD = 0.64] to posttest [M = 5.10, SD = 0.61].

Grade Level

In analyzing by grade level, 11th graders seemed to improve slightly more than 10th graders (Table 3). Among the 11th graders, results indicated an 11.22% increase in racial identity from pretest [M = 4.01, SD = 0.60] to posttest [M = 4.46, SD = 0.51]. Among the 10th graders, results indicated a 6% increase in racial identity from pretest [M = 4.34, SD = 0.88] to posttest [M = 4.61, SD = 0.58]. Refer to Table 3 for scores broken down by subscale.

In analyzing by grade equivalency, the students in the Beginning grade category demonstrated a 13.7% improvement from pretest [M = 3.43] to [M = 3.90]; students in the Meeting category demonstrated a 9.83% improvement from pretest [M = 4.07, SD = 0.69] to [M = 4..47, SD = 0.49]; students in the Exceeding category demonstrated a 7.96% improvement from pre [M = 4.27, SD = 0.64] to [M = 4.61, SD = 0.57]; and the student in the Approaching category showed no improvement (0%) from pre to posttest [M = 2.5]. Refer to Table 3 for scores broken down by subscale.

Academic Achievement

Overall

Cumulative grade point averages in the years prior to GRACE and immediately following GRACE were used to examine the impact of GRACE on academic achievement (Table 4). Overall,

grade point averages increased 12.34% from pre [M = 2.10, SD = .75] to posttest [M = 2.36, SD

= .75].

Grade Level

In eleventh grade, grade point averages increased 13.15% from pre [M = 2.18, SD = .80]

to posttest [M = 2.46, SD = .84]. In tenth grade, grade point average increased 10.88% from pre

[M = 1.93, SD = .74] to posttest [M = 2.14, SD = 1.07].

Grade equivalence

One student's grade point average moved from Exceeding to Honors, one student's

moved from Approaching to Meeting, and one student's moved from Beginning to Approaching.

Thus, approximately 10% (N= 1) of student grade point averages were categorized as Honors,

40% (N= 4) were categorized as Exceeding, 30% (N= 3) were categorized as Meeting, and 20%

(N= 2) were categorized as Approaching. No student's grade point average was categorized as

Beginning.

Program Experiences

The Youth Experiences Survey provided insight into which high school developmental

domains students experienced while enrolled in GRACE. Results indicated that, on average,

student's reported "yes, definitely" and "quite a bit" to experiencing the five developmental

domains [M = 1.96, SD = 0.59]: identity experiences [M = 2.0, SD = 0.68], initiative experiences

[M = 1.75, SD = 0.43] basic skill [M = 2.38, SD = 0.89], teamwork , and social skills [M = 1.88,

SD = 0.71] . Scores by subdomain (i.e. identity exploration, identity reflection, goal setting, effort,

problem solving, time management, emotional regulation, cognitive skills, and group process

skills) are included in Table 5.

Grade Level

Tenth graders [M = 1.85, SD = 0.49] experienced slightly more developmental

experiences than eleventh graders [M = 2.04, SD = 0.66]. From most to least experienced, tenth

graders reported experiencing: teamwork and social skills [M = 1.6, SD = 0.40], identity

experiences [M = 1.67, SD = 0.51], initiative experiences [M = 1.75, SD = 0.24] and basic skill [M

= 2.22, SD =1.01]. Eleventh graders reported experiencing: initiative experiences [M = 1.79, SD

= 0.51], teamwork and social skills [M = 2, SD = 0.8], identity experiences [M = 2.16, SD = 0.68],

and basic skill [M = 2.46, SD = 1.02] (Table 5).

Grade Equivalent

The student with the lowest gpa, in the Beginning category, reported experiencing the

most developmental experiences [M = 1.34], followed by students in the Exceeding category [M

= 1.93, SD = 0.67], students in the Meeting category[M = 2.10, SD = 0.64], and the student in

the Approaching grade point average category [M = 2.31]. To see the remaining scores broken

down by grade equivalent, please refer to Table 13.

Tasha: A Case Study

Tasha's journey in GRACE is an important example of how a student's actions,

perceptions, and cognitions can dramatically change outcomes. Tasha began the program with

the lowest grade point average (0.63), credits completed (8.00), and scores on the children's

hope and racial identity measure. Tasha was aggressive towards her teachers, often getting

thrown out of the classroom for yelling and being confrontational. At the beginning of GRACE

she would arrive frustrated and upset, venting to the group about how her teachers were always

trying to disrespect her so she saw no point in trying because everyone gave up on her anyway.

Through engaging in program activities, Tasha's behavior began to change. The largest

transformation occurred during the fifth week. Instead of walking into the program frustrated,

she walked into the room excitedly. She said that her teacher was impressed that she did her

homework during GRACE that she had not "called her out" all week. She said that maybe the

teacher never held any hostilities towards her and she was probably just mad she never did any

work.

In being able to adopt another perspective, Tasha was able to see the benefits in engaging

in school activities. Tasha stopped skipping class and began listening to what the teacher had to

say. The teacher was so surprised that she visited the program during Week 6. She walked into

the room with tears in her eyes, saying that she was so proud of her and although she knew

Tasha thought she was hard on her – she only wanted what was best. Tasha began to tear up and

she told her to leave her to get her work done, with a wide smile on her face. After the eight

weeks, Tasha's grades, as well as scores in racial identity and hope increased dramatically. She

stopped skipping school and began to complete her homework, saying that she finally

understood the importance of staying in school.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE) was an eight-week program

developed specifically for black girls in tenth and eleventh grades. The program, which was

offered once a week for two hours, used specific group and individual activities to emphasize the

importance of historical, ecological, and phenomenological contexts. Each week was designed to

improve self-perceptions, racial identity and academic achievement. This study contributes to

the literature on development and educational outcomes of black adolescent girls. Surveys

demonstrated an improvement in racial identity, self-perception, and academic achievement,

supporting all hypotheses. Many students reported that GRACE was a positive turning point in

their lives. Eleventh graders improved more than tenth graders in racial identity, self-perception,

and academic achievement, whereas tenth graders reported experiencing slightly more

developmental experiences through the GRACE program. Although tests of significance were

not performed due to the nature of the sample size, these findings along with the case study

suggest that participating in a culturally grounded in-school intervention for black adolescent

girls has the potential to improve outcomes. Findings will be discussed below both in how they

relate to previous literature and how they can guide future research and programming.

GRACE did not alter the contexts in which the individual students were embedded, such

as the classrooms they were in or the method of instruction, yet students reported a change that

persisted beyond the program and into the classrooms and school environment. The school

principal wrote a letter discussing the change in identification and participation she saw in the

students, providing a second example of a student who benefited from the program structure.

> Ms. Mims proposed a research project that has proven to shift the thinking and life
> aspirations of the young women at our school. Within a few short weeks of the program's
> inception, I quickly realized that GRACE was making a significant impact on our ladies.
> I observed the community building activities and for many of the young ladies, I had not
> seen this level of engagement in the time they have been at the school. In the words [] of
> one young lady, "Ms. [] do you know the mentor called me at home and is going to help
> me pass my Biology exam!" In a very short time, GRACE has helped the first cohort of
> young ladies to build a community, understand their self worth, and choose to work hard
> toward their goals of high school graduation.

In using PVEST as a lens to interpret the results, the change could be attributed to the

notion that it is not merely a child's ecological context that affects development, but also his or

her cognitive understanding of his or her world. In improving self-perception, racial identity and

academic achievement, students may have been better able to assume a double consciousness,

identify with the school environment and feel less threatened. This improved cognition may

have provided students with tools to cope with the contexts they were facing and explained why

the girls thrived even though they had identifiable barriers to development (e.g. as seen in the

endorsement of the criterion for selection). Improvement across all three outcome measures

provided support for the philosophy that a child's identity development shapes and is shaped by

all experiences in his or her environment. Although the sequence of this pathway was not

investigated and it is impossible to determine which processes improved first and if they

influenced one another, the following sequence of events is an activity meant to provide a

possible explanation for the results.

If an adolescent girl improved in her self-perception by learning about proverbs,

engaging in collaborative activities, and finding motherline support through GRACE, the

adolescent may have felt less hopeless, depressed or alone and begun to feel that she could

achieve her goals and engage in school. GRACE, which was designed to serve as a platform for

working on and acknowledging the success of these goals, could have helped students find tangible pathways to achieve their goals and positively contribute to the improvement in academic achievement (as seen in the results) and in school engagement (as reported by the school principal) after eight weeks.

While improvement was seen across all students, it is important to dig deeper and begin to think about why scores may have increased more among the eleventh grade students. The difference in scores on racial identity and self-perception between tenth and eleventh graders may be explained by aforementioned theories of development. As noted earlier, Phinney (1989, 1992) described stages of identity development that led children to move from a place of self-hatred and/or miseducation, to a stage of self-actualization and cultural affirmation. These stages, which Phinney (1989) describes as a facet of adolescence, and which Cross (1971, 2001) describes as a facet of adulthood, change as youth develop and affect actions, identifications, and cognition. Accordingly, the difference in change scores between racial identity and self-perception in tenth and eleventh grade students, with eleventh graders demonstrating a higher change, could be explained by a difference in cognitive and developmental maturity. If racial identity development has a temporal component, with change occurring progressively with age, an argument could be made that eleventh graders were more cognitively and developmentally equipped before the start of GRACE to process and utilize the curriculum to improve their identity.

Another hypothesis is that there could have been a difference in the type of role model needed among the students in the tenth grade and students in the eleventh grade. As was discussed in previous research, younger black girls reported a maternal figure as being most influential to their development while older black girls reported some other member as being important in their lives (Davis-Maye & Perry, 2007). In line with the research, eleventh graders would find greater benefits in joining a mentoring setting that introduced adult role models because that age may characterize a critical shift from finding inspiration from their immediate

family to looking for fictive kin and role models outside their immediate environment. Tenth graders could still find the program beneficial, but might find greater benefits in working with their own established role model.

The current program model did not include the parents in any activities, but often the program facilitator unintentionally interfaced with a child's mother. In checking for the completeness of permission and consent forms, it was noted that the forms were signed either by the students' mother or grandmother serving as the custodial parent. This finding was interesting enough to merit an informal investigation and a question asking "who is your role model" was added to a quick "getting to know you" questionnaire completed during the first session and shared with the graduate student assistants in order to learn more about each participating student. While the focus of the program was devoted to building unity among peers and graduate students assistants in the program and time constraints prohibited contacting each role model identified on the questionnaire directly, the children often mentioned the various influences these women had on their lives and this generated hypotheses for future program implementation.

For example, one student, Kia, listed a celebrity role model on her getting to know you questionnaire and seemed to have struggled to connect with her motherline. She often asked if the group could discuss more woman-to-woman issues (e.g. sex, dating, relationships, colorism) because she felt her own mother was too busy caring for her seven other siblings. Her questions, such as "how do I get time to bond with my mom," often led to small group brainstorming sessions about novel ways to talk to her busy mother (i.e. in the car, during laundry time, after bedtime, or through letters). While Kia did not seem to make progress with her own mother, her demeanor in group changed dramatically. She did not speak during the first group, taking an extraordinarily long time to complete her surveys. By the eight week, she was the most verbal and always the last student to leave the group. She begged each week to have group sleepovers and spend more time hanging out, asking if it was okay if she called others on the phone to

continue the conversation. She appeared to be more engaged across many settings, speaking of conversations she had with teachers and family members.

The program facilitator informally met and connected with Tasha's mother after a session. Tasha's mother discussed struggling to understand why her daughter was not doing well and that she felt as hopeless as her daughter, but deeply wanted to her child to succeed in the way she was unable to. The school also reported trying to contact and get help from Tasha's mother, but the efforts did not change Tasha's performance. A parent education and collaboration component might alleviate the hopelessness felt by the parents in the same way it was able to among the girls in the program. This additional component might create a lasting change in the relationship with their most influential role model. Further, given the importance of teachers in facilitating achievement in high school, developing a corresponding training for teachers about working with black adolescent girls might provide important support for the students, teachers and their relationships.

These results suggest that students are navigating through processes of personal and ethnic identity, and that these constructs may play a role in black students' success in school. GRACE can positively contribute to the field by providing more insight on interventions for black adolescent girls in a forum where there are very few programs designed specifically for this population. Further, this research also introduced some key questions that could guide the field in research and in practice. Further research should be conducted to investigate the causal pathways between racial identity, self-perception, and academic achievement. For example, does one construct have to be present in order to see an improvement in another? If so, GRACE could be altered to focus on the constructs sequentially instead of simultaneously. In thinking back to the differences found between tenth and eleventh graders, which developmental and cognitive capacities are needed to see a change in racial identification? Finally, how can a parent and/or teacher component contribute to achievement?

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

This study has many limitations due to the small sample and absence of a control group. With a larger sample size and a control group, this study would have significant power and tests of significance could be performed. Due to the small sample size and the specificity in which participants were chosen, findings from this study cannot be generalized to other groups. Also, while surveys were administered before and immediately after the eight-week intervention, the long-term impact of the program was not examined.

Second, the uniqueness of the school should be emphasized as it may have affected results. The small pilot school previously had been recognized and awarded for its ability to improve test scores and student performance, outperforming many other high schools in its district. The school's mission, "college graduation for all", emphasizes innovation, risk taking, and professional development with the goal that all their graduates will attend and complete college. This goal is different than most high schools, which focus less on college readiness and more on high school completion. Therefore it must be recognized that some improvement in academic achievement may be attributed to efforts by the school and may not be generalizable to other schools. The headmaster discussed the void and need she saw for the program in writing that, "Ms. Mims came at a time when we were struggling with our ability to offer social emotional supports to many of our students due to budget constraints. Her proposal to offer our most struggling young ladies the intervention program, Girls Rising Against Circumstances to Excel, GRACE was exciting and filled a void in our support services."

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

In a recent report released by the Department of Education's Office For Civil Rights (March 21, 2014), the Department reviewed data from all public schools in 2011-2012 and once again found a large pattern of educational inequality by race. Black students were expelled and suspended three times more than white students, with black girls being suspended at a greater rate than girls of any other race, as well as most categories of boys (Department of Education, 2014). Arne Duncan, the United States Secretary of Education (2014), stressed the importance

of finding solutions to these inequalities, saying "in all, it is clear that the United States has a great distance to go to meet our goal of providing opportunities for every student to succeed."

An important route to improving the educational experiences for black students who are currently facing barriers could be through current academic reform efforts (such as addressing school characteristics), but this reform should also include helping all students cope and thrive within the current educational contexts through socio-emotional curriculum and programming. The young black girl who wrote to Lupita Nyong'o about how she was saved by the actress' presence undoubtedly will face more struggles as she defines her identity within mainstream society, but maybe she can develop a positive self-perception, racial identity, and record of academic achievement by participating in an in-school program that recognizes the unique struggle black female students face. All girls deserve a chance to rise above circumstances to excel.

Appendix A. Recruitment Materials

Name:

Mentor Application Form 2013-2014

Deadline: September 20th, 2013

Please either:
1) Print out this form and return it to the Lauren Mims' mailbox in Eliot-Pearson OR 2) email the application materials to Lauren Mims at lauren.mims@tufts.edu. Please include a current resume.

A. Please Print the Following Information:

Name: _____

Name you prefer (nickname): _____

Email address: _____

Phone: _____   Dept: _____

Year in School: _____   Age: _____

Race or ethnicity: _____

B. Free Response:

Why would you like to be a mentor to a high school girl?

What do you want out of this role and the afterschool program?

What are your short term and/or long-term goals?

What does it take to be a great mentor?

Describe a difficult situation an adolescent girl might face and ways you could help.

Would you like to enroll in the program for one semester or the full year?
_____

What other extracurricular commitments will you have in the fall?

Name:	Time Commitment:	Responsibilities:

C. Expectations for participation
1. Agree to attend (4) training sessions; which include but are not limited to mentor orientation, initial mentor training, cultural sensitivity training and follow-up training.
2. Agree to oversee mentee's progress by attending (8) two hour face-to-face group meetings per semester. A yearlong commitment requires attending (16) two hour face-to-face group meetings.

3. Agree to oversee mentee's program by arranging (2) additional one hour or more face-to-face meetings outside of group with your mentee. A yearlong commitment requires arranging (4) outside meetings (2 per session)
4. Agree to complete a survey upon program completion

D. Important: Mentoring Group Times: The intervention will occur during remediation time either Monday or Friday from 1:30 – 3:30. Does this fit your schedule? _____

E. Statement Concerning Criminal Record
I certify and warrant that I have not been convicted of any offense involving child abuse or sexual or physical misconduct with a minor, nor have I been convicted of any felony.

Upon acceptance, I understand that a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check will be submitted for my personal information to the DCJIS.

In addition, I recommend the following three people as character references for me:

References:

<u>Name</u>   <u>Address</u>   <u>Phone</u>

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

F. Acknowledgement
By my signature below, I acknowledge that the information contained in this application is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Signature _____

Date _____

Thank you for your interest in participating in this exciting program! I look forward to reading your application!

If you have any questions, please contact: Lauren Mims   lauren.mims@tufts.edu   703-400-6353

Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel
Recruiting college women mentors for an exciting intervention program hypothesized to increase hope, academic achievement and racial identity in Black high school girls.

Your participation will involve:

- Mentoring a Black student for either a semester or a full year 1 day a week for two hours
- Arranging to meet your mentee outside of school for an additional hour once a month for ice cream or any activity of your choice
- Attending mentor orientation and training sessions
- Completing a survey about your experiences in the program

Benefits include:

- Meeting and forming a community with fellow Tufts students
- Developing a friendship with a high school student

This program is being conducted by Lauren Mims for her Masters Thesis

For more information please email Lauren Mims at Lauren.mims@tufts.edu

Blurb to the Tufts Child Development Listserv

      Lauren Mims is recruiting college women to be mentors for an exciting intervention program (GRACE) hypothesized to increase hope, academic achievement and racial identity in Black high school girls.

      <u>Your participation will involve:</u> Mentoring a Black student for either a semester or a full year 1 day a week for two hours, arranging to meet your mentee outside of school for an additional hour once a month for ice cream or any activity of your choice, attending mentor orientation and training sessions, and completing a survey about your experiences in the program

<u>Benefits include:</u>

- Meeting and forming a community with fellow Tufts students
- Developing a friendship with a high school student

For more information please email Lauren Mims at Lauren.mims@tufts.edu

Appendix C: Letters of Introduction

Tufts
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development

Dear _____,

Hello, my name is Lauren Mims and I am a second year Child Development Masters with Thesis student at Tufts University. I am writing to you today in hopes of partnering with your school to pilot an after school program for at risk girls. G.R.A.C.E. (Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel) is a positive youth development program that aims to decrease problem behaviors by enhancing positive views of the future, increasing perceived social support, and improving motivation. The program has been designed to fit the unique needs of Black girls in the tenth and eleventh grade who are in the bottom 30% of their academic class.

In the fall, I would like to work with 15 students once a week for eight weeks after school for two hours. Fifteen additional students will be placed on a wait-list for spring enrollment. Each student will be paired with a Tufts University student mentor. The first hour of the program will be devoted to personal and social development (e.g. goal setting, networking, school engagement). The second hour will be devoted to academic performance (e.g. study skills, organization, accountability). Group and individual tutoring also will be provided during this session. The student mentor will also individually spend one hour a month with students outside of the group meetings doing any activity they choose (e.g. getting ice cream or visiting a musuem).

I will be applying for outside funding and will implement the program at no cost to you. If this program sounds like a good fit for a group of students in your school, I would love to meet and discuss what I am sure will be an incredible partnership.

Best,

Lauren C Mims

Lauren Mims
703-400-6353
Lauren.mims@tufts.edu

Tufts
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development

Dear _____ ,

Hello, my name is Lauren Mims and I am a Masters student in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University. I am studying adolescent achievement and would love to have your daughter join a research study: an intervention program offered during remediation period. G.R.A.C.E. (Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel) is an after-school program made especially for Black girls in tenth and eleventh grades. Enrollment in G.R.A.C.E. hopes to help your daughter, both in and out of school.

If you agree to allow your daughter to participate in this study, she will meet with other tenth and eleventh graders and Tufts University women once a week for two hours from 1:30-3:30 pm. During the first hour, she will participate in large group activities (e.g. setting goals, sharing advice and talking about issues related to being a teen). For the second hour, she will be provided free tutoring and homework help. Food will be provided. The student mentor will also individually spend one hour a month with your daughter outside of the group meetings doing any activity they choose (e.g. getting ice cream or visiting a musuem). The program will last eight weeks. Your daughter will also be paired with a mentor from Tufts University.

To learn more about your daughter and to help me understand if the program works, she will complete surveys questions that ask about herself and her community. She does not have to answer any question she does not want to and she can stop at any time without any penalty. We also request access to your child's academic grades so that we can see whether her grades change due to her participation in the study.

The information your daughter gives us will be kept private. Nobody will be able to know what she answered. Your daughter will be given an identification number and her name will not be stored in any of the data collection files. If we see any evidence of harm to your child, though, we are obligated to report this to the school.

Your daughter's participation is entirely voluntary. Your decision to allow your daughter to participate in this program or not to participate in it will have no effect on your relationship with the school. I need your permission in order to include your daughter in this program. If you do not want your daughter to be part of the research study, she will not be invited to attend the program.

I hope that your daughter will benefit from this program. I hope to use the data to publish results on the effectiveness of a new learning program. Her participation will also help researchers learn more about the best ways to work with Black girls now and in the future!

If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to e-mail or call me at (lauren.mims@tufts.edu or 703-400-6353) Please return this form by September 27th.

Thank you again for your time!

Lauren C Mims

Tufts
UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development

Hello << Name of Parent>>,

About a week ago, you received a letter requesting your daughter's participation in a research study, G.R.A.C.E. (Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel), an after-school program we have developed at Tufts University and made especially for Black girls in tenth and eleventh grades. I am writing to you today because we have not heard from you.

We would love to have your daughter join! In order for your daughter to participate, we need your permission.

If you would like your daughter to participate, please return the form included by September 27th!

If you have questions, please feel free to call or text Lauren Mims at (703) 400-6353. She can also be reached by e-mail at lauren.mims@tufts.edu

Thank you again for your time!

Lauren C Mims

Appendix D. Consent Forms

Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE)

Informed Consent Form (Tufts Student)

Title of the Research Study: Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel

Principal Investigator: Lauren Mims, M.A. Student
Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development
Tufts University
Medford, MA 02155
(703)400-6353
e-mail: lauren.mims@tufts.edu

Faculty Advisor: Ellen Pinderhughes
Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development
105 College Avenue
Medford, MA 02155
(617)627-3355
e-mail: ellen.pinderhughes@tufts.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation is voluntary which means you can choose whether or not you will participate. If you decide you do not want to participate, it will not affect your relationship with Tufts University.

Before you make a decision you will need to know the purpose of the study, the possible risks and benefits of being in the study, and what you will have to do if you decide to participate.

Please contact the researcher to explain anything you do not understand on this form. If you decide to participate, please sign this form and a keep the second copy given to you. Keep this form; in it you will find contact information and answers to questions about the study.

Introduction
This study is being conducted by Lauren Mims as part of her Masters thesis at Tufts University. The project is overseen by her committee members Ellen Pinderhughes, Tama Leventhal and Karen Craddock.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the study is to test how well a new program (GRACE) works in helping Black girls. The study hopes to increase high school student's grades, hopes for the future and racial identity.

Participant Information

You are being asked to participate in this study as a program mentor.

Location
The program will take place at New Mission High School.
Study Procedures
Upon acceptance, a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check will be submitted for your personal information to the DCJIS (Department of Criminal Justice Information Services). You will be required to participate in mentor orientation, mentor training, cultural sensitivity training, and a follow-up training session upon acceptance into the program. You will participate and attend afterschool meetings once a week for eight weeks afterschool in a designated classroom from 1:30-3:30 pm with fifteen high school participants and fourteen other college participants and participate in tasks such as leading discussions about proverbs, helping mentees set goals, and helping adolescents develop critical thinking skills. During the second hour, you will offer free group and individual tutoring of subjects of your choice. You will also be required to spend one hour a month (for a total of 2 meetings) with your assigned high school mentee outside of the group meetings.

To learn more about your perceptions and actual experiences in the program and to help me understand if the program works, you will be asked to complete survey question at the end of your application that will used for the purpose of research. At the conclusion of the eight-week program, you will be asked to complete surveys questions about your experience as a mentor.

Risks
We believe that participating in these activities poses no/few risks to you. All participants will be asked not to share what is said during group with anyone outside of GRACE, but there is a risk another participant could disclose what was said during the sessions. Some tasks may be challenging or uncomfortable, but fellow Tufts students will be available to support you personally and as a mentor in order to make the environment a safe space.

Benefits
We believe that high school students will benefit from the program activities and free tutoring. We believe that your participation can help provide a community of support for you within Tufts University. Your participation will also help researchers learn more about the best ways to work with Black girls now and in the future!

Alternatives
You may choose to join the study or you may choose that you do not want to join the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate in any activities that you do not want to.
There is no penalty if you choose not to join the research study.
If you choose not to join in the research study, your services with Tufts University will not be affected in any way.

Payments
There are no costs to you to participate in the study. You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Completion and Withdrawal
The study is expected to end April 2014. The study may be stopped without your consent for the following reasons:

- o The Principal Investigator feels it is best for your safety and/or health. You will be informed of the reasons why your participation has ceased.
- o The Principal Investigator, the Sponsor, or the Office of the Vice Provost at Tufts University can stop the study anytime.

You have the right to drop out of the research study anytime during the study. You have the right to request that any or all of your information collected to date be withdrawn. There is no penalty or loss of benefits if you do so.

If you no longer wish to be in the research study, please contact Lauren Mims at (703) 400- 6353 and she will withdraw you.

Privacy and Confidentiality
The research team will make every effort to keep your information strictly confidential, as required by law. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Tufts University is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research volunteers like you. The IRB has access to study information. Any documents you sign that could identify you by name will be kept in a locked drawer. All the information you provide will be stored by an ID code and kept separate from the documents you sign. These documents will be kept confidential. All the documents will be destroyed after five years.

Injury Statement
In the unlikely event you becomes injured and/or feels upset and emotional discomfort while participating in the study you may contact the Principal Investigator.

Rights and Welfare
If you have questions about your rights and welfare as a participant in the research study please contact Lara Sloboda, the IRB Administrator, at (617) 627-3417 and/or the Principal Investigator named on the first page of this document.

_____
Print name of Participant

_____
Print Name

_____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE)
Informed Consent Form (School)

Title of the Research Study: Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel

Principal Investigator: Lauren Mims, M.A. Student
Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development
Tufts University
Medford, MA 02155
(703)400-6353
e-mail: lauren.mims@tufts.edu

Faculty Advisor: Ellen Pinderhughes
Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development
105 College Avenue
Medford, MA 02155
(617)627-3355
e-mail: ellen.pinderhughes@tufts.edu

I give consent for you to implement the GRACE program at New Mission High School.

I understand the project logistics and understand that:

- The role of the school is voluntary
- I may decide to withdraw the school's participation at any time without penalty
- Participants who qualify will be invited to participate
- I agree to allow the researcher to access academic records from all participating students
- All suspected cases of child abuse or neglect will be reported to you immediately.
- Only parents who consent and participants who assent will participate in the program
- All information will be kept confidential
- The name of the student's will not be used in any publication
- The school will not be identified in written reports
- Participants may withdraw without penalty
- The Principal Investigator, the Sponsor, or the Office of the Vice Provost at Tufts
   University can stop the study anytime.
- The results of the study will be available to the school
- If I have any questions, I will contact Lauren Mims or Ellen Pinderhughes

_____   _____

Principal Signature   Date

_____

Principal Name (Printed)

Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE)
Informed Consent Form (Parent)

Title of the Research Study: Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel

Principal Investigator: Lauren Mims, M.A. Student
              Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development
              Tufts University
              Medford, MA 02155
              (703)400-6353
              e-mail: lauren.mims@tufts.edu

Faculty Advisor: Ellen Pinderhughes
              Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development
              105 College Avenue
              Medford, MA 02155
              (617)627-4560
              e-mail: ellen.pinderhughes@tufts.edu

You are being asked to give permission for your child to participate in a research study. Her participation is voluntary which means you can choose whether or not she will participate. If you decide your child cannot participate, it will not affect your relationship with your child's school.

Before you make a decision you will need to know the purpose of the study, the possible risks and benefits of being in the study, and what your child will have to do if you decide she can participate.

Please contact the researcher to explain anything you do not understand on this form. If you decide that your child can participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you. Keep this form; in it you will find contact information and answers to questions about the study.

Introduction
This study is being conducted by Lauren Mims as part of her Masters thesis at Tufts University. The project is overseen by her committee members Ellen Pinderhughes, Tama Leventhal and Karen Craddock.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the study is to test how well a new program (GRACE) works in helping Black girls. The study hopes to increase your child's grades, hopes for the future and racial identity.

Participant Information
Your child is being asked to participate in the study because we think she would be a good match for our program.

Location
The program will take place in a classroom at your daughter's school.

Study Procedures
If you agree to allow your daughter to participate in this program, she will meet with other tenth and eleventh graders and Tufts University women once a week for two hours when she would normally go to remediation. During the first hour, she will participate in large group activities (e.g. setting goals, sharing advice and talking about issues related to being a teen). For the second hour, she will be provided free tutoring and homework help. Food will be provided. The program will last eight weeks. Your daughter will also be paired with a mentor from Tufts University. The Tufts University student will also individually spend one hour a month (for a total of 2 additional meetings) with your daughter outside of the group meetings doing any activity they choose (e.g. getting ice cream or visiting a musuem).

To learn more about your daughter and to help me understand if the program works, she will complete surveys questions that ask about herself and her community. We also request access to your child's academic grades so that we can see whether her grades change due to her participation in the study.

Risks
We believe that participating in these activities poses no/few risks to your child. All participants will be asked not to share what is said during group with anyone outside of GRACE, but there is a risk another participant could disclose what your daughter said during the sessions. Some tasks may be challenging or uncomfortable, but students will be available to support your daughter and make the environment a safe space.

Benefits
We believe that your daughter will benefit from the program activities and free tutoring. Her participation will also help researchers learn more about the best ways to work with Black girls now and in the future!

Alternatives
You may choose for your child to join the study or you may choose that she does not join the study. Her participation is voluntary. Your child does not have to participate in any activities that she does not want to or that you do not want her to participate in.

There is no penalty if you choose for your child not to join the research study.
If you choose not to volunteer your child in the research study, your services with programs you are participating in will continue and will not be affected in any way.

Payments
There are no costs to you for your child to participate in the study. Your child will not be paid for her participation in this study.

Completion and Withdrawal
The study is expected to end April 2014. The study may be stopped without your consent for the following reasons:

> o   The Principal Investigator feels it is best for your child's safety and/or health. You will be informed of the reasons why her participation has ceased.

      o   The Principal Investigator, the Sponsor, or the Office of the Vice Provost at Tufts University can stop the study anytime.

Your child has the right to drop out of the research study anytime during the study. You have the right to request that any or all of your child's information collected to date be withdrawn. There is no penalty or loss of benefits if you do so.

If you no longer wish to be in the research study, please contact Lauren Mims at (703) 400- 6353 and she will withdraw you.

Privacy and Confidentiality
The research team will make every effort to keep your child's information strictly confidential, as required by law. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Tufts University is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research volunteers like you. The IRB has access to study information. Any documents you sign that could identify you or your child by name will be kept in a locked drawer. All the information your child provides will be stored by an ID code and kept separate from the documents you sign. These documents will be kept confidential. All the documents will be destroyed after five years.

We will not tell anyone what your child tells us unless there is something that could be dangerous to her or someone else. If she tells us or if we see that someone is or has been hurting her, we may have to tell the school so they can make sure she is safe.

Injury Statement
In the unlikely event your child becomes injured and/or feels upset and emotional discomfort while participating in the study you may contact the Principal Investigator.

Rights and Welfare
If you have questions about your child's rights and welfare as a volunteer in the research study please contact Lara Sloboda, the IRB Administrator, at (617) 627-3417 and/or the Principal Investigator named on the first page of this document.

 Please initial beside each sentence if you give permission:

___ I give permission for my child to participate in the program
___ I give permission for my child to complete confidential surveys
___ I give permission for researchers to access my child's academic grades

_____
Print name of Child Participant

_____
Signature of Parent   Date

_____
Print Name of Parent

_____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix E: Assent Form

Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel (GRACE)
Child Assent

Title of the Research Study: Girls Rising Above Circumstances to Excel

Principal Investigator: Lauren Mims, M.A. Student
                                    Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development
                                    Tufts University
                                    Medford, MA 02155
                                    (703)400-6353
                                    e-mail: lauren.mims@tufts.edu
Faculty Advisor: Ellen Pinderhughes
                                    Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development
                                    105 College Avenue
                                    Medford, MA 02155
                                    (617)627-3355
                                    e-mail: ellen.pinderhughes@tufts.edu

Your parents (or guardians) have talked to you about being part of a program during remediation period once a week to help with school.

If you decide to participate in this program you will do these things:

1. You will meet with other tenth and eleventh graders and Tufts University women once a week for two hours when you would normally go to remediation. During the first hour, you will participate in large group activities (like setting goals, sharing advice and talking about issues related to being a teen). For the second hour, you will be provided free tutoring and homework help. Food will be provided. The program will last eight weeks. You will also be paired with a mentor from Tufts University. You will also spend an additional one-hour per month with your mentor outside of the group meetings doing any activity you choose (like getting ice cream or visiting a musuem).

2. To learn more about you and to help me understand if the program works, you will be asked to fill out a survey about yourself and your community before and after the program.

All participants' will be asked not to share what is said during group with anyone outside of GRACE, but there is a risk another participant could disclose what you said during the sessions. Some activities may be challenging or uncomfortable, but college students will be available to support you and make the environment a safe space.

We will not tell anyone what you tell us unless there is something that could be dangerous to you or someone else. If you tell us or if we see that someone is or has been hurting you, we may have to tell the school so they can make sure you are safe.

You can decide not to be in this program, or later on, you can decide that you want to be taken out of it. There will not be any harm for stopping! Your participation is voluntary and up to you if you want to participate or not!

___ I agree to participate in the program
___ I agree to complete confidential surveys
___ I agree to allow access to my academic grades

Your Signature _____   Date _____
Researcher's Signature _____   Date _____

Appendix F: Self-Perception Measure

Participant ID Number: _____ Date: _____

Questions About Your Goals

<u>Directions</u>:

The six sentences below describe how people think about themselves and how they do things in general. Read each sentence carefully. For each sentence, please think about how you are in most situations. Place a check inside the circle that describes YOU the best. For example, place a check (√) in the circle (O) above "None of the time," if this describes you. Or, if you are this way "All of the time," check this circle.

Please answer every question by putting a check in one of the circles. There are no right or wrong answers.

1. I think I am doing pretty well.

O	O	O	O	O	O
None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	A lot of the time	Most of the time	All of the time

2. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.

O	O	O	O	O	O
None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	A lot of the time	Most of the time	All of the time

3. I am doing just as well as other kids my age.

O	O	O	O	O	O
None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	A lot of the time	Most of the time	All of the time

4. When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.

O	O	O	O	O	O
None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	A lot of the time	Most of the time	All of the time

5. I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.

O	O	O	O	O	O
None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	A lot of the time	Most of the time	All of the time

6. Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.

O	O	O	O	O	O
None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	A lot of the time	Most of the time	All of the time

Thank you!

Appendix G: Racial Identity Measure

Participant ID Number: _____   Date: _____

Who I Am

Directions:
These questions are designed to learn a little bit more about you. Please put an X in the box that fits best. Please only choose one answer per question! Remember, all answers will be kept private! Thank you!

Question	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	I am not sure	Somewhat disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Blacks should be proud of race.					
2. Blacks can do anything if they try.					
3. Whites do better in school.					
4. Whites look better than Blacks.					
5. Blacks do not do well in business.					
6. Blacks are good at other things than sports.					
7. I prefer to go to a White school.					
8. Blacks have "bad" hair.					
9. Short hair is as nice as long hair.					

Question	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	I am not sure	Somewhat disagree	Strongly Disagree
10. Blacks don't speak as well as Whites.					
11. I prefer White friends.					
12. Blacks are not good at math.					
13. I don't like being around Blacks.					
14. Most Blacks can't be trusted.					
15. I like living in a Black neighborhood.					
16. Black is beautiful.					
17. I prefer living in a White neighborhood					
18. Whites speak better than Blacks.					
19. Black people are very smart.					
20. I wish my					

skin were lighter.					
21. I think people of other races look better than Black people.					

Appendix H: Grading Scale

High School Grade Equivalency Framework

PERCENT	GRADE	NUMBER TO USE IN CALCULATION	GRADE POINT AVERAGE	GRADING EQUIVALENT
97-100	A+	100	4.33	Honors(H)
94-96	A	95	4.00	
90 - 93	A-	90	3.66	
87 - 89	B+	89	3.33	Exceeding (E)
84-86	B	85	3.00	
80-83	B-	80	2.66	
77 - 79	C+	79	2.33	Meeting (M)
74-76	C	75	200	
70-73	C-	70	1.66	
67 - 69	D+	69	1 .33	Approaching (A)
64-66	D	65	1.00	
60-63	D-	60	.66	
Below 60	F+	55	0	Beginning (B)

Appendix I. Program Experiences

Participant ID Number: _____   Date: _____

Your Program Experiences

<u>Directions:</u>
Based on your ***current*** or ***recent*** involvement please rate whether you have had the following experiences in GRACE

Identity Experiences

Identity Exploration	Yes, Definitely	Quite a Bit	A Little	Not At All
1. Tried doing new things	1	2	3	4
2. Tried a new way of acting around people	1	2	3	4
3. I do things here I don't get to do anywhere else	1	2	3	4

Identity Reflection	Yes, Definitely	Quite a Bit	A Little	Not At All
4. Started thinking more about my future because of this activity	1	2	3	4
5. This activity got me thinking about who I am	1	2	3	4
6. This activity has been a positive turning point in my life	1	2	3	4

Initiative Experiences

Goal Setting	Yes, Definitely	Quite a Bit	A Little	Not At All
7. I set goals for myself in this activity	1	2	3	4
8. Learned to find ways to achieve my goals	1	2	3	4
9. Learned to consider possible obstacles when making plans	1	2	3	4

Effort	Yes, Definitely	Quite a Bit	A Little	Not At All
10. I put all my energy into this activity	1	2	3	4
11. Learned to push myself	1	2	3	4
12. Learned to focus my attention	1	2	3	4

Problem Solving	Yes, Definitely	Quite a Bit	A Little	Not At All
13. Observed how others solved problems and learned from them	1	2	3	4

14. Learned about developing plans for solving a problem	1	2	3	4
15. Used my imagination to solve a problem	1	2	3	4

Time Management	Yes, Definitely	Quite a Bit	A Little	Not At All
16. Learned about organizing time and not procrastinating (not putting things off)	1	2	3	4
17. Learned about setting priorities	1	2	3	4
18. Practiced self discipline	1	2	3	4

Basic Skill

Emotional Regulation	Yes, Definitely	Quite a Bit	A Little	Not At All
19. Learned about controlling my temper	1	2	3	4
20. Became better at dealing with fear and anxiety	1	2	3	4
21. Became better at handling stress	1	2	3	4
22. Learned that my emotions affect how I perform	1	2	3	4

Cognitive Skills	Yes, Definitely	Quite a Bit	A Little	Not At All
In this activity I have improved:	1	2	3	4
23. Academic skills (reading, writing, math, etc.)	1	2	3	4
24. Skills for finding information	1	2	3	4
25. Computer/internet skills	1	2	3	4
26. Artistic/creative skills	1	2	3	4
27. Communication skills	1	2	3	4

Team Work and Social Skills

Group Process Skills	Yes, Definitely	Quite a Bit	A Little	Not At All
28. Learned that working together requires some compromising	1	2	3	4
29. Became better at sharing responsibility	1	2	3	4
30. Learned to be patient with other group members	1	2	3	4
31. Learned how my emotions and attitude affect others in the group	1	2	3	4
32. Learned that it is not necessary to like people in order to work with them	1	2	3	4

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Tables

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics (N= 10) [N (%)]

Gender		
Female	10 (100%)	
Race/ethnicity		
Black		10 (100%)
Age (y)		
15- 18		
Grade (y)		
10th		3 (30%)
11th		7 (70%)
Economic Status		
Regular Lunch	1 (10%)	
Reduced Lunch	0 (0%)	
Free Lunch		9 (90%)
Credits Completed		
Grading Scale Category		
Honors (A- to A+)		0 (0%)
Exceeding (B- to B+)		4 (40%)
Meeting (C- to C+)		4 (40%)
Approaching (D- to D+)	1 (10%)	
Beginning (F+)	1 (10%)	

Table 2. Self-Perception Scores

	M	Median	SD	% Increase
Overall				
Pretest	2.47	2.75	1.05	
Posttest	3.25	3.42	0.97	
Difference in score				31.58%
Grade				
10th				
Pretest	2.22	3	1.35	
Posttest	2.83	3.17	0.88	
Difference in score				27.48%
11th				
Pretest	2.50	2.50	1.03	
Posttest	3.43	3.50	1.01	
Difference in score				37.2%
Grading Scale				
Exceeding				
Pretest	3.04	3.08	1.09	
Posttest	3.33	3.50	0.97	
Difference in score				9.54%
Meeting				
Pretest	2.33	2.50	0.82	
Posttest	3.25	3.25	0.89	
Difference in score				39.48%
Approaching				
Pretest	4			
Posttest	11			
Difference in score				177.27%
Beginning				
Pretest	15			
Posttest	26			
Difference in score				73.2%

Table 3. Racial Identity Scores

	M	SD	% Increase
Overall			
Pretest	4.17	0.65	
Social O.	3.82	0.88	
Appearance O.	4.35	0.70	
Attitudes	4.87	0.64	
Posttest	4.51	0.50	
Social O.	4.24	0.75	10.99%
Appearance O.	4.66	0.41	7.13%
Attitudes	5.10	0.61	4.72%
Difference in score			8.15%
Grade			
10th			
Pretest	4.34	0.88	
Social O.	3.73	1.50	
Appearance O.	4.50	0.87	
Attitudes	5.04	0.71	
Posttest	4.61	0.58	
Social O.	4.13	1.18	10.72%
Appearance O.	4.89	0.19	8.67%
Attitudes	5.22	0.58	3.57%
Difference in score			6.22%
11th			
Pretest	4.01	0.60	
Social O.	3.86	0.63	
Appearance O.	4.29	0.68	
Attitudes	4.79	0.67	
Posttest	4.46	0.51	
Social O.	4.29	0.62	11.14%
Appearance O.	4.57	0.45	6.53%
Attitudes	5.05	0.67	5.43%
Difference in score			11.22%
Grading Scale			
Exceeding			
Pretest			
Social O.	4.15	0.53	
Appearance O.	4.17	0.74	
Attitudes	4.86	0.80	
Posttest			
Social O.	4.55	0.66	
Appearance O.	4.71	0.58	
Attitudes	5.19	0.72	
Difference in score			7.96%
Meeting			
Pretest	4.07	0.69	
Social O.	3.35	1.17	
Appearance O.	4.38		
Attitudes	4.69	0.61	
Posttest	4.47	0.49	
Social O.	4.00	0.66	
Appearance O.	4.62		
Attitudes	5.11	0.52	
Difference in score			9.83%

	M	SD	% Increase
Approaching			
Pretest			
Social O.	4.6		
Appearance O.	5		
Attitudes	5.55		
Posttest			
Social O.	4.6		
Appearance O.	5.0		
Attitudes	5.55		
Difference in score			0%
Beginning			
Pretest	3.43		
Social O.	3.60		
Appearance O.	3.33		
Attitudes	4.89		
Posttest	3.90		
Social O.	3.60		
Appearance O.	4.33		
Attitudes	4.22		
Difference in score			13.7%

Table 6. Academic Achievement

	M	SD	% Increase
Pretest	2.10	.75	
Posttest	2.36	.75	
Difference in score			12.34%
Grade			
10th			
Pretest	1.93	.74	
Posttest	2.14	1.	
Difference in score			10.88%
11th			
Pretest	2.18	.80	
Posttest	2.46	.84	
Difference in score			13.15%

Table 5. Program Experiences

|	M	SD
Overall	1.96	0.59
Identity Experiences	2.0	0.68
Initiative Experiences	1.75	0.43
Teamwork and Social Skills	2.38	0.89
Basic Skills	1.88	0.71
Grade		
10th	1.85	0.49
Identity Experiences	1.67	0.51
Initiative Experiences	1.75	0.24
Teamwork and Social Skills	1.6	0.40
Basic Skills	2.22	1.01
11th	2.04	0.66
Identity Experiences	2.16	0.68
Initiative Experiences	1.79	0.51
Teamwork and Social Skills	2	0.8
Basic Skill	2.46	1.02
Grading Scale		
Exceeding	1.93	0.67
Identity Experiences	2.17	0.79
Initiative Experiences	1.75	0.53
Teamwork and Social Skills	2.00	0.82
Basic Skill	2.19	0.90
Meeting	2.10	0.64
Identity Experiences	1.95	0.79
Initiative Experiences	1.75	0.34
Teamwork and Social Skills	2.05	0.70
Basic Skill	2.56	0.98
Approaching	2.31	
Identity Experiences	2.17	
Initiative Experiences	1.92	
Teamwork and Social Skills	1.6	
Basic Skill	3.33	
Beginning	1.34	
Identity Experiences	1.5	
Initiative Experiences	1.92	
Teamwork and Social Skills	1	
Basic Skill	1.56	
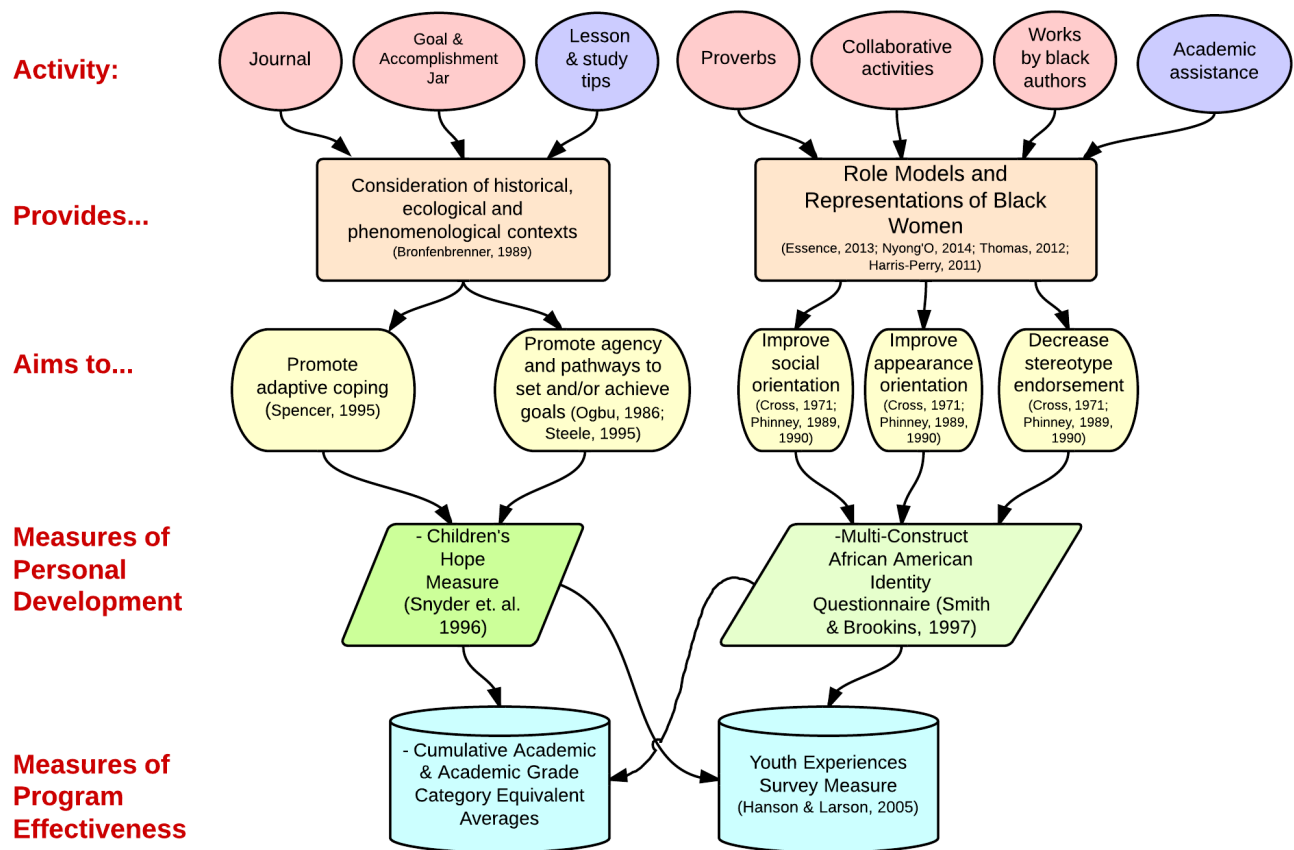
Figure

Figure 1. Program Description