CENTERING BLACK ADOLESCENT GIRLS' VOICES: STRATEGIES TO PREVENT DISPROPORTIONATE DISCIPLINE (PART I)

Suggested Audience: For adults in middle and high schools
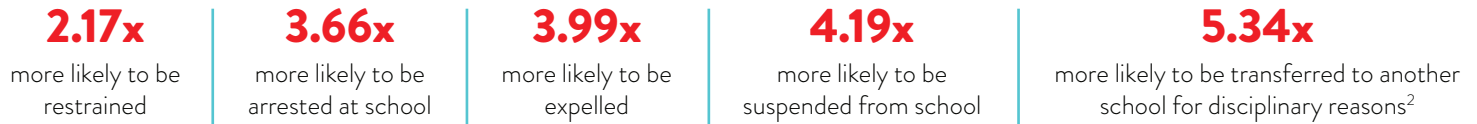Brief Authors: Dr. Aisha N. Griffith, Jean K. Sack, So Jung Lee, Bradley Crimmins, & Justyce Harris

This brief addresses how Educational Psychology can support equitable learning experiences through positive identity development.

KEY FACTS AND STATISTICS

In 2017-2018[1], compared to White girls, Black girls were:

2.17x	**3.66x**	**3.99x**	**4.19x**	**5.34x**
more likely to be restrained	more likely to be arrested at school	more likely to be expelled	more likely to be suspended from school	more likely to be transferred to another school for disciplinary reasons[2]

Teachers disproportionately discipline Black girls for subjective behaviors like perceived defiance or disrespect rather than objective violations (e.g., fighting, weapons, vandalizing).[3,4,5] These punitive disciplinary measures increase during middle school, marking the beginning of adolescence.[5] Day-to-day interactions influence equitable learning experiences. Informed by a project [link to project here] that centers the voices of Black adolescent girls, quotes from Black middle and high school girls from 50 studies are presented and asset-based recommendations are provided.

> There's no White kids getting in trouble in the class and only the Black kids, but they could be doing the same thing. (9th grader)[8]

> And if you're Black AND a girl, the dress code is different for you too ... even though our bodies are not all the same ... right? ... it still feels like a dress code for Black girl bodies." (8th grader)[6]

> I notice teachers memorize White people's names more than Black people's names...[My teacher] called me [another Black girl's name] today, which is not my name. But he knows the White girl in front of me's name. (9th grader)[7]

BLACK ADOLESCENT GIRLS FACE SEVERE CONSEQUENCES AND UNFAIR TREATMENT FROM ADULTS AT SCHOOL BASED ON RACE AND GENDER, SUCH AS[i]:

- Inequitably applying dress code policies
- Punishing Black girls for offenses that are minor, ambiguous, and linked to notions of what are deemed as societal norms for femininity like not being "lady like," using the wrong "tone", and not being deferential[2,10,11]
- Viewing Black girls who are assertive or passionate as being combative and worthy of punishment[10,12,13]
- Withholding quality instruction unless girls engage in behaviors deemed as "agreeable" like good posture and being what one girl called "preppy"

BLACK ADOLESCENT GIRLS REPORT POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH ADULTS AT SCHOOL WHO EFFECTIVELY FULFILL THEIR ROLE, SUCH AS:[15]

- Explaining content clearly and showing they believe in them with high expectations
- Establishing a warm atmosphere and approach
- Incorporating readings and topics that include Black women and girls
- Devoting their time and energy through tutoring or helping with other classes
- Being attuned to their needs and challenges, including checking in on them

Positive interactions with school adults can improve Black adolescent girls' affective experiences in school, facilitate motivation, and buffer the impact of racial discrimination from others on achievement.[16]

You know the teachers that are interested in making sure that African American girls succeed. They always tell you that you can do it and that you shouldn't listen to the negative stuff that people say about us.. . . One teacher would take books to class about successful African American women to let us know that we can do anything we set our minds on. . . . [Other] teachers go out of their way to make sure that you understand everything that they teach in class. . . . [They] will take other textbooks to the class to help you to better understand the topic. They just show you in every way possible that they care about your learning. They are real [supportive]. (12th grader)[17]

She took us to the computer lab so that we could look at colleges.… She gives us these long talks, she walks in with a good attitude, and she's like, "Good morning," and if nobody says anything, she says, "I said 'Good morning!'" She wants everybody to be in a good mood—she's just that light that I like. (9th grader)[18]

There was this one teacher who was the first White teacher who was actually open-minded as far as talking to her about Black people. Because there was this one thing where somebody was called a racial slur on the bus and she said "I don't know what it's really like," but she was still able to really relate to me and I was shocked because I was expecting her to just brush it off. (12th grader)[19]

OUR SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE[ii]

Explore more by
- Watching Dr. Monique W. Morris' TED Talk: Why Black girls are targeted for punishment at school
- Using self-paced learning videos on Countering Pushout: Skills to Support Black Girls to develop skills for fostering positive experiences for Black girls
- Engaging with the webinars and discussion forums on The Schools for Girls of Color Learning Network
- For Black women who are educators, check out: https://www.blackgirlsteach.com

Identify and affirm Black adolescent girls' assets in the classroom by
- Inquiring about Black girls' interests and passions to build relationships
- Incorporating and referencing their interests within lessons and activities
- Explicitly recognizing the accomplishments of Black women to support cultural pride and advocacy[5]

Elevate Black girls' voices by
- Developing extracurricular activities that provide spaces for Black girls to express their voices at school
- Engaging in empathetic listening and asking questions as detailed in When We Listen to Students

Collaborate with other teachers to better support Black adolescent girls in the school by
- Discussing resources on Black girls' school experiences including:
  - Loud, Proud, and Love a Crowd: African American Girls and School Discipline Practices
  - How We Can Help Black Female Students
  - Cultivating Joyful Learning Spaces for Black Girls: Insights Into Interrupting School Pushout
  - African American Young Girls and Women in PreK12 Schools and Beyond: Informing Research, Policy, and Practice
  - Investing in the Educational Success of Black Women and Girls
  - Strong Black Girls: Reclaiming Schools in Their Own Image
  - Journal of African American Women and Girls in Education's freely accessible research
- Identifying places in each person's curriculum to highlight the strengths of Black women and brainstorm opportunities for collaborating to do this across disciplines
- Inviting adults from community programs that support Black girls
- Discussing biases and anti-racist teaching
- Creating an accountability group to make and discuss adjustments to support Black girls in and outside of class

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Click here or scan the QR code for resources for practitioners, full references in this brief, and information on the larger project.

Click here or scan the QR code to read part 2 of this brief.

[ii]We generated many of these by thinking about the findings from our project through the lens of our personal experiences in the education system and also maintaining an asset-based lens when thinking about Black girls and teachers. Then we consulted literature we were familiar with referenced in the endnotes (e.g., Walker, 2020)